**2 Corinthians Commentary**

**2 Corinthians Chapter 1**

2Co 1:1

**“holy ones.”** For more on why the Christian is called a “holy one,” see commentary on Philippians 1:1.

2Co 1:6

**“But if we are afflicted, *it is* for your comfort and salvation.”** Paul and his close companions here demonstrate in their lives what it means to “value others as more important than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3) and “present your bodies as a sacrifice—living, holy, *and* pleasing to God—which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). Paul was willing to be afflicted so that others could be comforted.

The noun translated as “salvation” is *sōtēria* (#4991 σωτηρία), and in this context it seems to refer both to “deliverance” from earthly problems and everlasting life salvation. The church at Corinth had plenty of internal problems that are exposed in Paul’s letters to the Corinthians. The list is too long to try to give every example, but there are plenty (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:10-11; 3:1-4; 4:18; 5:1-2; 6:6; 8:12; 2 Cor. 6:1, 11-12, 7:2; 10:7-11; 11:12-15; 12:11-13; 20-21). Paul wanted to see the people of Corinth delivered (“saved”) from those troubles. Also, however, Paul wanted the people to continue in their trust in Christ so they would receive everlasting life (“salvation”). It seems that some people had so completly urned away from the Faith and rejected their belief in Christ that their everlasting salvation was in jeopardy (1 Cor. 15:2; 2 Cor. 6:1). Paul gave us a wonderful example of what it means to be a Christian; he was willing to suffer affliction so that other Christians could be delivered from troubles here on earth and so they could continue unwavering in their trust in Christ and receive everlasting life.

2Co 1:8

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek text is “brothers,” but that often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

2Co 1:10

**“hope.”** The Greek verb is *elpizō* (#1679 ἐλπίζω). To “hope” is to have a desire for, or an expectation of, good, especially when there is some confidence of fulfillment. It is used that way both in common English and in the Bible. However, the Bible often uses the word “hope” in another way—to refer to the special expectation of good that God has in store for each Christian in the future that is based on the Word and promises of God and therefore guaranteed to occur. This includes the “Rapture,” receiving a new, glorified body, and living forever on a new and wonderful earth. Today, the ordinary use of “hope” allows for the possibility that what is hoped for will not come to pass. However, when the Bible uses the word “hope” to refer to things that God has promised, the meaning of “hope” shifts from that which has a reasonable chance of coming to pass to that which will absolutely come to pass.

A biblical occurrence of “hope” as “an expectation of good” can be found in Acts 27:20. Paul was on a ship bound for Rome. A storm came up and raged for many days, such that “all hope that we would be saved was being taken away.” Another example is in 3 John 14 where the apostle John wrote to his friend Gaius and said, “I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.” These are examples of the Bible using the word “hope” in the way it is used in everyday language, such as when someone says, “I hope the mail comes on time today.” However, there are also many times the Bible uses the word “hope” to refer to things that will absolutely come to pass, such as everlasting life and the blessings associated with it. Colossians 1:23 mentions “the *hope* held out in the gospel,” i.e., “the expectation of future good presented in the gospel.”

Unfortunately, in common English the word “hope” is often used as a synonym for “wish.” When a person says, “I *hope* it rains this week,” it is likely that there is no rain in the weather forecast, and so the statement is made without any certainty or confidence that it will, in fact, rain. It would have been more proper for the person to say, “I *wish* it would rain this week.”

It would help us understand the Bible if Christians used vocabulary the way God does in His Word, and use the word “hope” when there is an absolute certainty, or at least a good chance, that what is “hoped” for will occur. God, “who does not lie,” made many promises about the future everlasting life of the believer. Although we may not know when He will fulfill those promises, we can be absolutely certain that He will fulfill them. We can, and should, base our thoughts and actions on the “hope” that God promises in His Word.

2Co 1:11

**“on our behalf.”** Other manuscripts read “on your behalf.” This reading would then suggest that Paul is saying that thanks will be given by many for the generosity of the Corinthians in helping with the care of the Church.

2Co 1:16

**“travel by way of you into Macedonia.”** Here in 2 Corinthians 1:16, Paul says he had been planning to travel across the Aegean Sea to Corinth, then travel north to Macedonia and then go south again to Corinth. But because of what was happening in Corinth he delayed coming to them. In 1 Corinthians 16:5, he revealed that he would first travel through Macedonia and then travel south to Corinth. He ended up going through Macedonia, then down to Corinth, then back north through Macedonia.

2Co 1:21

**“in *union with* Christ.”** On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), being “born again” of God’s spirit first became available, and Christians became part of the Body of Christ and identified with him (crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, and raised with him). Today, Christians are “in Christ” (“in union with Christ”) by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ, and it is important that we also are “in Christ,” that is, “in union with Christ” because we obey him and lead godly lives. When we read a phrase such as “in Christ” or “in him,” we must pay careful attention to the context to see if it refers to our spiritual union due to being part of the Body of Christ, or whether it refers to our being in union with Christ because of our obedience and godliness, or if both meanings apply in that given context. A lot of the blessings that Christians enjoy today are due to the fact that we are in union with Jesus Christ.

[For more on being in union with Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:3. For more information on the Christian’s identification with Christ, see commentary on Rom. 6:5.]

2Co 1:22

**“down payment.”** The gift of holy spirit is the down payment or first installment of the full payment that is to come, that full payment being our full salvation; when we have new, everlasting bodies and live with Christ forever. See commentary on Ephesians 1:14.

2Co 1:23

**“soul.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is more broadly used of the individual himself while including his thoughts and emotions. Thus, while the verse could read something such as, “I call on God as a witness, on my life” (HCSB, NAB), or as “I appeal to God as my witness” (NET), using the word “soul” shows us that Paul is calling God to witness his testimony based on all who Paul is in himself and in his thoughts and emotions. All of us should strive to live such godly lives that our lives can be called upon as a witness for Christ.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

**2 Corinthians Chapter 2**

2Co 2:1

**“for my own sake.”** The Greek construction makes this the reading most preferred.[[1]](#footnote-30364) It is easier to read, but not really to the point to say, “I made up my mind.” The Greek gives a reason, represented in the ASV as “for myself,” and in the NASB as “for my own sake.” Paul is not just saying he determined (literally: “judged”) what to do, but rather, that he determined his course of action based on what was good for him. This is, no doubt, another effort to spare the Corinthians. Meyer calls it “an ingenious, affectionate turn” “the truth of which there is no doubt.” The Corinthians were already feeling badly about their sin, and had repented (2 Cor. 7:8-10) and it would have really hurt them for Paul to say he did not visit because of the sorrow it would cause. He did not lie when he said he judged that it was for his sake he did not come, for it is never easy to reprove and correct people. But it really was for the sake of the Corinthians, as is clear from the context.

2Co 2:9

**“pass the test.”** The translation “pass the test” here in 2 Corinthians 2:9 comes from the Greek word *dokimē* (#1382 δοκιμή), which is often brought over as “test.” More than simply a “test,” the word has a special emphasis on the *result* of someone passing a test. In this case, people who pass the test have proven their character. Hence, BDAG refers to the word’s usage here as the “proof of someone’s character,” and some modern versions use “character” in the verse (cf. HCSB, NAB). Nevertheless, most versions, along with the REV, stay with the more literal translation involving a test.

2Co 2:11

**“the Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost.

[For more information, see commentary on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“gains no advantage over us.”** Although there are many ways Satan, “the Adversary,” can gain an advantage over a believer, the specific context of this verse is forgiveness. Being unforgiving gives Satan a foothold in our life, because it is a sin and it leads to many other hurtful things, such as bitterness.

2Co 2:12

**“in the Lord.”** Use of “in the Lord” in this verse is explained in Word Study: “In the Lord.”

2Co 2:13

**“for my spirit.”** This is the use of “spirit” (*pneuma*) that refers to the mental and emotional life. Paul could not find Titus, and he was anxious and worried about him, so he left Troas to go to Macedonia to try to find him. We understand what it is to be so concerned, even worried and anxious, about someone that we just cannot seem to rest, and we make much effort to find out where they are and if they are okay. There is no mystical meaning to “spirit” here, it simply refers to Paul’s thoughts and emotions.

[For more information on the uses of *pneuma*, “spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

2Co 2:14

**“triumphal procession.”** 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 refers to a Roman event known as the “Triumph,” which we sometimes refer to as the Triumphal Procession. The Roman Triumphal Procession was a parade honoring the victory of a Roman general and his army. In the days before photographs and mass communication, it was important to find ways to engage the people of Rome in the events of the Empire. The Triumph brought some of the pageantry of the conquest into the streets of Rome for everyone to see. First, we will describe the Triumph, then show how it relates to the biblical text and Christian life.

When considering exactly what a Triumph was like, we must remember that the written accounts and the visual depictions on bas-reliefs, vases, cups, etc., of Roman Triumphal Processions were generally produced as political propaganda to aggrandize Rome and its power, and not as accurate historical accounts. Also, we have no complete descriptions of a Triumph. We have many descriptions and depictions of parts of them, and they can be used to build a general picture of what a whole Triumph involved. Also, there were something like 500 Triumphs that are recorded in the ancient Roman records, supposedly going all the way back to a victory of Romulus, the founder of Rome. With so many instances, obviously there were differences between them. Besides, as with most parades, there is a tendency toward greater grandeur, pomp, and expense, so some change was unavoidable. Thus, what follows is only a typical description of what a Triumph was like. In spite of their differences, however, the Triumph was a parade with both immediate and historical significance, and every Triumph was designed to connect this victory with victories that had come before, thus pointing out the stability and continuity of Rome. Therefore, there was enough continuity between them that we can speak of things “typical” to a Triumph.

A Triumph was only given when certain conditions were met in the war. Although these too changed a little over time, the basics remained the same. The war had to be fought on foreign soil. The war had to be a significant victory for Rome in which at least 5,000 enemy soldiers were killed and territory was added to the state. The conquering general had to be of the rank of “dictator,” “consul,” or “praetor.” The victory had to end the war so decisively that the Roman army could come home. If these conditions were met, the Senate of Rome would vote to decide whether the commander would be given a Triumph.

Leading the Triumph were the Roman senators and magistrates, who met the parade as it entered the streets of Rome. Next, trumpeters and musicians came, announcing to all the victory and the celebration. After them came the captives, led in chains and destined for the slave market or the arena. Apparently, in different Triumphs, these captives were treated differently. In some they were clothed, while in others they were paraded naked down the streets (see commentary on Col. 2:15). Also, sometimes they followed the spoils instead of coming before them.

After the captives came the spoils of war. Carts had “trophies,” on them, which is the technical term for a post or a post with cross-pieces on which were hung shields and armor worn by enemy soldiers. These “trophies” showed the people of Rome how well-armed the enemy was. The captured treasure was displayed, including gold, silver, and other valuables. In some cases, such as when Jerusalem was captured and the Menorah from the Temple was in the Triumph, placards or signs described what the treasure was. Some of this treasure was later distributed to the returning troops as thanks for their bravery and sacrifice. Along with the treasure, there were paintings and “floats” with portrayals of the cities, defenses, and fortresses of the enemy, all designed to help the people of Rome see how valiant the Roman army was.

Following the spoil, dressed in the black of mourning, came the captured foreign king, his family, extended family, and even the nurses and teachers of his children, showing the total conquest of his kingdom and social system.

After the spoils came members of the victorious army without weapons, but carrying laurel branches symbolizing victory. Unlike modern armies, in which the soldier swears allegiance to his country, Roman soldiers swore allegiance to their general. Therefore, to prevent any possible coup, it was against Roman law for a general to bring his armed troops inside the city of Rome, and it was why the Emperor had his own armed troops, the Praetorian Guard, inside the city. Of the troops in the Triumph, individuals who had done great feats wore special crowns for the occasion. For example, a soldier who was first over the wall (and lived to tell about it) might have a gold crown cast to look like city walls, with crenellation on top. Later, that crest would be carved in stone and be placed over the main door of his house as a permanent civil recognition. The soldiers would often be singing, and sometimes songs would be about some of the faults of the general—the thought being that he was just “one of the men” and care must be taken not to elevate him too highly. Sometimes some or all of the troops followed the conquering general instead of going before him.

Following the troops was the conquering general. He wore dress traditionally associated with the statue of *Jupiter Capitolinus* and the ancient Roman monarchy, which was the purple and gold toga, a laurel crown, and red boots. He held laurel branches and perhaps a staff representing civil authority, and rode in a chariot usually drawn by four beautiful horses. The chariot had ceremonial status and would be kept for years, just like in modern times, revered memorial pieces are kept for years. For example, the chariot that Augustus Caesar rode in was used by Nero some 50 years later. The general was accompanied by his immediate and extended family. Smaller children might ride in the chariot with him, while older boys might ride on the horses pulling the chariot. The idea was to convey that the victory was a victory for Rome itself, and supported the whole social order of Rome and its families. The general who was honored with a Triumph was then referred to as *vir triumphalis* (“a man honored with Triumph”) for the rest of his life.

After the commander and the last troops came oxen (usually white), which would be sacrificed in dedication to Jupiter at the Temple of Jupiter, which was the endpoint of the procession (often the oxen were in a different order besides last). The meat from the oxen was then distributed to the people of Rome. Sometimes the meat was distributed directly to the people, while at other times the streets of Rome were filled with tables and there was a more formal public dinner with everyone invited. In each case, the point was to help everyone recognize that the victory was a victory for Rome, the Roman people, and the Roman way of life.

At some point, after the feast, there would be the culminating event, a public spectacle. This would usually be in the arena. Although exactly what happened varied, events that were standard included gladiator events, animal hunts (where the floor of the coliseum was decorated as much as possible to look like the area just conquered and the animals were native to that place), reenactments of battles that had occurred, and the execution of prisoners taken in the war, often in inventive ways, such as having them eaten by wild animals.

Triumphs always took the same route. In that sense, there was with each Triumph the idea that Rome was building on what had been built before. The Triumph started at the *Campus Martius* (“Field of Mars”) on the west bank of the Tiber River, and traveled a long, circuitous route through the city, passing through every Triumphal archway from previous generals, and past the temples erected in dedication to previous victories. The Triumph passed by the Circus Maximus and the Forum Romanum. The final destination was always the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline Hill. All along the route, the streets were packed with excited, shouting people. Also, incense filled the air along the whole route of the Triumph because incense was burned on the altars of temples in Rome (Plutarch; Dio Cassius). The smell of this incense is mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16.

It is this “Triumph,” or Triumphal Procession, that 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 is referring to, and thankfully, many modern versions read “triumphal procession,” which makes the verse much clearer (ESV, NET, NIV, NRSV). The King James Version gives us the wrong impression when it says, “Now thanks *be* unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ.” This makes it sound like Christians win every battle—we always triumph. In a practical sense, we do not. There are many times in life when we lose a battle, just like the Roman army lost battles in the enemy country. Terrible things happen to us (cf. 2 Cor. 1:8; 4:8-10; 6:4-10; 11:23-28; 1 Thess. 3:4; 2 Tim. 3:12). Also, many Christians are killed or die of unnatural causes (Acts 7:60; 12:2). Although God is always working for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28 NIV), bad things often happen to good Christians. We must not try to “explain” 2 Corinthians 2:14 by somehow “recasting” the evil that happens to us as “good” and as a “triumph.” While it is always true that God will reward Christians for doing the right thing, even if it means being tortured and killed, that is not the triumph God is referring to in this verse.

Properly interpreted, 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 is speaking of the Triumphal Procession that occurs at the end of the war. Battles may be lost, but the war has been won by Jesus Christ. Although the actual fight between good and evil is not over, our eventual victory is so assured that God uses the analogy of the Triumph to demonstrate that it is just a matter of time before the victory is total and final. The analogy of the Triumph shows us that the outcome of the war is not in doubt. Jesus Christ is the conquering general of the highest rank (his name is above every name), who has soundly defeated his enemies and won a victory on foreign soil (earth; now controlled by the Adversary). Because the war is “won,” he leads his “Christian army” in a Triumph. We can march along in life, knowing that we will win by resurrection, even if we are killed in this life.

It is valuable to notice that in 2 Cor. 2:14-16, God makes a shift in His use of the Triumph analogy. In the first part of verse 14, we are the conquering troops being led in the Triumph. However, in the middle of verse 14, we become the smell of the incense that is burning on the altars of Rome. That analogy is powerful because although the same incense burned on the altars, the smell of it meant different things to different people. To the conquering army, it was the sweet smell of victory and meant home, safety, and friends. To the captives in chains, it meant death in the arena (or slavery; a living death). In the same way, Christians, by our life and testimony, are the smell of “life” to other Christians, but the smell of “death” to those who do not believe.

It is important to notice that God never tells us to figure out how to “smell better.” We Christians are not to water down our witness so that we do not offend the unsaved by our smell of death. In fact, the very next verse (2 Cor. 2:17) speaks of those who water down the Word, ostensibly to be accepted by others. Christians smell like death to unbelievers. Hopefully, some of them will recognize that the death they smell is their own, and come to Christ for salvation so they can live forever.

2Co 2:15

**“on the road to salvation.”** The Greek is the present passive participle of *sōzō* (#4982 σῴζω) “to rescue; to save; to make whole,” and literally would be “who are on the road to being saved.” The verb is present tense in this verse because “saved” is not just referring to our everlasting life, but is referring to the broader spectrum of salvation, which includes being rescued from troubles here on earth and being given everlasting life in new bodies when the Lord returns. Our full salvation even likely includes the rewards in the future Kingdom that we receive for our faithful service. The verb is a passive participle because God is the one who actually saves us as we have faith in Him. The phrase “on the road to salvation,” or “on the way to salvation” is due to the present participle, which indicates the action is ongoing, and the “road” comes into the translation, with some liberty, from the metaphor about the Triumph—the victors and the captives would walk down the road, some to salvation, some to destruction.[[2]](#footnote-16938)

[For more on “saved,” see commentary on Romans 8:24, “have been saved” and commentary on Romans 10:9, “will be saved.”]

**“on the road to destruction.”** The Greek verb translated as “destruction” is *apollumi* (#622 ἀπόλλυμι), which means “to cause or experience destruction”;[[3]](#footnote-26480) so “perish” or “be destroyed” are good translations here, and the verse would read more literally, “those who are perishing.” However, whereas *sōzō* (“are being saved”) is clearly a passive participle, the verb form of *apollumi* (“are perishing”) can either be passive voice or middle voice. We assert that from the context and scope of Scripture, this should be understood as a middle voice, which means that the people are doing the action in a way that affects them. This verse is saying that while God is the one who acts to bring about our salvation both now and in the future, people bring about their own destruction by rejecting God. The phrase “on the road to destruction,” or “on the way to destruction” is due to the present participle, which indicates the action is ongoing, and the “road” comes into the translation, with some liberty, from the metaphor about the Triumph—the victors and the captives would walk down the road, some to salvation, some to destruction.

2Co 2:16

**“deadly aroma leading to death…life-giving aroma leading to life.”** In 2 Corinthians 2:14-16, God makes a shift in His use of the triumphal march analogy. In the first part of verse 14, believers are the conquering troops, being led in the triumph. However, in the middle of verse 14 believers become the smell of the incense that is burning on the altars that line the streets of the triumphal march through Rome.

The analogy of the incense is powerful because although the same incense burned on the altars, the smell of it meant different things to different people. To the conquering army, it was the sweet smell of victory and it meant home, safety, and friends. To the captives in chains, the aroma meant death in the arena (or slavery; a living death). In the same way, Christians, by our life and testimony, are the smell of “life” to other Christians and people who come to believe, but the smell of “death” to those who do not believe and thus consign themselves to everlasting death.

It is important to notice that God never tells believers to figure out how to “smell better.” Jesus Christ is a stone of stumbling to unbelievers and God-rejectors, and we Christians represent Christ. We are not to water down our witness so that we do not offend the unsaved by our smell of death. The unsaved will die in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15), and that truth is very unsettling, and in fact, should inspire believers to try their very hardest to get unbelievers saved even if it means offending them. Proud and defiant people are often offended if they think they have to submit to someone else, so it should not surprise believers that unbelievers are often offended at the thought of having to submit to God, no matter how “nicely” it is presented to them. In fact, the very next verse (2 Cor. 2:17), speaks of those who water down the Word, ostensibly to be accepted by others. Christians smell like death to unbelievers. Hopefully, some of them will recognize that the death they smell is their own, and come to Christ for salvation so they can live forever.

[For more on the Triumphal March, see commentary on 2 Cor. 2:14. For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

2Co 2:17

**“peddle...for *personal* gain.”** The Greek is *kapēleuō* (#2585 καπηλεύω), which was used frequently of tavern-keeping [because the owners would water down the wine]. Because of the tricks of small tradesmen, the word almost comes to mean “adulterate” (e.g., Vulg., Syr., Goth.).”[[4]](#footnote-22764) The emphasis is on the manner in which preaching was happening as well as the motivation of the individuals. Paul is criticizing other preachers who selfishly use the “word of God” as a means for procuring money, but at the same time, he is saying that they are like street hucksters who “water down” the good news, thereby corrupting (i.e., adulterating) it from its original potency.

**2 Corinthians Chapter 3**

2Co 3:1

**“recommend.”** The Greek word is *sunistēmi* (#4921 συνίστημι). It has a number of different meanings, but in this context, it means to recommend (cf. commentaries on Rom. 16:1 and Col. 1:17).

2Co 3:4

**“in God through Christ.”** Literally, the Greek reads, “we have such confidence through Christ toward God,” but this is difficult to read in English. We would not say, “I have confidence toward God,” rather, we would place our confidence *in* God. An alternate translation might read, “we have such confidence as this *directed* to God through Christ.”

2Co 3:6

**“has made...sufficient.”** 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 shows that at this time, not in the future, Christians are ministers of the New Covenant. 2 Corinthians 3:6 has the third use of the basic word “sufficient” that appears in 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 (First, “sufficient,” *hikanos*, #2425 ἱκανός, an adjective. Second, “sufficiency,” *hikanotēs*, #2426 ἱκανότης, a noun. Thirdly, “has made...sufficient,” *hikanoō*, #2427 ἱκανόω, a verb). Thus, the root word of “sufficient” is used in three different ways in these two verses, and as such is the figure of speech repetitio (repetition), which God uses both to catch our attention and to emphasize the point that we are sufficient.

It would have been easier for the English reader to get the impact of the Greek text if all three words, *hikanos*, *hikanotēs*, and *hikanoō* had been translated by one English word appearing in different forms, as we have done in the REV, and also if they had all appeared in one sentence in one verse. This is one of the places where the copyists and scribes who divided the text into sentences made a mistake.

In 2 Corinthians 3:6, the verb *hikanoō* is in the aorist tense, and in this context, it is indicating a past event; that Christians “have been made sufficient” ministers of the New Covenant. It is hard to translate the Greek into English exactly because the Greek sentence actually starts in 2 Corinthians 3:5 (cf. ASV, ESV, KJB, NAB, NASB) and has a break in 2 Corinthians 3:6. A more literal translation of the Greek text is, “…our sufficiency is from God, who has also made us sufficient. Servants of a new covenant….” That sentence is awkward in English, but we must not make “sufficient” into an adjective and have, “…has made us sufficient servants.” The thought of the Greek text could be elided in several different ways to make the English read more clearly. For example, we could say, “has made us sufficient…servants of a new covenant.” Or “…has made us sufficient *as* servants of a new covenant.” Or “…has made us sufficient. *We are* servants of a new covenant.” Perhaps the third option is the clearest in English.

One thing that is very clear in 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 is that we Christians should not doubt that God has made us sufficient, and so we can be effective ministers of the New Covenant and serve God in the Church. The Devil has done a masterful job in convincing many Christians that they are somehow unqualified to serve in the Church. In fact, in many cases, the Devil has managed to change Christian worship and service into a “spectator sport.” A huge number of Christians who go to church do not do more than sing songs (if they even do that). The average church-going Christian gets no chance to pray in the church service, or speak up, share their opinions, ask questions, or manifest the gift of holy spirit by speaking in tongues, interpreting, or prophesying. That consistent non-participation creates weak Christians who then do not think of themselves as “sufficient” ministers of the New Covenant. It is important for church leaders to think of ways to build strong Christians who think of themselves as sufficient ministers of the New Covenant. This can in part be done by encouraging people to go to Sunday School as well as church; be part of small groups, break-out groups, and outreach programs; attend camps and conferences; and many more such things that strengthen Christians and cause them to grow in the Lord.

**“servants.”** The Greek word translated “servant” is *diakonos* (#1249 διάκονος), which refers to someone who carries out the commands of someone else, and thus is a servant, minister, or attendant. Because of the context, many translations use the word “minister,” but the problem with that translation is that it sets up a kind of false dichotomy between “servants” and “ministers,” especially when the modern English reader thinks of a “minister” as being a trained and ordained leader of a church, but the Latin word *minister*, which is the origin of the English word “minister,” simply meant “servant.” All Christians are servants of the New Covenant. We serve the wants and needs of God and help Him and the Lord Jesus with their work.

**“new covenant.”** Christians are “servants,” or “ministers” of the New Covenant. This can be confusing because the New Covenant has not come in fullness yet. When it does, all the covenant promises will be fulfilled. Christ will reign as king on earth. The earth will be restored to being a paradise. There will be no war. The deserts will bloom and there will be an abundance of food. The animals will all return to eating plants like they did in the Garden of Eden, and much more.

[For more on this, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

However, there is often a long time between when a covenant is made and when the covenant promises are fully realized. For example, God made a covenant with Abraham to give him the land of Israel (Gen. 12:7; 13:15-17; 15:18-21), but it has now been about 4,000 years and Abraham has not yet gotten the land, even though he will in the future. The New Covenant is similar to the Abrahamic Covenant in that there has been a long time between the time the covenant was made and the complete fulfillment of the covenant promises.

Christ ratified the New Covenant with his blood when he died on the cross. He had told the disciples about that at the Last Supper (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). We don’t know how long it will be before Jesus sets up his kingdom on earth and the New Covenant promises are completely fulfilled, but God does not lie, so we know they will be fulfilled. In the meantime, some of the covenant promises have already been fulfilled. The gift of holy spirit that we now have is one of the New Covenant promises. We can now “serve in a new way of *the* spirit, and not an old way of *the* written code” (Rom. 7:6). Our sufficiency is of God and we can serve Him as servants of the New Covenant. So, there are aspects of the New Covenant that are active now, and aspects that are not active now, but at a future time, all the aspects of the New Covenant will be accomplished and active.

[For more on the gift of holy spirit that Christians have as one of the New Covenant promises, see commentary on John 7:39.]

**“not of the letter.”** The Old Covenant was written on tablets of stone (not the entire Old Covenant, but the heart of it, the Ten Commandments, cf. Exod. 34:1-3). God promised that the New Covenant would be written on the hearts of the people (Jer. 31:33).

2Co 3:7

**“the glory of his face.”** 2 Corinthians 3:7 is referring to the Old Testament record in which Moses goes up onto Mount Sinai for the seventh time and speaks with God while he is there, and when he comes down the mountain his face is radiant (Exod. 34:29-35).

All seven times that Moses ascended and descended Mount Sinai are in Exodus. First time: Exod. 19:3 up; Exod. 19:7 down. Second time: Exod. 19:8 up; Exod. 19:14 down. Third time: Exod. 19:20 up; Exod. 19:25 down. Fourth time: Exod. 20:21 up; Exod. 24:3 down. Between the fourth and fifth time up Moses went partway up with the elders of Israel: Exod. 24:9. Fifth time: Exod. 24:15 up (he was there 40 days and 40 nights (Exod. 24:18) and got the Ten Commandments on stone (Exod. 32:15) during this fifth trip; Exod. 32:15 down. Sixth time: Exod. 32:31 up; Exod. 32:34 he is commanded to go down. Seventh time: Exod. 34:4 up; Exod. 34:29 down.

This seventh time down the Mount, Moses was carrying the second set of the Ten Commandments. The first set of stone tablets God Himself carved out of stone and wrote on (Exod. 31:18; 32:15-16). After Moses broke them, God told Moses to chisel out two new tablets (no easy task with bronze tools) and He would write on them (Exod. 34:1, 29).

Exodus 34:29 tells us that Moses’ face was radiant. The Hebrew text says that Moses’ face shined (the Hebrew word is *qaran* (#07160 קָרַן) and means “to shine.”) Moses’ face was reflecting the brilliant light of God, and it was shining so brightly that the Israelites, including Aaron the High Priest, were afraid of him (Exod. 34:30), and he had to cover his face with a veil (Exod. 34:33, 35). What Exodus does not specifically say, but just assumes, and Corinthians tells us explicitly, is that the radiance of Moses’ face eventually went away.

2Co 3:11

**“passing glory, much more that which remains has permanent glory**.” The Greek phrasing here is very interesting. Paul uses two participles (passing away, remaining) and two prepositions (through, in) but no verbs. Literally, it would read, “the one fading away, through glory; the one remaining, in glory.” This effectively paints a picture of the old covenant temporarily passing *through* glory, fading away, while the new covenant remains *in* glory. The preposition *dia* (#1223 διά), meaning “through,” creates a feeling of the law momentarily journeying across the realm of glory, never meaning to permanently reside there—the Law is portrayed not as an end in and of itself, but as a progression on the journey to bring us to Christ:

**Galatians 3:23-25 (ESV)**

Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

The new covenant, on the other hand, is said to be the one remaining *en* (#1722 ἐν) glory. It is permanent, taking up its residence in glory land, and is there to stay.

2Co 3:17

**“the Lord is the Spirit.”** In the New Testament, Jesus is sometimes called “the Spirit” because of the new spirit-powered body he got after the resurrection. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

2Co 3:18

**“reflecting as in a mirror.”** The verb translated as “reflecting” is *katoptrizō* (#2734 κατοπτρίζω), which can mean “to behold” one’s self in a mirror, as many versions translate it (e.g. ASV, ESV, KJV, NAB, NASB), or to reflect one’s image, to mirror one’s self, as represented in the HCSB, NET, NIV, and NJB. The translators are evenly divided on the issue; however, it most likely means “reflecting” here. This can be seen from the context which speaks of Moses, whose face shone with glory and who covered his face with a veil (2 Cor. 3:13). This verse (2 Cor. 3:18) is drawing a parallel between Christians and Moses. When he came down Mount Sinai, Moses was not *beholding* glory in a mirror but was *reflecting* the glory of God out to the Israelites. Furthermore, it is not reflecting as *in* a mirror but reflecting *as* a mirror; our job as Christians is to reflect the glory of God like a mirror reflects the beams of the sun. Unlike Moses, who covered his face, we openly reflect the glory of the Lord and become transformed into this glory. This experience of transformation goes beyond what happened to Moses, whose mere external appearance was affected only temporarily.

**“just as one would expect.”** The Greek is *kathaper* (#2509 καθάπερ), and in this context, the best meaning seems to be “just as” and more expansively, “just as one would expect.”[[5]](#footnote-14482)

“Just as one would expect” makes perfect sense in light of what we know about both good and evil associations. Bad company affects us in bad ways, and we become bad, “corrupted.” The Bible tells us, “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals’” (1 Cor. 15:33). Then, when bad people continue to associate with bad people, they go from “bad to worse” (2 Tim. 3:13). It is clearly in Scripture and has been seen in the world over and over again with all kinds of sin—sexual, drug-related, abuse, murder, etc.—that the sins a person commits become worse over time. This is clearly set forth in many verses of Scripture (cf. 2 Tim. 2:16; 3:13; Rom. 6:16, 19; Jude 1:13).

Here in Corinthians, we see just the opposite of bad people getting worse: the person who continues to look at Jesus Christ becomes transformed into his glorious image. That is why it is important for Christians to take the time to figure out how they can get mental time away from the world and the hustle and bustle of life to pray, think, read the Bible, and commune with God. It is vital that we have the image of Christ in our minds and constantly strive to emulate him.

**“the Lord *who is* the Spirit.”** Cf. ESV, HCSB, NAB, NET, NIV, NJB, Williams. The Greek has the two genitive nouns, “Lord” and “Spirit,” in apposition; in other words, they are describing the same reality. The Lord and the Spirit are the same. Jesus Christ is sometimes called “the Spirit” in the New Testament. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

**2 Corinthians Chapter 4**

2Co 4:2

**“the hidden, shameful things.”** The Greek reads “the hidden things of shame,” which is the figure of speech antemereia, “exchange of cases.” The adjective “shameful” is put in the nominative as the object of a genitive, to give it more force. However, that construction is somewhat confusing when translated into English.

**“adulterating.”** The Greek word is *doloō* (#1389 δολόω, pronounced dŏ-'lŏ-ō ), and it meant to ensnare, to change something so that it would be false, thus distort, falsify, adulterate. *Doloō* was used of the innkeepers who would overly water down the wine so they could make more profit, a practice that was well-known in Corinth. Corinth had many inns and restaurants because it was one of the largest trading emporiums in the ancient world, host of the Isthmian Games (one of the Panhellenic Games of the ancient world, along with the Olympic, Pythian, and Nemean Games; the Isthmian Games were held every two years, the year before and the year after the Olympic Games), and a well-known sexual hot spot (a common Latin word for a prostitute was a “Corinthian Girl”).

The whole first part of this verse fits the behavior of many innkeepers: they were involved in hidden, shameful activities of all sorts, they lived crafty, deceitful lives, and they adulterated the wine they served to make more money for themselves. In comparison to those kinds of people, Paul writes that he does not live like that, and does not adulterate the Word of God, i.e., water it down to where it is not the Word but is something false.

[For more on inns and innkeepers, see commentary on Rom. 12:13, “In regard to hospitality.”]

2Co 4:4

**“god of this age.”** This phrase emphasizes the Slanderer’s rulership over this age and the worship associated with it. It is used only one time (2 Cor. 4:4), and frankly, the general Christian teaching that “God is in control,” and “The Devil can only do what God allows him to do,” has obscured the powerful meaning of this phrase.

The Bible does not use the word “god,” lightly or haphazardly. In Greek, it is *theos*, the same word that is used for our God and Father. Since in Greek, the word *theos* is not capitalized when referring to our God (unlike what we do in English), if we made English words like the Greek words, we would say either “god and Father” and “god of this age,” or “God and Father” and “God of this age.” The point is that, by using the word “god” for the Devil, our God is giving us a glimpse into the tremendous power and control he exercises over the world—a control that is obvious when we stop and think about it. Famines, floods, hurricanes, tsunamis, tornadoes, epidemics, hatred and wars, envy, and murder—these are all engineered by the “god of this age.” And that is just one part of his power. From behind the scenes he manipulates people to do his will and is so powerful that it is safe to say that almost no one has a truly carefree life. Evil, hatred, jealousy, envy, and the use and abuse of people are everywhere, all promoted by the “god of this age.”

Another thing the phrase “god of this age” brings into focus is his insatiable desire for worship. The Slanderer has so manipulated the things of this life that he directly and indirectly gets worship from many sources. Some people directly worship him as Satan or as another “ungodly god” that he has invented and elevated to the top of a pantheon of lesser gods, such as Zeus, Odin, or Ra. Sometimes he is worshiped as an idol. Sometimes he is indirectly worshiped by people who are awed by, and then dedicated to, power, fame, wealth, or just the glitz and glitter of the world.

The word “age” (sometimes mistranslated as “world”) is *aion*. While it is true that *aion* refers to an age, a period of time, the meaning is actually much deeper. It refers to the spiritual and moral climate of a time, the characteristics that mark the age. In restaurant terms, it means “atmosphere.” The Devil is the god in control of the “atmosphere” of our world, its spiritual and moral climate, and its physical activities (see commentary on Eph. 2:2).[[6]](#footnote-19955) Because *aion* does not just refer to time, but to the character or atmosphere of the time period, “world” is not a bad translation of *aion* in some contexts. Nevertheless, the word *aion* does communicate that the rulership of the Slanderer is limited to this “age,” and not the next, whereas the “world” will continue. Another reason for translating *aion* as “age,” and not “world” in this verse is that John 12:31 calls the Slanderer the “ruler of this world,” and in that verse, “world” is the Greek word *kosmos*, which does mean “world.”

It is unfortunate that most people are not aware of the “spiritual atmosphere” that surrounds them. They think “This is just the way life is.” A major goal of the Devil is to make the “atmosphere” we are immersed in ungodly so that people are led into ungodliness, and live in it without being aware of it or having any desire to change it. A good example is a person who watches sitcoms on TV daily and thinks that cutting people down with words and being sarcastic toward others is simply the way to communicate. Only when we are aware that the Devil creates the atmosphere that we live in do we become aware of it, not live according to it, and try to change it.

[For more on the age we live in, see commentary on Rom. 12:2. For other names of the Slanderer (the Devil) and what they mean, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.” For more on the Devil being the ruler of the world and how he got that power, see commentary on Luke 4:6.]

**“*and shining forth*.”** The Greek text in this verse contains the figure of speech amphibologia, or double meaning.[[7]](#footnote-30766) The double meaning arises from the phrase *mē augasai ton phōtismon*, which can be understood to mean, “lest [they] see the light” or “lest the light shine.” Most modern versions go with the first translation, as, for example, the NIV, “so that they cannot see the light.” The ASV, KJV, and Darby’s translation, on the other hand, understand the phrase in the second sense. In reality, both are true. The Devil desires to keep unbelievers from seeing the light, and to keep them from shining this light forth, once they are illuminated by the face of Christ.

[See Word Study: “Amphibologia.”]

**“the image of God.”** For more on the image of God, see commentary on Genesis 1:27.

2Co 4:6

**“to give *us* the light.”** The *pros* (#4314 πρός) in this verse indicates purpose, “*in order to provide* illumination.”[[8]](#footnote-27722)

**“in the face of Jesus Christ.”** This idea builds from the subject in chapter 3, and in a way, brings it to a climax. 2 Corinthians 3:7 speaks of the glory of the Old Covenant, which was reflected in the face of Moses. That glory, though it was passing away (2 Cor. 3:13), and not even glorious compared to what we today have in the glory of the ministry of righteousness (2 Cor. 3:10), was so bright that Israel could not look on Moses’ face. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says that as we look at the Lord Jesus, we reflect the glory that shines from him and are transformed into that same glory. When Moses saw the glory of God, that glory was reflected on his face and was so bright it frightened the people of Israel (see commentary on 2 Cor. 3:7). Now we have the opportunity to see and reflect the glory of God, which is not seen by looking upon the face of Moses, but looking at the face of Jesus Christ. We must look at Jesus to reflect the glory of God.

2Co 4:7

**“this treasure.”** The treasure is the “knowledge” of the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:6).

**“in earthen vessels.”** It is likely that Paul wrote that because he was being attacked and part of the attack focused on human actions and weaknesses he had, such as that he was not a classically trained speaker, something that was valued in Greek society (2 Cor. 11:6).

**“so that the exceeding greatness of the power will be of God, and not from ourselves.”** The great knowledge that Christians have is a treasure “in earthen vessels,” a statement that emphasizes the weakness of the vessel, i.e., us humans. Too often, however, we humans think and act as if our human weakness and limitations somehow limit God. We say, “If only I had more money I could do (whatever).” Or we say that about more help, or a bigger building, or better electronics, or, or, or. While of course that may be true to some extent, we must never forget what the Lord told Paul: “My grace is sufficient for you, for *my* power reaches its fulfillment in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9; and see commentary on 2 Cor. 12:9). We certainly see that demonstrated over and over again in Scripture. Very seldom do God’s people seem to have worldly superiority in life and in war. God has managed to bring victory out of the most dire-looking circumstances (such as when Gideon took 300 men against an army of 135,000), and He will continue to do so if we simply stay faithful to Him and pray and let Him work.

2Co 4:10

**“carrying around in our body the putting to death of Jesus.”** 2 Corinthians 4:10 seems to have a couple of meanings. One certainly is that as Jesus suffered while he lived and was eventually put to death, so Paul and his companions suffer in their journey, which will end in death one way or another. Paul suffered in many and various ways (see commentary on 2 Cor. 4:12). But also the vocabulary of the verse seems to point in some degree to the “putting to death” of Jesus, that is, the process of suffering before death. Lenski[[9]](#footnote-16930) points out that “the putting to death of Jesus” makes Jesus the object of the phrase instead of the subject. Both constructions are grammatically acceptable, and both make sense, it just seems to be more in line with the subject matter being discussed to make the putting to death the subject and Jesus the object of the phrase.

Given all that, it seems that in order to fully understand this verse, we must understand that Christ is still suffering. His death atoned for sin once and for all, but he is alive, and he is still suffering. Sometimes this is due to the purposeful actions of his enemies (“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Acts 9:4), and sometimes through ignorance, laziness, weakness, or other sins and faults by unbelievers and believers alike that hurt him, usually through hurting his Body. This suffering of ours that is also the suffering of Jesus is a theme in 2 Corinthians, and first appears in 2 Corinthians 1:5 where the sufferings of Jesus overflow into our lives, and are our sufferings.

**“the life also of Jesus.”** Just as we cannot understand the verse if we do not understand how we carry the putting to death of Jesus, we cannot understand it if we do not grasp what the life that he gives is (and makes publicly known through us). The “also” can make the verse somewhat difficult to understand, but it is necessary. If we were to conflate the verse, we could say, “always carrying around in our body the putting to death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, as well the death we are experiencing, can be made visible in our body.” In other words, Christians who are actively standing for the Word of God are always under pressure, and that is visible to others around us, but we also have to show that the life of Jesus is alive in us, giving us hope, a reason to live, and more. Too many times unbelievers see our problems and not our joy, or we try to hide the problems and pretend we are always “blessed.” The truth is that we are always bearing the suffering of Jesus, and should also be drawing life and joy from him, and people around us need to see both sides of our life.

It is not referring to the post-resurrection physical life of Jesus, although we certainly make known that Jesus is alive. The emphasis of this verse is that we reveal to others the “life,” the salvation and everlasting life (along with “real life,” a real sense of meaning and “being alive”) to others. This allows us to understand 2 Corinthians 4:12, in which death “keeps working” in the apostles, but life “keeps working” (the verb is understood in the sentence) in the Corinthians. As the ones being ministered to by Paul and his companions, the Corinthians kept getting to see and experience the life that flowed from Jesus via the sacrificial lives of the apostles. There would be a turnaround, of course. As the Corinthians matured in the faith and ministered to others, they would bear the burden and the dying of Jesus, while others would see and experience the “life” of Jesus that they provided.

2Co 4:12

**“So then death keeps working in us, but life in you.”** Paul is setting forth the position that he and his companions, such as Silas and Timothy (Acts 18:5; 2 Cor. 1:19), are constantly in danger of death and constantly in circumstances that are deleterious to good health. Paul’s daily life is difficult. He is “pressed on every side,” perplexed, persecuted, and struck down (2 Cor. 4:8-9). He constantly endures things such as hard work, pressures, hardships, distress, beatings, imprisonments and other “punishments,” riots, stonings, shipwrecks, dishonor, “evil reports,” sleepless nights, hunger, and worldly poverty. He lives in danger of death from all kinds of things in his journeys, including rivers, robbers, and angry and deceitful Jews and offended Gentiles (2 Cor. 6:4-10; 11:23-26). But this “death” that keeps working in him produces “life” in those that he witnesses to and brings to Christ. Paul dies to himself to bring life to others. Philip Hughes writes, “It is the unconquerable life of the risen Jesus within that enables His servants willingly and perpetually to be handed over to death for His sake, in order that the same life of Christ may be kindled in the hearts of others, enabling them in turn to win others.”[[10]](#footnote-11087)

2Co 4:14

**“*to be* with Jesus.”** We have added “to be” in italics to best capture the meaning of the word “with,” and to avoid a misunderstanding about the phrase “raise us with Jesus.” The word “with” is *sun* (#4862 σύν), and means “in association with,” “in accompaniment with.” We will be raised *to be with* Jesus, to be in his company. The “with” here does not mean a temporal with, as in, “we were raised with Jesus, when he was raised.” The verb is future tense, we “will be” raised, hence, it is speaking of a future rising. As Kistemaker has written, “not that Jesus was raised again, but that Jesus as the firstfruits of all his people guarantees their resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20, 51, 53). Jesus will secure the glorious state of all believers and be with them in God’s presence (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:27; Col. 1:22; Jude 24).”[[11]](#footnote-12704)

2Co 4:16

**“our outward self is wasting away, yet our inner *self* is renewed day by day.”** The “outward self” is the body of flesh, which is getting older and weaker with each passing year. The “inner self” is the real “you.” Philosophers have long debated the question, “What is the real ‘you’?” The “real you” is not the physical body, because that can and does change dramatically over time and can change radically and instantly if there is an accident such as a car wreck, shooting, etc. The “inner self” is the “you” that can talk to yourself. It is the invisible self that thinks and plans, and has desires and aspirations, and that has deep emotions and feels great joy in some circumstances but great pain in other circumstances, and that makes decisions about what to do. Paul speaks of the inner self in Romans 7:22-23 and Ephesians 3:16 and here in 2 Corinthians 4:16. In Romans 7:22-23, which is one sentence, what he calls his “inner self” in the first part of the sentence he refers to in short as “my mind” in the last part of the sentence.

It is very difficult to define or quantify the inner self, the “real you.” It does not reside in any single part of the body, but is intrinsically connected to the whole body. It is not the holy spirit in the person, or the soul. Some people believe that the “soul” is the real you, but the most common uses of “soul” are either as a way of describing an individual or describing the life force that animates both humans and animals. There are, however, times when the word “soul” is used to describe the inner self, the “inner individual” if you will, such as when a person talks to his “soul,” i.e., to himself (Luke 12:19).

Also, the “inner self” is not the gift of holy spirit that resides in the born-again believer. When a person becomes born again, the holy spirit is “born” (by an act of creation) in them. However, the wording of Ephesians 3:16 makes it clear that the holy spirit in the Christian is not their “inner self” because it is the inner self that is strengthened “by the spirit.” Furthermore, as was stated above, in the same sentence, Paul refers to his “inner self” as “my mind” (Rom. 7:22-23). Also, 2 Corinthians 4:16 says that the “inner self” is renewed day after day, but the holy spirit inside the believer does not need to be “renewed,” it is the mind that is carnal and gets worn down and needs to be “renewed.” The “inner self” is the real you, the self that makes the decisions and drives the thoughts and actions that we will be judged for on the Day of Judgment.

The “real you” is intrinsically and mysteriously connected with the whole body. This can be seen by a study of the body parts in the Bible. God speaks of them as producing thoughts, desires, attitudes and emotions, and yet it is not the physical organ that is the “inner self,” but that somehow the organs contribute to, and are interconnected with, the inner self. For example, the kidneys have information and are tested by God (Ps. 16:7; 26:2; Prov. 23:16; Rev. 2:23). The bowels are connected with our emotions and what we feel (Song 5:4; Isa. 16:11; 63:15; Jer. 4:19; 31:20; 2 Cor. 7:15; Phil. 1:8), and so is the liver (Lam. 2:11). The issues of life come from the heart (Prov. 4:23). God says the human being is amazingly and wonderfully made (Ps. 139:14), and that is clearly evident in studying the relationship between the bodily organs and the inner self.

So, Romans, 2 Corinthians, and Ephesians each give us different information about our “inner self.” In Romans 7:22-23 we learn that our mind is part of the “inner self,” and although our mind delights in the law of God and wants to be obedient, there are members of our flesh body that war against our mind and bring us captive to sin (which is why we sin although we don’t want to). Then, 2 Corinthians 4:16 shows us that our mind can experience a renewal every day. Paul’s body was getting older and weaker, but his “inner self” was being renewed every day, and committed Christians can experience that same daily renewal. Then, from Ephesians 3:16 we learn that the “inner self” is strengthened by the gift of holy spirit as it works in us in its many ways. Some of those ways a Christian can “feel,” such as when they speak in tongues, or prophesy, or receive clear revelation via the spirit, and occasionally a Christian may be able to sense the holy spirit actually empowering their body. Other times we must simply trust that the Bible is accurate when it says that God works in us both to want to do, and to do, His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13), and we know that God usually works in us via His gift of holy spirit. Christians should pray the same prayer that Paul did, that Christians would be strengthened with power in their inner man by means of the spirit of God.

Here in 2 Corinthians 4, Paul and his companions are going through some very difficult physical circumstances (2 Cor. 4:8-12). Yet the light has shined in Paul’s heart (2 Cor. 4:6), and he is excited to be able to speak the Word of God to people, knowing that one day he will be raised from the dead and be with Christ, and also that the Good News of the grace of God is spreading to more and more people (2 Cor. 4:13-15). Given those things, Paul was not discouraged. His outward body was getting weaker, but his inner self, his mind, was being renewed day after day, and the renewing of the mind in 2 Corinthians 4:16 is similar to the renewing of the mind mentioned in Romans 12:2, which uses the same Greek root word (except Romans uses a noun and Corinthians uses a verb). Paul is encouraged and excited about life and what the Lord is doing in him and in the world, and his “inner self” was being renewed by that.

[For more on the “inner self,” see commentary on Rom. 7:22. For more on “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

2Co 4:18

**“we do not look at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen.”** The things that are seen are the things around us in life, both positive and negative, but they are all temporary and will pass away. In contrast, the things that are not seen are the things that God promises us for the future; many wonderful things that the Bible does not even fully describe. This idea is repeated in 2 Corinthians 5:7, “for we walk by trust, not by sight.”

**2 Corinthians Chapter 5**

2Co 5:1

**“we know that.”** This verse, 2 Corinthians 5:1, shows that it is possible to be confident of one’s salvation. A person gets saved by trusting that Jesus is Lord and that God has raised him from among the dead (Rom. 10:9). That is easy to do. Paul and Timothy, who are mentioned in 2 Corinthians 1:1, knew they were saved, and every believer can also know that. Christians do not have to be in fear or doubt that they will be saved.

[For more on knowing we will be saved, see commentary on 1 John 3:2.]

**“our tent.”** The Greek is the genitive of apposition and reads “the house of our tent,” where the house and the tent are the same thing. Our earthly body is called a “tent” because it is so temporary in nature. Paul’s use of “tent” here is purposeful. While he lived in Corinth he was a tentmaker (Acts 18:3), and the Christians in Corinth would have known that.

**“here on earth.”** The Greek is *epigeios* (#1919 ἐπίγειος) and means existing upon the earth, earthly, terrestrial. It is an expression of locality, not of character, as if “earthly” were contrasted to “godly,” or some such. Our house, our tent, is here on earth.

**“in the heavens.”** How we could currently have a “building” “in the heavens” has been a point of major dispute among theologians. A very viable way of understanding the verse, but one that flies in the face of tradition, is that the “building” is our new body, which is everlasting and not just a “tent,” and that the Greek phrase “in the heavens” is not locative, but is qualitative, that is, it means “heavenly.”[[12]](#footnote-18768) That would make sense and fit with 1 Corinthians 15:42-44; Philippians 3:21, and 1 John 3:2, that we will have a spiritual body like Christ’s body. Thus, 2 Corinthians 5:1 is saying that if our earthly body is destroyed, we have a heavenly body to take its place.

2Co 5:2

**“*while we are* in this *tent* we continually groan.”** The verb “groan” is in the present active. We groan and groan. Life on this fallen earth is very hard, and so Christians groan to be with Christ and in their new bodies.

2Co 5:3

**“after we are clothed, we will not be found naked.”** When Christ comes back, Christians will be changed and get a new body. After Christians are clothed with their new body, they will not be found naked, “unclothed,” which we can tell from the next verse, 2 Corinthians 5:4, means dead. Everyone alive is clothed with a temporary tent. We look forward to being clothed from heaven. We do not want to be “unclothed,” that is, naked, dead.

2Co 5:4

**“not that we want to be unclothed, but to be clothed.”** There are three states in this verse: alive now in an earthly tent; “unclothed”; and “clothed” from heaven. Paul does not want to be “unclothed,” that is, dead, but “clothed” in his new body, the building from heaven. Verses such as this one show that a person does not go to heaven when they die because when they die they are “unclothed,” dead, and not clothed and in heaven (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:8).

We can understand the verse better by looking at it phrase by phrase: “For indeed, we who are in this tent” [that is, alive in our frail human tent-body] “continually groan, being burdened” [living Christians groan to be with Christ and have their new body], “not that we want to be unclothed” [“unclothed” means “dead,” with neither a human “tent” body or a new glorious body from heaven], “but to be clothed” [that is, clothed in his new immortal body]; “so that what is mortal” [the earthly body] “is swallowed up by life” [that is, the immortal body].

Philippians 1:21-23 presents the same three possibilities as 2 Corinthians 5, but uses different vocabulary. In Philippians, the three choices are life in this earthly body, death, and being with Christ which is “far better.”

2Co 5:5

**“prepared.”** The Greek is to *katergazomai* (#2716 κατεργάζομαι), and one of the meanings is to cause to be well prepared, prepare someone.[[13]](#footnote-26256) The Christian is well prepared for receiving a new, everlasting body.

**“God.”** The position of “God” in the sentence in Greek makes it emphatic. Our future clothing has nothing to do with us. We are prepared by God; we will be clothed by God. The crowning experience of the believer, a new body, is all of God; all we did was to accept the invitation.

**“down payment.”** The gift of holy spirit is the down payment or first installment of the full payment that is to come, that full payment being our full salvation when we have new, everlasting bodies and live with Christ forever. See commentary on Ephesians 1:14.

2Co 5:6

**“confident.”** The Greek is *tharrheō* (#2292 θαρρέω), and in this context, it refers to being confident, drawing courage from what we know to be truth. The BDAG *Greek-English Lexicon* defines *tharrheō* as “to have certainty in a matter; be confident, be courageous” and gives 2 Corinthians 5:6 and 5:8 as examples.[[14]](#footnote-21112) Friberg’s *Analytical Lexicon* notes that when *tharrheō* is referring to an attitude, it is “be confident” or “be cheerful,” and when it is about a manner of approaching something it refers to being bold or courageous.[[15]](#footnote-13127)

It is important to notice that Paul has repeated the word “confident” twice in the sentence, which, in the Greek text, starts in 2 Cor. 5:6 and ends in 2 Cor. 5:8. When it comes to what happens when we die, we must have confidence in what God says and courage to face our mortality and the situations that confront us in life, because we cannot know about spiritual truths concerning life after death from the world around us.

2Co 5:7

**“for we walk.”** It is unhelpful in our study of the Bible that 2 Corinthians 5:7 was made into a verse and was not left as the end of 2 Corinthians 5:6. Verses 6 and 7 are one thought: “Therefore we are always confident—even though we know that *while* we remain at home in the body we are away from home; away from the Lord—for we walk by trust and not by sight.” The point is that Paul is confident that he will eventually be with the Lord because he walks by trust, that is, he trusts what God says. The word “walk” is idiomatic for living life. Walking was so fundamental to ancient life that “walk” came to mean “live life.” Thus, the verse could be translated “for we live our lives by trust, not by sight.”

**“trust.”** The Greek is *pistis* (#4102 πίστις), a noun. In both ancient secular Greek and in the Bible, *pistis* means “trust, confidence, assurance.” The word “trust” is preferred in the REV. When the people of the first century got the letters of Paul, they did not think, “Wow, Paul must have invented a new word. What is *pistis*?” The Greek word *pistis* was in common use in the Greek language and had been for centuries. It is in the writings of the Greeks, including Aristotle, Plato, Herodotus, etc. The first definition of *pistis* in the Liddell and Scott *Greek-English Lexicon* is “trust in others.”[[16]](#footnote-21687)

When the Greek New Testament was translated into Latin, *fides* was the natural choice as a translation of *pistis*, because *fides* means “trust, confidence, reliance, belief.” So where Greek Bibles have *pistis*, Latin Bibles have *fides*. As the English language developed, the English word “faith” came from the Latin word *fides*. Despite the fact that a lot of Christians are confused about “faith,” there is nothing mysterious about *pistis*, *fides*, or “faith.” We know what trust is. *Merriam-Webster* defines it as “assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something.”[[17]](#footnote-15216)

A lot of the reason there is confusion about “faith” is that the definition of “faith” changed in the Middle Ages. The ancient (and biblical) definition of *pistis* differs from the modern definition of “faith.” If both *pistis* and *fides* mean “trust,” how did “faith” come to be defined in our modern culture as “firm belief in something for which there is no proof”?[[18]](#footnote-27290) The actual historical process is long and tedious, but the concept is simple. The Church asked people to trust doctrines that were neither logical nor clearly backed up by Scripture. For example, one such doctrine is “transubstantiation”; the doctrine that the “host” (bread) and wine that are used in Roman Catholic Mass become the body and blood of Christ is not logical, nor is it backed up with solid Scriptural exegesis. Priests know this, and so they ask people to “Take it by faith,” meaning, “Believe this even though there is no proof.” That happened with enough doctrines that over time, “belief in something for which there is no proof” became the accepted definition of “faith.” This is especially harmful because people then import that made-up definition of “faith” back into the Bible, although that is not what “faith” means when used in the Bible.

There is nothing wrong with “take it by faith (trust)” if there is actually something (such as a promise) to trust. When Jesus told the blind man that if he washed in the Pool of Siloam he would be healed, the blind man had “faith” in Jesus, that is, he trusted Jesus and his promise, so he washed and was given sight by a miracle. However, if there is nothing to trust in and nothing “trustworthy” to believe, then asking people to “take it by faith” is wrong, and contributes to the misunderstanding of God and the Bible. Biblical “faith” is neither magic, nor unreasonable, nor illogical. It is simply *trust*.

The way God designed the human mind, we only trust things when there is a reason to trust them. We cannot “just trust” something that does not make sense. For example, if a stranger comes to our house, we cannot “just trust” him. There may be something about him that gives us some confidence, so we decide to take a risk and let him in, but we do not “trust” him yet. True trust develops over time. Jesus never asked anyone to trust he was the Messiah without proof. He healed the sick, raised the dead, did miracles, and he asked people to believe the miracles that he did (John 10:38). Similarly, God does not ask us to believe Him without proof. He has left many evidences that He exists and that His Word is true. Thus, when God asks us to have faith, He is not asking us to believe something without proof. God proves Himself to us, and because of that, we trust Him, that is, we have faith. If we are going to please God, we have to trust Him, which means trusting what He says (cf. Heb. 11:6). It seems D. Elton Trueblood said it well when he said, “Faith is not belief without proof, but trust without reservation.”

When it comes to spiritual realities, such as what happens when a person dies, the only truly reliable source is God and His Word. The wise Christian learns to live his life by trusting God, and not relying only on what he sees in the world around him.

[For more on faith and trust, see Appendix 2: “‘Faith’ is ‘Trust.’” For more information on the difference between “faith” and the “manifestation of faith,” see commentary on 1 Cor. 12:9.]

2Co 5:8

**“we are confident.”** 2 Corinthians 5:8 has been used to try to show that people go to heaven when they die, but that is not what the verse is saying. Paul is saying that he would prefer to be out of his mortal body and be at home with the Lord, and that is something that most Christians want also. But most Christians make the mistake of thinking that when a person dies, they are immediately out of their body and home with the Lord, and that is not what happens and not what 2 Corinthians 5:8 is saying. A person is out of their body and home with the Lord when the Lord comes for his Church, because that is when dead Christians are raised and living Christians are changed. What Paul is confident of, and would prefer over being alive in his natural body or being dead, is the Lord coming and the Rapture occurring.

The message of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation is that when a person dies, they are dead in every sense of the word, with no conscious awareness. Dead people will be raised at the Rapture or a resurrection. This is contrary to the teaching of traditional Christianity, which says that when a person dies, their soul (or spirit) immediately goes to heaven or hell. Through the centuries, Christians have focused on a few verses of Scripture to support their claim that dead Christians are alive in heaven, and 2 Corinthians 5:8 is one of those verses.

In 2 Corinthians 5:8, Paul said, “We would prefer to be away from the body and home with the Lord.” But at what point is a Christian home with the Lord? Christians will be at home with the Lord sometime in the future when the Lord comes and gets us. Jesus Christ will come down from heaven, shout, and the trumpet will blow. At that time dead Christians will come out of the ground in new bodies and join the Lord in the air. Also, the Christians who are still alive on earth will immediately change, receive new everlasting bodies, and meet the Lord in the air (1 Cor. 15:51-53; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). So in 2 Corinthians 5:8, the apostle Paul is saying, “Look, I am living a tough life, and I would prefer to be at home with the Lord.” A lot of Christians today feel the same way, and they will be at home with the Lord at the Rapture, when Jesus comes from heaven to get us.

To better understand that 2 Corinthians 5:8 is not saying we are at home with the Lord at the moment of our death, it is important to read it in its context. As we read, we will see that Paul speaks of three possibilities for the believer. One is being alive in our earthly “tent,” our natural body. Another is being clothed with our house from heaven, our new body, and the third is being “naked,” “unclothed,” which is being dead. But traditional Christianity leaves out the part about being dead. According to traditional Christianity, a saved person is either in their earthly tent or in their heavenly house. At no time are they “naked,” i.e., dead. But Paul clearly has the three alternatives: being alive in a natural body; being dead (“naked”); and being clothed with a heavenly house, which will happen when the Lord returns.

In 2 Corinthians 5:1, Paul refers to the human body as a “tent” because it is temporary. Paul writes, “we know that if our house here on earth, our tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God.” Paul’s contrast between the “tent” we live in now, and the “building” from God is very important. Our body is called a “tent” because it is temporary, but in contrast, the new body we will receive is like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21) and is everlasting, so it is a “building.” The “building” we receive from God is a body—our new incorruptible body—not a disembodied spirit state, as traditional Christianity teaches. But when do we receive that new body?

When we study the Bible on the subject of the dead, we learn that no one receives a new body until the Rapture or the resurrections. God promises that each Christian will have a new body, but not until the Lord comes for us and we are raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15:42-44; 1 Thess. 4:15-17).

It is very important when reading the verses on being raised from the dead that we pay attention to the word “dead.” When a person dies, they are “dead,” lifeless. They are not “alive but in a spirit body” as most Christians believe. The Bible teaches that death is really death—the person is dead in every way. This is why death is an enemy—it cuts us off from life, God, and everything we love (1 Cor. 15:26).

Death really is death in every way, so when verses such as 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says, “the dead in Christ will rise,” it is making a clear and straightforward statement: the people are dead but they will rise from the dead and be made alive again. Although traditional Christianity teaches that verses such as 1 Thessalonians 4:16 are teaching that “dead” Christians are alive in heaven and will be rejoined with a body when the body is raised from the grave, that is simply not what the verse says. The Bible says “the dead” will get up, not “living spirits will rejoin dead bodies.” There is no verse—none—that says that dead bodies rise and then be united with their living spirits.

The context of Corinthians continues with 2 Corinthians 5:2 saying that while we are alive in our natural bodies we groan and long for our habitation from heaven, but like verse 1, verse 2 in no way states that when we die we immediately receive a new body. In fact, as we will see, 2 Corinthians 5:3 says just the opposite: when we die we are naked.

Understanding 2 Corinthians 5:3-4 is vital to properly understand this section in Corinthians. 2 Corinthians 5:3 says, “because truly, after we are clothed, we will not be found naked.” “Naked” means “dead.” We are not “naked” while we are alive. When we are alive, we are either in our earthly “tent” (2 Cor. 5:1), or we are in our next house, the building from heaven that we groan for, which is our new body. For most Christians, there is a time between when they are in their earthly tent and when they are in their house from heaven, and during that time they are dead; according to Paul they are “naked,” they are “unclothed.” The general experience for most Christians is life, death, then the return of the Lord, and getting up from the dead, and those three experiences are covered in 2 Corinthians 5:1-3. So, in summarizing the first three verses of 2 Corinthians 5 we see that in verse 1 people who are alive have a “house,” a “tent.” Then verse 2 says that while we are in our house we continually groan. Then verse 3 points out that when we are “clothed,” which will happen when we get our new house, our new body, we will not be found naked. So we can conclude that living people are clothed but dead people are naked. But if people immediately went from being clothed in an earthly tent when alive on earth to being clothed with a heavenly house when they died, then no one would ever be “naked.”

2 Corinthians 5:4 then makes the point that we should not want to die. Paul repeats that while we are in this earthly body we groan, but even so, he says that we don’t want to be “unclothed” (“naked”). As difficult as this life is, we do not want to be “unclothed,” that is, dead. Instead, what we want is stated in the last part of 2 Corinthians 5:4, that “what is mortal is swallowed up by life.” Our mortality is swallowed up by life when the Lord returns. At that time we receive everlasting bodies and we are finally at home with the Lord. Our new bodies will be wonderful indeed, as Paul wrote: “So it is with the resurrection of the dead. It [our earthly body] is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power” (1 Cor. 15:42-43).

We might well ask, “How can we know that God will raise us from the dead and give us new, everlasting bodies?” The answer is that God guarantees it. Continuing our reading of 2 Corinthians 5:1-8, we now come to verse 5, which says that God gave us the gift of holy spirit “as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” We can see why God guaranteed that He would raise believers from the dead. Death is scary, but we can have confidence that God will raise us from the dead because He guaranteed it and He never lies (Titus 1:2).

2 Corinthians 5:6 opens with Paul saying that he is confident. Confident of what? Confident of what he has been saying, that Christians are guaranteed to receive a house from heaven. We do not know when the Lord will return, and we may die before he does and so become “naked,” but no matter when the Lord returns we will get up in new bodies, and we can be confident of that. Then 2 Corinthians 5:7 reminds us that we must live by faith. Death may be scary, but we must trust God that He will raise us from death in brand new bodies like Christ’s body (Phil. 3:21).

2 Corinthians 5:8 opens with Paul repeating “we are confident,” that is, confident that God will raise the dead in new bodies. Then Paul says that we would “prefer instead to be away from this house, out of the body, and to be at home with the Lord.” Yes, we would prefer to be out of our fallen earthly bodies and be home with the Lord, but how would that happen? It would happen if the Lord would return, and we do not get to determine that; the Lord will come when he comes. 2 Corinthians 5:1-7 has been setting forth the three possibilities we have in life: being in our earthly tent, being dead, or being with the Lord. Given those choices of course we would prefer being with the Lord. In verse 8, Paul, who is alive, said he would prefer being with the Lord. We understand that and would prefer that too.

Traditional Christianity ignores the context of verse 8 and acts as if there are only two choices: being in our earthly body or being at home with the Lord. But the verse does not say there are only two choices; Paul is alive, in his earthly house, and he says he would “prefer” to be at home with the Lord, which will happen when the Lord comes. Traditional Christianity teaches he will be at home with the Lord when he dies. That is not correct, the context states that when he dies he will be “naked,” “unclothed,” and he clearly does not want that.

Seen in its full context, 2 Corinthians 5:8 is both simple and beautiful. Paul is alive in his earthly body and his life is difficult. So, although he is “confident” that he will be raised from the dead if he were to die, he would “prefer” for the Lord to come back so he could be at home with the Lord.

[For more on the dead being dead and not alive in any way, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

**“prefer.”** The Greek is *eudokeō* (#2106 εὐδοκέω), and it means to consider something as good and therefore worthy of choice. The meaning includes “want, decide, choose” depending on the context.[[19]](#footnote-23096) Given his choice of the three states of being, alive in this earthly body, dead, or being with the Lord, Paul would prefer to leave his earthly body and be at home with the Lord in his new body, which he will get when the Lord returns.

**“instead.”** The Greek is *mallon* (#3123 μᾶλλον), which in this context marks the object of greater preference. Thus, “rather” or “instead” (cf. NJB). Paul is “confident” in the promises of God about his future, but he would prefer instead to actually be in his new everlasting body.

**“to be away from *this* home.”** The Greek is *ekdēmeō* (#1553 ἐκδημέω), and it refers to movement from one geographical area to another: to leave one’s home or place of residence and go to another. It is a very appropriate word for the movement that Christians will see at the Rapture from their old body (or the grave) to the new place of everlasting residence.

**“to be at home.”** The Greek is *endēmeō* (#1736 ἐνδημέω), and it refers to being or staying at home, being among one’s own people, to live in one’s own country. It implies having a fixed place to live, which will certainly be the case when we get our new everlasting bodies. We will “be at home” with the Lord.

2Co 5:9

**“And so we also.”** The Greek *dio* in this context means “and so,”[[20]](#footnote-20073) or “That is why.”[[21]](#footnote-28372) In this context, those phrases are basically equivalent.

**“make it our aim.”** The Greek verb is *philotimeomai* (#5389 φιλοτιμέομαι), and it means to have as an aim, to have as a driving ambition;[[22]](#footnote-20807) to consider it an honor. In this context, Paul states that to be pleasing to the Lord is his aim, his driving ambition.

**“whether at home or away from home, to be pleasing to him.”** At first reading, this verse can be confusing. We know we can do things that displease God in this life. But why would the verse say that we make it our aim to be pleasing to Him when we are “away from home,” which the context makes clear is when we are in our new bodies and home with the Lord? The answer is in verse 10, that the reference to being away from “home” (i.e., away from our earthly body) is referring to the time immediately after the Rapture when we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and are judged for what we have done in our body.

This verse is indeed very important instruction for Christians because we want to live in a way that pleases the Lord now, and we want to live in such a way that the Lord will be pleased with us on the Day of Judgment. The Bible makes it clear that each person will be judged for the things he has done while living life on earth, and some people will be rewarded and some punished (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10).

2Co 5:10

**“must.”** The Greek word is *dei* (#1163 δεῖ) and refers to what is necessary. “Must” is a good translation. We cannot avoid or decline the Judgment. God created us for His purposes, not our own, and each person has a moral obligation to serve the Creator. At the Judgment, God will repay people for the good or evil they have done.

**“be exposed.”** The Greek word is *phaneroō* (#5319 φανερόω), to be made manifest, to be revealed, to be exposed. Furthermore, it is in the passive voice, so it is not something that we do, but something that is done to us. Philip Hughes catches the implication of the word: “To be made manifest means not just to appear, but to be laid bare, stripped of every outward facade of respectability, and openly revealed in the full and true reality of one’s character. All our hypocrisies and concealments, all our secret, intimate sins of thought and deed, will be open to the scrutiny of Christ….”[[23]](#footnote-21191)

**“judgment seat of Christ.”** Jesus Christ will do the actual judging, but God is the authority behind the judgment. For an explanation of why the judgment seat is sometimes referred to as the judgment seat of Christ, and at other times the judgment seat of God, see commentary on Romans 14:10.

The Greek word translated “judgment seat” is *bēma* (#968 βῆμα)*.* There are some people who believe that a *bēma* is a place where only rewards are given out, but this is incorrect. The *bēma* of Christ will be a “judgment seat” in the common sense of the word. *Vine’s* is very helpful in understanding *bēma*: “Primarily, a step, a pace (akin to *bainō*, to go), as in Acts 7:5, translated ‘to set (his foot) on...[it]’ was used to denote a raised place or platform, reached by steps...[and] from the platform, orations were made. The word became used for a tribune, two of which were provided in the law courts of Greece, one for the accuser and one for the defendant; [then] it was applied to the tribunal of a Roman magistrate or ruler.”[[24]](#footnote-14483)

The uses of *bēma* in the New Testament make its meaning clear: it is used as a place for the foot (Acts 7:5), it is used as a place from which to speak to people (Acts 12:21), and it is used as a judgment seat (Matt. 27:19; John 19:13; Acts 18:12,16,17; 25:6,10,17; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10). The fact that Jesus Christ was sentenced to death from a *bēma*, and that the Jews brought Paul to Gallio’s *bēma* for trial (Acts 18:12, 16, 17) shows that it was not just a place for oration and rewards.

**“in.”** In this verse, the body is shown to be the vehicle for the actions of the person’s will. The Greek word is not *en* (in) but *dia* (through, by means of), although “in” conveys the point. It is not only what a person does “in” the body, but what is done through the body that will be openly exposed. This would include allowing demon spirits entrance to our bodies and working evil through us. We need to be in control of ourselves and think and live in a godly way.

**“good or evil.”** The traditional and orthodox belief that when a saved person dies they go right to heaven and live there forever has obscured the clear meaning of this verse and others like it. It has also obscured a major reason God gives in His Word that we should be obedient to Him. To clearly understand what will happen to a person in the future, it is essential for us to understand the difference between salvation and rewards. “Salvation” refers to being saved; i.e., having everlasting life. “Rewards” refers to being given rewards in that future life for the way we have lived in this life.

When it comes to salvation, either a person is saved or is not saved. On the Day of Judgment, a person who is not saved will be thrown into the Lake of Fire and burned up (Rev. 20:11-15; also see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire”). In contrast, a person who is saved will have everlasting life and will live in Jesus’ Kingdom on earth. But not everyone who gets saved will have the same rewards in the Kingdom. Our rewards will differ, depending on how we live this life.

The Bible does not teach that people who are saved will be in heaven forever. What it teaches is that Jesus Christ will come down from heaven to the earth, fight and win the Battle of Armageddon, and set up his kingdom on earth, which will fill the whole earth (see Dan. 2:35, 44; and Rev. 19:11-21; and Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”). Jesus will set up his palace in the newly rebuilt Jerusalem, and reign for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:1-5); he will reign over all the earth with a “rod of iron” (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15 KJV). Many scholars refer to this 1,000-year kingdom as the “Millennial Kingdom.” After the 1,000 years are over, there will be a great war (Rev. 20:7-10). Then there will be the second resurrection (Rev. 20:11-13), and after that, the Everlasting City, the New Jerusalem, will come from heaven to earth, and the saved will live forever in that city (Rev. 21:1-4).

When Christ sets up his Millennial Kingdom on earth and rules the earth from Jerusalem, Christ’s kingdom will be a “kingdom” in the true sense of the word, with every kind of job that is done in any kingdom. If we ask the question, “What will people do in heaven forever?” the Bible does not have an answer. The reason for that is simple: people will not be in heaven forever. But if we ask, “What does the Bible say people will do on earth in the Kingdom of Christ?” then we get lots of clear answers. For one thing, there will be people assigned to rule and administer with Christ (Isa. 1:26; 32:1; Jer. 3:15; 23:4; Ezek. 44:24; Matt. 19:28; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26). The apostles understood this, and James and John boldly asked Jesus if one of them could sit on his right side, and one on his left, in his kingdom. They were asking to be Jesus’ second and third in command, a request that made the other apostles angry, no doubt at the possibility of them getting a lesser position in the Kingdom. Jesus told them that the positions of authority in his kingdom would be given by God (Mark 10:35-41).

The Bible specifically mentions many jobs in Christ’s Kingdom on earth, some having more honor, some having less. These include:

* builders (Isa. 54:12; 60:10; 61:4; Jer. 30:18; Ezek. 36:10, 33; Amos 9:14).
* farmers (Isa. 30:23-24; 32:20; 61:5; 62:9; Ezek. 36:9, 34; 48:19; Amos 9:13).
* herdsmen (Isa. 30:23-24; 60:6-7; 61:5; Jer. 31:12).
* vinedressers and vintners (Isa. 25:6; 62:8; Jer. 31:5; Amos 9:13).
* metalworkers (Isa. 2:4; 60:17; Mic. 4:3).
* fishermen (Ezek. 47:10).
* landscapers (Isa. 60:13).
* servants (Isa. 14:2).
* cleanup duties and gravediggers (Isa. 9:5; Ezek. 39:14-15) (There will be death in the Millennial Kingdom because “natural people” will live there, people who survived the Tribulation and Armageddon and whom Christ allowed into the Kingdom; Matt. 25:31-46; Isa. 65:20. After the 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom comes the Everlasting Kingdom, which includes the New Jerusalem that comes down from heaven (Rev. 21:2ff). There will be no death in the Everlasting Kingdom.)

The Bible does not name every job in the future Kingdom of Christ. Enough are named to show us that the Kingdom will be similar in diversity and needs to the earthly kingdoms and nations of today. When we understand that our future life will be in Christ’s Kingdom on earth, we get a much clearer picture of how we can be rewarded or punished in the future. We are finally in a position to understand how a person can “be repaid for the things *done* in the body, according to what he has made a practice of doing, whether good or evil” (2 Cor. 5:10).

The process of God’s judgment is quite straightforward and comes in two stages: a judgment for salvation and a judgment for rewards. First, each person is either saved or unsaved. The unsaved will burn up in the Lake of Fire and be gone, while the saved have everlasting life and so they will be judged for rewards. The Word of God shows three possible outcomes at a person’s judgment for rewards. If the person obeyed God and did godly works then they “will receive a reward” (1 Cor. 3:14). If the person’s works did not meet God’s standards of godly works, the person is still saved but they have no reward—they enter the Kingdom with little or nothing (1 Cor. 3:15; 2 John 1:8). If the person believed in Christ and was saved but lived in such a way that they actually marred the church and hurt their brothers and sisters in Christ, then they will be punished (1 Cor. 3:17; 1 Thess. 4:6). So, if a person is “saved,” they will get to live forever in the Kingdom, but what job will they do? The “job” we do in the Kingdom is a part of our reward, and as with life on earth now, some jobs are glorious and highly esteemed, and other jobs are not.

That a Christian can end up with few or no rewards in the Kingdom is not commonly taught in Christendom today, so the information may seem unbelievable or shocking. Nevertheless, it is what the Word of God says over and over in verse after verse. We need to be thankful that God is loving and just, and has spoken of these things so that we can make informed choices about our day-to-day behavior now, before the Day of Judgment, because then it will be too late to change. We should also notice that when God does speak of people losing rewards, He never threatens. He gives factual information so people can make informed choices. He honors our free will and makes factual statements so people can choose. God is just, and it would not be just or right for God to “surprise” people by waiting until the Judgment to inform them that His judgment is based on their actions.

The Bible repeatedly declares that people will eventually get what they deserve, and the verses below are some examples of that.

* **Jeremiah 17:10:** “I, Yahweh, search the heart, I test the kidneys, in order to give to each one according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings” (there are many other verses that say this same thing: Job 34:11; Psalms 62:12; Proverbs 24:12; Jeremiah 32:19; Ezekiel 33:20; Matthew 16:27; and Romans 2:6).
* **Matthew 10:41-42:** “Whoever receives a prophet because they are a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever receives a righteous person because they are a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink because they are a disciple, truly I say to you, he will absolutely not lose his reward.”
* **Matthew 16:27:** “For the Son of Man is about to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each *person* according to what he has done.”
* **Luke 12:47-48 (abridged):** “And that servant who knew his lord’s will but did not get ready, nor do according to his will, will be beaten with many stripes, but the one who did not know, but did things worthy of stripes, will be beaten with few stripes.”
* **1 Corinthians 3:10-15 (abridged):** “I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But let each one be careful how he builds on it…each one’s work will become plainly seen…because it will be revealed by fire. If anyone’s work that he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, but it will be like escaping through a fire.”
* **2 Corinthians 5:10:** “For we must all *appear and* be exposed before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be repaid for the things *done* in the body, according to what he has made a practice of doing, whether good or evil.”
* **Colossians 3:23-25 (abridged):** “Whatever you do, work from the depths of your soul, as for the Lord and not for people, because you know that you will receive the inheritance as a reward from the Lord. For the one who does wrong will be paid back for what he did wrong, and there is no favoritism.”
* **1 Thessalonians 4:6:** “*and* that no one overstep proper boundaries and take advantage of his brother or sister in this matter [of sexual sin], because the Lord is an avenger of all these *offenses*, just as we told you before and solemnly warned you.”
* **2 Timothy 2:11-13 (abridged):** “For if we died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us. If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.”
* **2 John 1:8:** “Watch yourselves, so that you do not lose what we have worked for, but *that* you may receive a full reward.”

It is sometimes taught that verses that mention punishment or wrath are referring to God’s punishment now, not in the future. Although there certainly can be God’s wrath manifested on earth now, verses such as Matthew 16:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Colossians 3:23-24; 1 Tim. 6:18-19; and 1 John 2:28, make it clear that rewards and punishments will be handed out at the Judgment. The Kingdom on earth is still future, and the rewards and punishments associated with the Kingdom are future also. Of course, God is “pruning” people today, but that is totally different from the rewards or punishment spoken of in Scripture that people will receive on the Day of Judgment.

It is also sometimes taught that Christians can get rewarded for what they do, but they will never be punished. However, verses such as 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Colossians 3:23-25; 1 Thessalonians 4:6; 1 John 2:28; and 2 John 1:8 are written to Christians, not to the unsaved. Sometimes verses such as these speak of “losing” rewards (cf. 2 John 1:8), or having one’s works burned up (1 Cor. 3:15), and that in and of itself would be a form of punishment, but 1 Thessalonians 4:6 says the evil will be avenged, and that is more than just a loss of rewards.

Unless they repent and confess their sin (1 John 1:9), Christians who have been selfish and disobedient to God will experience shame for their selfishness when they stand at the Judgment Seat and face the Christ they ignored or denied throughout life.

* **Luke 9:26:** “For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he comes in his glory and *the glory* of the Father and of the holy angels.”
* **1 John 2:28:** “And now, little children, remain in him, so that when he appears, we will have confidence and not shrink back in shame from him at his coming.”

Scripture is silent about how long the feeling of shame will last, and surely there will be joy and blessings on the future earth. However, there are more verses that mention shame than the two quoted here, so some degree of shame will be very real for people who have lived selfish lives and not sought to obey God. The Bible is telling us this so we will make the effort to live our lives in a way that is a blessing to God and for which He will reward us. These scriptures, and others like them, can be very sobering, even disheartening, to people who are recognizing God’s justice for the first time. This recognition may also bring with it a genuine sense of remorse for ungodly behavior. That is an important part of repentance and becoming obedient to God’s Word.

It will be a great tragedy on Judgment Day for some of the people who are saved to realize that their selfishness and failure to obey God has resulted in their not being rewarded in the Kingdom—especially since they will be with so many people who have dedicated their lives to Christ and will have great rewards in the Kingdom. The book of Ezekiel contains a quite graphic portrayal of this kind of loss and speaks of the difference between the Levites and priests who were faithful to God and those who were not.

**Ezekiel 44:10-16 (abridged):** “The Levites who went far from me...and who went astray after their idols will bear the consequences of their iniquity. 11They will minister in my sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the house and ministering in it; they will kill the burnt offering and sacrifices for the people and stand before them to minister to them. 12But because they ministered to them before their idols and became a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel, therefore...they will bear the consequences of their iniquity. 13They are not to come near to me to serve as priests...they will bear their shame and the consequences of the abominations they have committed. 14Yet I will appoint them to keep charge of the house, all its service, and all that is to be done in it. 15But the Levitical priests...who performed the duty of my sanctuary...are to come near to minister to me; they are to stand before me to offer the fat and the blood....16They alone may enter my sanctuary; they alone may come near my table to minister to me and keep my instruction.”

Ezekiel. 44:10-16 portrays two categories of Levites and priests: those who were faithful to God in their first life; and those who were not faithful to God but were “carnal,” even drifting into idolatry. Jesus Christ is not interested in ministering together with Levites and priests who were idolaters in their first life and not dedicated to God. It should not confuse us that some of these priests were idolaters in their first life but still end up saved and in the Millennial Kingdom. They may have worshiped God and idols at the same time. Many Christians go to church and worship God, but also check the astrology column in the newspaper for daily guidance. Or they rely on objects such as a rabbit’s foot, a “lucky coin” or a “lucky hat” to help them, and when they do, knowingly or unknowingly, they are practicing idolatry. Physical objects that people honor by looking to them for “invisible help” are idols.

The Levites who served idols can do the work in the Temple, but “they will bear their shame and the consequences of the abominations that they have committed.” This record is very sobering and should cause any Christian who is living in sin to wake up and consider the consequences of his actions. The good news is that there is no need for any shame at the Judgment. People can avoid shame on the Day of Judgment by repenting of their ungodly lifestyle, confessing their sin, and dedicating their life to Christ. No wonder the Bible says, “do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature” (Gal. 5:13).

The Bible makes it clear that the bottom line for receiving rewards is obedience to God’s commands. Every Christian should desire to obey God in order to receive great rewards. This will involve finding out what the Lord wants done and then carrying through with it. Few people have given up as much as Moses. He was a prince in Egypt. He had attained “the good life,” including good food, power, prestige, nice clothes, etc. He had a very posh lifestyle but gave it all up. Why? The Bible says he gave it up because he saw the reward in the future.

**Hebrews 11:24-26:** “By trust Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing to be mistreated along with the People of God, rather than to enjoy the temporary pleasures of sin, considering the abuse for the sake of the Messiah greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.”

Moses gave up the good life because he “looked ahead” and saw that he would be rewarded in the Kingdom. Do not be shortsighted. All of us should look ahead to the reward we can have in the future and act in a way that will attain it.

(Other verses that are not mentioned above and that speak of rewards include: Matt. 5:12, 19; 6:1, 5; 18:1-4; 25:14-29; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; 1 Tim. 6:17-19; and 2 Pet. 1:5-11).

[For more information on the future Millennial Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth,” and also see commentary on Matt. 5:12; 6:1; 1 Cor. 9:26, 27. For a much more complete explanation of the Millennial Kingdom and rewards in the future, see John W. Schoenheit, *The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul*. For more on sin and salvation, see commentary on Gal. 5:21. For more on people being judged for how they lived this life, see commentary on Rom. 14:12.]

2Co 5:11

**“knowing the fear of the Lord.”** The knowledgeable and wise believer understands the fear of God and Christ, and thus is concerned both about his or her own judgment and the judgment of others.

**“we are persuading others.”** The verb “persuade” in this phrase is in the present tense, active voice, and can be understood in one of two ways. It is either conative, “we try to persuade,”[[25]](#footnote-17389) or durative “we are busy persuading.”[[26]](#footnote-14699) The question is whether Paul meant to communicate what they were trying to do, or simply to relate what they were in fact doing. In truth, Paul was doing both, he was busy persuading, trying to persuade others. In English, the translation “we are persuading” can communicate both these senses and thus was the choice for the REV.

**“others.”** The Greek is *anthrōpos* (#444 ἄνθρωπος), and it is used collectively of both men and women. The REV often has “people,” but it was felt that was too stiff here, so “others” brings the meaning across.

2Co 5:12

**“We are not commending ourselves to you again.”** We can tell from the things in the letters to the Corinthians that Paul’s critics were saying that Paul was all about himself and preaching about himself for his own advantage. Paul openly and firmly stood against that accusation, as he does here (cf. 2 Cor. 4:5).

**“but are giving you an opportunity to boast about us.”** The Corinthians should have had wonderful things to say about Paul and his companions because Paul had been with them for more than a year and a half and had ample time to interact with him and observe firsthand how he lived (Acts 18:1-18). Given that, it is not unreasonable for Paul to expect the people of Corinth to defend him to his critics.

**“to those who take pride in appearance, and not in heart.”** It is a sad truth that many people are more concerned about how people look on the outside than how they really are on the inside. Furthermore, the people who think that way are usually shallow and ungodly on the inside themselves. They never learned the lesson that God spoke to Samuel some 3,000 years ago now: “But Yahweh said to Samuel...‘*God does* not see as man sees, for man sees the outward appearance, but Yahweh sees the heart’” (1 Sam. 16:7). It is easy to attack someone’s outer appearance and weaknesses but it only reveals your weak character. True strength is found in supporting each other and building each other up.

2Co 5:13

**“it is to God, or...it is for you.”** Paul is deflecting any criticism that he is doing what he is doing out of self-interest, a criticism that would naturally come from people who are interested in outward appearance (2 Cor. 5:12). With all the troubles he goes through it seems he should not have to do that, but this just goes to show that no matter what you do or go through to help other people, someone may say that you are only doing it to promote yourself.

2Co 5:14

**“For the love of Christ urges us on.”** This is an important phrase and needs to be properly understood. For one thing, “the love of Christ” can be understood as meaning the love we have for Christ, or the love Christ has for us. The most dominant meaning is the love we have for Christ, and that urges us on, and most scholars agree with that viewpoint, but that cannot be divorced from the love Christ has for us, which is a lesser but important meaning of the phrase as well.

Also, the Greek verb translated “urges...on” is *sunechō* (#4912 συνέχω) and it has many meanings, but one of them is to force into a position to move in a certain direction (for example, it was used of forcing a ship into a narrow channel where its movement was restricted, or forcing an animal into a pen that restricted its movement, and it was also used of being closely occupied with any business.) What Paul is saying is that the love of Christ “forces” him to move in a certain direction in his life. When we really understand the love of Christ and that he accomplished our salvation, love and logic “force” us to stay focused on the goal of bringing others to Christ and helping them grow. Of course, following Christ is a free will decision, but once we make Jesus Lord in our lives and truly love him, then many of the decisions we have to make in life become obvious, even if they are difficult decisions.

**“that one died in place of everyone, therefore everyone died.”** Jesus Christ died in the place of every human, so every human could be saved. The phrase, “therefore everyone died” makes it clear that, as far as God is concerned, every human died and their sin and death were paid for by Jesus Christ—now all they have to do to accept that payment is believe (Rom. 10:9). When Christ died, “everyone died” in the sense that no one has to pay for their own sin by dying (cf. Rom. 6:23). Christ’s death paid the price of death for everyone. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, his death paid the price for every human who has ever lived or will live so that they could be saved. If they accept the salvation Jesus bought for them, it is another step, but they only have to accept Christ’s work, they don’t have to die themselves. Christ’s death covers all humanity.

Calvinists teach that Christ only died for those people who God knew would accept him (this involves the Calvinist doctrine of “irresistible grace”), but they also teach that when 1 Timothy 2:4 says that God wants “everyone” to be saved the “everyone” actually means “everyone whom God wanted to be saved.” Similarly, when John 3:16 says that “whoever” believes in Jesus will have everlasting life, Calvinists teach that the “whoever” actually means only those whom God wants to be saved will be given the grace to believe and be saved. Traditional Christianity rejects this kind of exegesis, and asserts that Jesus Christ died so that anyone who wanted to choose life (Deut. 30:19) would be saved.

2Co 5:15

**“in place of everyone.”** From the Greek preposition *huper* (#5228 ὑπέρ). See commentary on Romans 5:6, “in place of the ungodly…in place of…in our place.”

**“so that those who are living.”** The meaning is “so that those people who are alive.” The wording in the text places an emphasis on being alive and then not living just for oneself. A simpler but less emphatic reading would be, “he died in place of everyone so that people should no longer live for themselves.”

**“should no longer live for themselves.”** This is a huge part of the Christian message. While it is certainly available to take Jesus as Lord and be saved without doing much for the Kingdom, that was never God’s intention. He created people to worship and obey Him and do good works (Eph. 2:10), and He expects us to stop focusing on our own life and focus on what furthers the Kingdom of God (cf. Matt. 6:33). Furthermore, people who do that will be richly rewarded (2 Cor. 5:10).

**“was raised.”** The Greek verb is *egeirō* (#1453 ἐγείρω, pronounced eh-'gay-row), and it refers to getting up, raising or being raised or raised up. Checking the English versions one can immediately see that some read “rose again” (ASV, KJV, NASB, NIV84, YLT) while others read something such as “was raised” (CJB, ESV, HCSB, NAB, NET, NRSV, RSV). Why the difference, and which is correct? The difference is due to the interpretation of the verb. *Egeirō* is one of the Greek verbs that has the same form (*egerthenti*; ἐγερθέντι) in both the middle and passive participle forms. If the verb is thought to be passive, then it should be translated “was raised,” but if it is in the middle voice, then it would more properly be “raised again.” The context and/or scope of Scripture will have to guide us as to the proper translation.

In this case, the scope of Scripture guides us quite firmly to the passive voice translation, “was raised.” Scripture says over and over that God raised Jesus from the dead (cf. Acts 2:24, 32; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30; Rom. 10:9; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:20; Col. 2:12; 1 Thess. 1:10; 1 Pet. 1:21). Furthermore, the phrase “raised again” is confusing since Jesus Christ was only raised one time.

2Co 5:16

**“we.”** The word “we” occurs three times in 2 Corinthians 5:16. The first time it occurs, although it technically refers to Paul, with Timothy, who penned 2 Corinthians, it seems clear that this first “we” also includes and reflects the thoughts and actions of the one who follows Christ.

**“by the standards of the flesh.”** The Greek is perhaps more literally, “according to the flesh” (2x in the verse), but that phrase has meaning in the writings of Paul that needs to be more clearly expressed and understood. The scholars and versions differ in how to bring the meaning into English but there are many good ways to do it (e.g., “by the standards of the flesh” (JB); “by human standards” (CEB, NJB); “from a human point of view” (AMP, GW, NLT, NRSV, RSV; cf. NET); “from a worldly viewpoint” (CJB; cf. CSB, NIV); “as the world thinks” (NCV); “estimated” (Goodspeed); “our knowledge of men can no longer be based on their outward lives” (Phillips).

When Paul writes, “we regard no one by the standards of the flesh,” he is speaking about the change in the way he thinks about people. Before his conversion and decision to follow Christ, he thought about people in a worldly way and looked at people’s wealth, status in society, physical attributes, nationality, education, and other such things. However, now he does not use those worldly standards when looking at people. Instead, he works to look at people in the way the Lord does and looks at things like whether the person is saved or not and whether they strive to live by the spirit in obedience to God. Furthermore, God looks on the heart and Christians should too.

It helps us to understand this verse to remember that Roman society was very stratified and was a patron-client society from the top (the emperor) down to the lowest slave. Higher-ups in society were proud of their status and expected to be looked up to and get preferential treatment. Similarly, people of lower status in the Roman world were regularly degraded and mistreated. None of that is God’s heart toward people, and if the world is going to change, that change must occur in the hearts of Christians first.

**“even though we have known Christ by the standards of the flesh, yet now we know *him that way* no more.”** There is a question among scholars as to whether or not Paul ever saw Christ in person. Although that certainly could have been possible given the timelines of their life—Paul might have been in Jerusalem for feasts such as Passover or Pentecost that Jesus attended and may have heard him teach—there is no record that the two ever met in the flesh. It is believed that Paul met Christ on the road to Damascus and was subsequently converted (Acts 9:1-19) around AD 35 or 36. He was a “young man” when Stephen was killed and was approving of Stephen’s being executed (Acts 7:58-8:1) yet he was old enough to be charged with arresting Christians in Damascus (Acts 9:1-2). Thus, we can conclude that Paul was likely in his late twenties when Stephen was killed. In fact, if Paul was, say, 27 when Stephen was killed (which was perhaps AD 35; scholars generally say AD 34-36), and was martyred by Nero in 66 or 67, then Paul could have been in his mid to late fifties when he was martyred. So, in conclusion, Paul could have easily been in Jerusalem at a time when Jesus was, and heard him teach.

But a meeting in the flesh between Paul and Christ is not necessary for 2 Corinthians 5:16 to make sense. Paul certainly “knew” (the Greek word allows for “knew about”) Christ from his many contacts with both Christ’s enemies and his disciples, and before his conversion that knowledge was “by the standards of the flesh.” Yet since his conversion, and especially as he moved forward in his ministry and in the process of becoming like Christ, he did not know Christ by the standards of the flesh any longer, and other Christians should follow Paul’s example.

2Co 5:17

**“in *union with* Christ.”** On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), being “born again” of God’s spirit first became available, and Christians became part of the Body of Christ and identified with him (crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, and raised with him). Today, Christians are “in Christ” (“in union with Christ”) by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ, and it is important that we also are “in Christ,” that is, “in union with Christ” because we obey him and lead godly lives. When we read a phrase such as “in Christ” or “in him,” we must pay careful attention to the context to see if it refers to our spiritual union due to being part of the Body of Christ, or whether it refers to our being in union with Christ because of our obedience and godliness, or if both meanings apply in that given context. A lot of the blessings that Christians enjoy today are due to the fact that we are in union with Jesus Christ.

[For more on being in union with Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:3. For more information on the Christian’s identification with Christ, see commentary on Rom. 6:5.]

**“new creation.”** At the moment a person confesses and believes that Jesus Christ is Lord and that he has been raised from the dead (Rom. 10:9), God creates in them His gift of holy spirit and they become “born again.” At that very moment, the “natural man” of just body and soul becomes a child of God with body, soul, and holy spirit. The gift of holy spirit is created in the person, which is why the person is a “new creation,” as 2 Corinthians 5:17 says. Furthermore, the gift of holy spirit created in the person carries the very nature of God, which is why the Christian has a new divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Also, the person “in union with Christ” is a “new creation” because he or she is now “in union with” Christ and is a part of the Body of Christ. Whereas before the New Birth, the person was just an individual person, now the person is part of a spiritual collective referred to as the Body of Christ. Thus, a Christian should no longer live for himself or herself, but think of themselves as part of the Body of Christ, working together to accomplish God’s purposes and bring glory and honor to God.

[For more on the New Birth, see commentary on 1 Pet. 1:3. For more on the holy nature of the Christian, see commentary on 2 Pet. 1:4. For more on Christian salvation, see Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

**“behold.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“new things have come.”** “New things” is from the neuter plural *kaina* (καινά), which functions as the subject of the verb “have come” (*gegonen*, γέγονεν). Thus, as R. C. H. Lenski correctly points out, “the subject of…[‘become’] is not drawn from παρῆλθεν; ‘have become new’ contains its own subject, one that is implied in καινά,” which contains its own subject.[[27]](#footnote-23329) The KJV imports “all things” from Revelation 21:5, but obviously, not everything becomes new when someone is born again, just the things inside that believer. The Revised Version and the ASV, which have “they have become new,” miss the point. It is not the old things that become new; it is that there are new things created.

2Co 5:18

**“all this.”** This is the meaning of this word in this context.[[28]](#footnote-28579) All these new things about us, for example, the way we think about people, being in union with Christ, and being a new creation, are all from God.

2Co 5:19

**“God was reconciling.”** The emphasis of the verb is that God was reconciling, not that God was in Christ.[[29]](#footnote-12381) God reconciled us to himself “through”[[30]](#footnote-30885) Christ.

**“not counting their transgressions against them.”** Everyone sins (Rom. 3:23), and part of the great grace and mercy of God is that when a person accepts Christ as Lord, then God forgives their sin and brings them into the body of people who are saved. Some people think of themselves as being unworthy to be saved, but that misses the point. Salvation is not about one’s personal worthiness. Technically, everyone is unworthy (Rom. 3:23). Our worthiness comes from Christ—he made us worthy, and our sins are forgiven and not counted against us. Also, Christians are to imitate God (Eph. 5:1) and forgive others (Eph. 4:32).

**“and has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”** The “message” of reconciliation” in this context refers to the message of how to be reconciled to God and why that is necessary and desirable. The Greek word translated as “message” is *logos* (#3056 λόγος), and one of the meanings of *logos* is “message,” which is why that translation occurs in most modern versions (cf. CEB, CJB, CSB, ESV, NAB, NET, NIV, NJB, NLT, NRSV, RSV). Although *logos* can be translated as “word,” in many contexts *logos* does not refer to a “word,” like a “vocabulary word,” but rather to a “message.”

A wonderful example of *logos* referring to a “message” is in 1 Corinthians 12:8. In that verse, the revelation that believers get via the spirit is referred to as a *logos* of knowledge and a *logos* of wisdom, but the revelation given via the spirit is almost never given as a “word,” that is, a vocabulary word; it is given as a “message.” Furthermore, much of the time that revelation is given to a believer, the revelation is not even given in words at all, but rather it is given in pictures, or a feeling, or simply as just knowing something. Thus, the revelation is a “message,” not a “word.” The word *logos* is also used as a “message,” “the message [*logos*] of truth,” in Ephesians 1:13 and Colossians 1:5, and in those passages, the “message” refers to the good news about salvation.

God has committed to believers the “message” of reconciliation. Although the basics of the message never change, what a believer says to someone they are talking to changes with each person and each circumstance. Believers say to a person what it takes to communicate God’s desire to be reconciled to people, and also how people can be reconciled to God. Believers can witness with confidence, knowing that because God has committed to them the message of reconciliation, He and the Lord Jesus will help them win the lost and also bring the straying believer back to God. Furthermore, behind every genuine message of reconciliation is the solid rock of the Word of God and God’s promise of everlasting life and a wonderful future for anyone who gets saved.

2Co 5:20

**“we are ambassadors.”** We are “ambassadors” in that we speak for Christ. Christ is in heaven, and we are his representatives here on earth. There was a huge shift in evangelism between the Old Testament and the New Testament after the resurrection of Christ. In the Old Testament, God’s design was to bless and elevate Israel as a holy nation and make them an example to the world that would draw people to God and His laws and ways. In the Old Testament, individual Jews were never told to evangelize and try to bring others to God. That changed after Christ’s resurrection. Now Christ has told believers to be witnesses to the world and to make an effort to bring others to God, Christ, and salvation (see Acts 1:8 and commentary on Acts 1:8).

Here in 2 Corinthians 5:20, the Greek verb, *presbeuō* (#4243 πρεσβεύω) means “ambassadors,” and also “legates.” Our union with Christ (Rom. 6:3), includes the honor, privilege, and ability to act in his stead. *Presbeuō* was used in the Greek language to refer to three different kinds of people: an “elder,” an “ambassador,” and a “legate.” Whenever we come across a Hebrew or Greek word that has more than one meaning, we must decide which of them is the correct or appropriate meaning in the verse. In this case, we can do that by “trying out” the meanings of *presbeuō*. Reading “elder” in this context does not make good sense, and thus “elder” is not the meaning here. Reading “ambassador” in this context makes sense, because we have the ministry and message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18 and 5:19). As ambassadors whose citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20), we are in a foreign country here on earth, spreading goodwill and trying to win support for our king and country. But we are also legates for Christ.

Communication in the Roman Empire was slow. In the Roman world, if a war broke out the Emperor may have not even heard about it for weeks, and then not been able to decide what to do simply because no matter what information he had and how many daily messengers arrived, their “news” was always old. Worse, when the Emperor’s orders actually arrived at the trouble spot—well, the situation was likely totally different or the trouble even over.

One way the Greco-Roman rulers dealt with the problem was through the office of the legate, a person with the authority to represent the ruler, a person delegated and empowered to act as the king himself in any given situation. About *presbeutēs* Barnett writes: “Such delegates—Jewish or Greco-Roman—came with the authority of the sender, in his place, to secure his interests,” and they were referred to as legates.[[31]](#footnote-32078) *Kittel’s Theological Dictionary* adds, “In the Roman period *presbeutēs* is the Greek equivalent of [the Latin] *legatus*...It is commonly used for the imperial legates.”[[32]](#footnote-31231) Where the ellipse appears in the quotation, there are a number of references to ancient works to substantiate the point. Spicq adds, “...a legate is a noteworthy personage, at the top of the military hierarchy, and *presbeuōn* and *presbeutēs* are technical terms for imperial legates in the Greek Orient.”[[33]](#footnote-18198)

The fact that each of us is a “legate” is an important point being made in 2 Corinthians 5:20, because even though we are ambassadors for Christ, we are also his legates—his personal presence on earth. As we walk by the spirit, in a very real sense we are “Christ” in the situation. We see this played out over and over again in the New Testament, especially in Acts. One notable example in Acts occurred when Peter was traveling around Israel teaching, and a woman named Tabitha who lived in Joppa, the old seaport city of Israel, died. The disciples found out Peter was in a nearby city and called for him. Notice how Peter acts in the place of Christ when raising the dead. He assessed the situation, then acted, saying “Tabitha, get up” (Acts 9:40).

Peter prayed about what to do, but once he received revelation guidance about what to do concerning Tabitha, he did not pray for God to raise her. He did not say anything such as: “Dear God, here lies Tabitha. Please raise her from the dead. Please put life back into her.” No, Peter did not pray like that. Rather, he acted like Jesus acted. When Jesus was in the presence of a dead girl, he did not ask God to raise the girl, he said, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!” (Mark 5:41). In fact, if we study Jesus Christ’s healings and miracles, there is not one single time Jesus asked God to do the healing. It was God’s power that did the work, certainly, but Jesus knew he was God’s representative on earth, so he healed a leper, saying, “Be clean” (Matt. 8:3). He healed a cripple, saying, “Stretch out your hand” (Matt. 12:13). He cast demons out of people by commanding them to leave, as we see in Luke: “Come out of him” (Luke 4:35). Peter knew that he was the legate of Christ, the personal presence of Christ, and he healed as Jesus did.

Paul healed the same way that Jesus and Peter did (Acts 14:10; 16:18). There is no record in Acts of anyone being healed where the one doing the healing prayed for God to do it. In every specific case, the individual did the healing or miracle, but was clearly doing so by the power of God, which is why God always gets the glory.

We Christians are legates of Christ—the personal presence of Christ on earth. However, we have a decision to make. Just as a Roman legate could go to the hippodrome and sit and eat olives and watch the horse races all day long instead of going out and representing the Emperor, so Christians can act in ways that hang on to the flesh and not walk in the power of Christ. Walking in the fullness of the power of Christ does not “just happen,” it is a purposeful decision. We must realize the power we have, and then go into the world and walk it out in faith. So should 2 Corinthians 5:20 read “legates” instead of “ambassadors?” “Ambassadors” fits the context so well that it seems best to leave it as the reading in the text and have the reading “legate” in the margin as an additional meaning.

**“We implore on behalf of Christ.”** Although many English versions supply “you” and thus have a translation similar to “we implore you,” there is no “you” in the Greek text, and it is misleading to supply it. “We” Christians are ambassadors and legates for Christ, and “we” implore any person who needs to be reconciled to God.

2Co 5:21

**“He made him.”** The pronouns mean: “God made Jesus Christ….”

**“who did not know sin.”** This is the meaning of “know” that is “to experience.” Jesus Christ had never experienced sin by personally sinning. Of course he “knew” intellectually what sin was. 2 Corinthians 5:21 could also be translated, “...who had never experienced sin” or, more colloquially, “who had never sinned.”

[For more on the uses of “know,” see commentary on Gen. 3:22.]

**“sin offering.”** The Greek word translated “sin offering” in the REV is *hamartia* (#266 ἁμαρτία). *Hamartia* usually means “sin,” but it can also mean “sin offering.” Jesus Christ was the sin offering that cleanses the believer from sin, but he was a much more complete sin offering for us than the sin offerings described in the Old Testament were, as will be explained below. Many Greek lexicons do not mention that *hamartia* can mean “sin offering,” but that is one of its meanings. For example, Newman’s *Greek-English Dictionary* says *hamartia* means “sin” and “sin offering,”[[34]](#footnote-18719) and the Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible lists both “sin” and “sin offering” under “sin” as a translation of *hamartia*.[[35]](#footnote-24923) English Bibles that have “sin offering” or an equivalent in 2 Corinthians 5:21 include the CJB, NLT, REV, The New Testament by Charles Williams, and The Holy Bible: New European Version. *Hamartia* is the translation of the Hebrew word for “sin offering” many times in the Septuagint (cf. Septuagint text of Exod. 29:14, 36; 30:10; Lev. 4:3, 8, 21, 24, 25, 29, 32, and 4:33).

Also, just as the Greek word *hamartia* can be “sin” or “sin offering,” the Hebrew word *chatta'ah* (#02403 חַטָּאָה or חַטָּאת), the most common word for “sin” in the Hebrew Bible, means either “sin” or “sin offering,” depending on the context (see commentary on Lev. 4:3). In fact, we would expect if the Hebrew word *chattath* can be “sin” or “sin offering,” then the Greek translation of it would do the same and then that concept be brought into the Greek-speaking Jewish culture, because although the language was Greek, the Jewish concepts of sin and sacrifice for sin were carried with them as many of them changed from speaking Hebrew (or Aramaic) to speaking Greek.

The Hebrew-English lexicons list both the meaning “sin” and “sin offering” for *chattath*.[[36]](#footnote-27719) Also *chattath* is translated “sin offering” in a large number of verses in the Old Testament (cf. Exod. 29:14, 36; 30:10; Lev. 4:3, 8, 14, 20, 21, 24, 25, 29, etc.). In fact, in a few Old Testament verses where *chattath* occurs more than once, it is translated both ways: as “sin” and “sin offering” (cf. Lev. 4:3, 4:14; and 5:6).

F. F. Bruce writes about the phrase *hamartian epoiesen* (“made him to be a sin offering”): “…this remarkable expression…can best be understood on the assumption that Paul had in mind the Hebrew idiom in which certain words for sin can mean not only sin, but ‘sin offering.’”[[37]](#footnote-27172) We must keep in mind that Corinth was a large Greek city. Both Acts (primarily 18) and the Epistles to the Corinthians indicate that the congregation in Corinth had a large percentage of Gentiles. They, as well as many Jews, used the Septuagint as their Bible, and so would have been very familiar with the use of *hamartia* as “sin offering.”

Albert Barnes explains that Jesus had to be a sin offering, saying he could not become “sin,” nor “a sinner,” nor “guilty.”[[38]](#footnote-18606) First, Jesus could not literally become “sin.” Sin is breaking the commandments of God. No person can become “sin.” We are not “sin,” and Jesus did not become “sin” for us. Nor could Jesus have become “a sinner.” BDAG treats *hamartia* as if it should be translated “sin” but understood as referring to “the guilty one,” i.e., the sinful one.[[39]](#footnote-25772) If that were the case, then by the figure of speech metonymy, “sin” would stand for the one who had sin, i.e., the sinner himself. Thayer’s lexicon does a similar thing, and says that “sin” puts the “abstract for the concrete,” using “sin” but meaning “the sinner.”[[40]](#footnote-29494) Thus, both BDAG and Thayer see this verse as saying Christ becomes “a sinner” for us, but that cannot be correct. For one thing, the whole Bible testifies to the holiness and sinlessness of Christ. More to the point, however, is that if Jesus did become “a sinner,” then he could not have been our savior, because the death of one sinner does not in any way impute righteousness to another sinner. There is no merit in the death of a sinner. The only reason Christ’s sacrifice is sufficient to provide salvation for all people is that he was not a sinner. Similarly, Christ could not have become “guilty,” as if “sin” were put by metonymy for the effect of sin, which is guilt. Again, one guilty person cannot atone for the life of another guilty person. The correct conclusion, and the one that Barnes arrives at, is that Christ is a “sin-offering.” This fulfills the prophecy in Isa. 53:10 that God’s Servant would be a guilt offering, although here it is called a sin offering. No doubt Christ was portrayed by both of those offerings, and in many other ways as well. He was sinless, and because of that fact, he could give his life as an offering to God for the sin of others. *The New Testament in the Language of the People* by Charles Williams is one of the English versions that has “sin offering” in 2 Corinthians 5:21 and notes the use of *hamartia* for sin offering in Old Testament Greek.

It is important to understand that Jesus Christ was a much greater, much more complete sin offering than the sin offerings described in the Mosaic law. The sin offerings in the Mosaic law atoned for accidental sin, but there was no sin offering in the Old Testament law that atoned for purposeful sin, sin that was done on purpose. That the sin offering atoned for accidental sin can be seen in the Mosaic Law (Lev. 4:2, 13-14, 22, 27; Num. 15:22-29). It can also be seen in the Mosaic Law that if a person sinned on purpose, there was no sacrifice for sin (Num. 15:30-31). After saying that a person who sinned on purpose was to be cut off from Israel in Numbers 15:30-31, Numbers 15:32-36 gives the example of a man who picked up sticks on the Sabbath and was stoned to death—he was not allowed to offer a sin offering to atone for his sin.

However, when Jesus came, it became clear that his death would atone for both intentional and unintentional sin. In his parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector, Jesus made it clear that people could be forgiven from sin in general if they honestly and humbly made confession before God (Luke 18:9-14). The person who humbly confesses sin is forgiven of all sin and unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Christ was the sin offering who died in place of sinners, and because of his sacrifice, believers are declared righteous in the sight of God (Rom. 5:6-11).

That Jesus was a sin offering for us shows us the great love, grace, and mercy of God. It truly confirms Psalm 103:10: “He [God] has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor repaid us according to our iniquities.” We all deserve death, but in His great love, God provided a sacrifice for sin that would justly provide a way for us to have everlasting life.

**“in *union with* him.”** On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), being “born again” of God’s spirit first became available, and Christians became part of the Body of Christ and identified with him (crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, and raised with him). Today, Christians are “in Christ” (“in union with Christ”) by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ, and it is important that we also are “in Christ,” that is, “in union with Christ” because we obey him and lead godly lives. When we read a phrase such as “in Christ” or “in him,” we must pay careful attention to the context to see if it refers to our spiritual union due to being part of the Body of Christ, or whether it refers to our being in union with Christ because of our obedience and godliness, or if both meanings apply in that given context. A lot of the blessings that Christians enjoy today are due to the fact that we are in union with Jesus Christ.

[For more on being in union with Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:3. For more information on the Christian’s identification with Christ, see commentary on Rom. 6:5.]

**“the righteousness of God.”** Christ was a sin offering for us so we could be declared righteous (cf. Rom. 5:9). In a sin offering, if the sinner was a member of the congregation and not a priest or leader, he brought the sin offering, which was a female goat or lamb, to the Temple and put his hand on the head of the sin offering and killed it. The priest caught the blood and put some of it on the altar and poured the rest of it out at the base of the altar (Lev. 4:27-35). The priest did not kill the sin offering, the sinner did, and the fact that the sinner put his hand on the head of the sacrifice and killed it symbolized the transfer of guilt and righteousness.

In the sin offering, the guilt of the sinner was transferred to the lamb, and the righteousness of the lamb was transferred to the sinner. The lamb (or goat) had to be without blemish, which symbolized its sinlessness and, therefore, righteousness. The animal had to be without blemish so that the “righteousness” of the animal could be transferred to the sinner. In the sacrifice, the sin of the sinner was transferred to the lamb, and the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), so the lamb was killed. The fact that the sinner, not the priest, killed the lamb symbolized that it was the sin of the sinner that made death necessary and thus killed the lamb. The whole ritual of the sin offering was to establish the lamb as a type of Christ and also establish that the way God set life up was so that an innocent, righteous one was able to die in place of a sinner and thus save that sinner from everlasting death.

Here in 2 Corinthians 5:21, the phrase that “we would become the righteousness of God” comes right from the pattern of the sin offering. In the Old Testament, the sinner became righteous because the lamb or goat was righteous. Christ, the lamb of God, was sinless, absolutely righteous in the sight of God, and when he died on the cross—killed by our sin—his righteousness was transferred to us, and we became “the righteousness of God,” that is, completely righteous in God’s sight, just as Christ was.

**2 Corinthians Chapter 6**

2Co 6:1

**“working together *with God*.”** The Greek verb translated “working together” is *sunergeō* (#4903 συνεργέω), and it means to work together, to assist each other. The italics, “with God” is supplied because the object of the verb “working together” primarily refers to God (cf. CJB, NIV, NLT). We can see this in the context—2 Corinthians 5:20 says that God is making His appeal through us. The cause of action in the context is God, not Christ. This starts very early in 2 Corinthians. For example, 2 Corinthians 4:6 points out that it was God who commanded light to shine out of darkness. In 2 Corinthians 4:7, the power flows from God. In 2 Corinthians 4:14, “the one” who raised Jesus is God. In 2 Corinthians 5:1, our everlasting body is “from God,” then in 2 Corinthians 5:5 it was God who prepared us for that body and gave us the guarantee of our future.

Although 2 Corinthians 5:10 speaks of Christ being the judge, the scope of Scripture makes it clear that God is still in charge and Christ is the judge because God appointed him to be the judge (John 5:22, 26, 27, 30). John 5:30 is especially important in understanding 2 Corinthians 5:10-11, because 2 Corinthians 5:10 says Christ is the judge but verse 11 says we are visible to God. The fact that we are visible to God is why Christ said, “I judge only as I hear” (John 5:30 CSB, NIV).

The primacy of God continues in 2 Corinthians 5:18, which says, “all this is from God, who…gave to us the ministry of reconciliation;” 2 Corinthians 5:19 says God was reconciling the world to Himself through Christ; 2 Corinthians 5:20 says that although we are ambassadors for Christ, it is God that is making His appeal through us; and 2 Corinthians 5:21 says that God made Christ to be a sin offering on our behalf.

It is in the context of God doing all those things that 2 Corinthians 6:1 says, “working together *with God.*” We can see this even more clearly when we remember that the original text had no chapter breaks and we read 2 Corinthians 6:1 immediately after 2 Corinthians 5:21.

As 2 Corinthians 5 closes, we see that God gave us the ministry of reconciliation; God was reconciling the world to Himself; God gave us the message [the “word”] of reconciliation; God is making his appeal to the world through us by making us ambassadors for His Son, Christ; and God gave His Son as a sin offering so people could be reconciled to Him. The only proper response to what God has done is to be “working together with God.” Furthermore, we work together with God by telling people, “Now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2), and by not causing unnecessary offense to people (2 Cor. 6:3), and by showing people that we are “servants of God” in everything we do and in everything we endure (2 Cor. 6:4-10).

Although the Greek text does not have the object “with him” after the verb “working together,” most English versions properly supply either “with him” or “with God” (the REV has “with God” in italics to show it has been added to the text). The reason God did not include the object “with God” is likely because although we work together with God, we do so by working together with His Son, Jesus Christ. In reality, we work together with them both. But if the text said, “working together with both,” it would not properly emphasize the primacy of God, which is so clearly portrayed in the context. Nevertheless, the reason most English versions add “with him” or “with God” to the text is to avoid the literal reading, “And working together, we exhort you,” which would most likely confuse people and make them think that the ones working together were Paul and Timothy (2 Cor. 1:1) or Paul and the people ministering with him in Corinth.

That Christians get to be workers together with God is a truly astounding thing, and a high and holy privilege that tells us much about God and demands much from us. It is certainly not hidden from God that even when we humans are at our best, we are frail, fallible, and sinful. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt” (Jer. 17:9 ASV). That God would set things up such that we get to work with Him shows His amazing love for mankind, as well as His patience, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. He wants us to love Him, and He gives us every opportunity to show that and grow in love. His calling also demands that we give our best to God, because He has given us so much when we deserve so little. The Bible tells us to “seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness,” and also to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and Christians should strive to live exactly that way.

**“in vain.”** The Greek is *kenos* (#2756 κενός), and it means, empty, vain, worthless, devoid of truth. Metaphorically it can mean destitute of spiritual wealth, of one who boasts of his faith as a transcendent possession, yet is without the fruits of faith. Also, it is used metaphorically of endeavors, labors, and acts that result in nothing, are fruitless, or are without effect.

R. C. H. Lenski points out that here, the Greek phrase *eis kenos* (literally “unto empty”) means “in an empty, hollow way.”[[41]](#footnote-12944) Thus, here Paul could be entreating the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God, but then have no real fruit from it. Heinz Cassirer (*God’s New Covenant* translation) translates the phrase, “you must not receive God’s gracious gift in a manner tending to make it profitless.”

The Greek phrase *eis kenos* is often translated as “in vain,” which is the way most English translations translate it, and some theologians believe that refers to someone not being saved. However, it might be possible that “in vain” refers to not producing fruit in their lives and not getting any rewards. The translation “and then do nothing with it” occurs in the CJB and NIrV.

2Co 6:2

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. It is the figure of speech asterismos, and the double use of it here in this verse should grab and hold our attention. NOW is the acceptable time! NOW is the time for salvation! Some people say, “Well, so and so will get saved when the time is right, on the Lord’s timetable.” That is fatalism (or Calvinism) and denies free will and the expressed meaning of the Word of God. God wants everyone to be saved right away so they assure themselves a place in the Kingdom and also can begin to store up rewards for themselves.

[For more on “Look,” see commentary on Matt. 1:20. Also, see Word Study: “Asterismos.”]

**“Now is the day of salvation.”** This is a very important verse in that it stands against Christian fatalism. Sometimes it happens when someone rejects God or the will of God that some well-meaning Christian will say, “Well, they will believe when it is right in God’s timing.” Or, “They will obey in God’s timing.” God gave humans free will and we humans decide to accept or reject God. From God’s viewpoint, it is always the right time to believe in Him and obey Him. The whole context of 2 Corinthians 6:2 (keeping in mind that there are no chapter breaks) is that Christians have the ministry of reconciliation, are ambassadors for Christ, and implore people to get saved, so the time for anyone to get saved is right now. From a biblical perspective, no one knows the time of their own death (Eccl. 9:12) and the Lord Jesus could return at any time and it will be unexpected (Matt. 24:44), and it will be terrible on earth for those people who miss the Rapture, so the time to get saved is now, not later.

2Co 6:4

**“servants of God.”** The Greek reads, “servants of God,” which in this context is the genitive of relation. This is not the genitive of possession, as if God owned the ministers, but rather of relation, servants (some versions read “ministers”) of the things of God.

**“in pressures.”** There are 17 words or phrases that begin with “in.” This is the figure of speech anaphora (“same sentence beginnings”) and it is done to emphasize each individual point. Every hardship that Paul or other Christians endure is valuable to God, and those Christians who persevere will be rewarded for it (2 Cor. 5:10). After the “in” phrases, there are three “through” phrases and then seven “as...yet” phrases.

2Co 6:6

**“in kindness.”** See commentary on Galatians 5:22, “kindness.”

**“in holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

2Co 6:7

**“in…through.”** This is another instance in which the verses in the English versions are obviously divided awkwardly. The shift from “in” for the first 17 things on the list to the last things on the list, marked by the Greek *dia*, is very clear.

**“in the word of truth.”** The basic meaning of this is “in our handling of the word of truth.”

**“through.”** There are three phrases that begin with “through,” and then seven “as...yet” phrases (see commentary on 2 Cor. 6:4). The Greek word translated as “through” is the preposition *dia* with the genitive case, and it means “through.” The minister of the Good News cannot be someone who demonstrates his Christ-like character only when times are good and things are going well. The minister must purify his heart so that, whether times are good or bad, he acts like Christ, can help others, and can even grow in character. As the minister lives day after day and year after year, he will pass through good times and bad. The minister of the Gospel works while some of his experiences are good and some are bad; some people laud him while some dishonor him; some reports about him are bad while some are good.

One of the lesser-known meanings of *dia* is “between,” and Lenski makes the case for *dia* meaning “between” in this context, and not “by,” or “through.”[[42]](#footnote-18515) On this view of the verse, the minister of the Gospel works while some of his experiences are good and some are bad, and he is “between” them, some people are lauding him while some dishonor him, and he is “between” them; some reports about him are bad while some are good, and he is “between” them. While this is true, we felt that the word “through” was clear enough. A person going through glory and dishonor spends his time “between” them.

**“the instruments.”** R. C. H. Lenski has what we believe is a very good and sound interpretation of this verse.[[43]](#footnote-10025) The Greek word that most versions translate as “weapons” or “armor” is *hoplon* (#3696 ὅπλον), which, like most Greek words, has more than one meaning (not all of which appear in the Bible). *Hoplon* can refer to any tool or implement for preparing a thing, armor (Rom. 13:12), arms or weapons used in warfare (John 18:3), or an instrument (Rom. 6:13). How are we to choose whether this word should be translated as an instrument or aid, or a weapon? The answer is the same way we always make that translation choice: by context. In the context of this verse, there is a clear continuous parallelization between one good thing and one evil thing (glory vs. dishonor; evil report vs. good report; deceivers vs. true; unknown vs. well-known; dying vs. we live; as punished vs., and *yet* not killed; grieved vs. always rejoicing; etc.). So if the phrase means, as most versions have, “by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left,” then it is the only time in the list a good thing is not juxtaposed with an evil thing—they are both positive weapons, just held in different hands. So in this case, the context indicates that the verse is not referring to a weapon that is held in the right hand and the left, but rather “instruments,” or “aids” of righteousness, some of which are “of the right hand” and some of which are “of the left hand.” Besides that, the context is all about what the minister is to endure to magnify Christ and not to bring blame to the ministry. There is nothing in the context about fighting or being aggressive; it is all about how to endure and be a godly minister.

**“from the right hand and the left.”** The Greek reads simply “of the right” or “of the right hand” and “of the left.” The key to understanding this verse is a biblical custom (more particularly a custom of the East than a custom of the Roman world, but to some extent, it existed in the Roman world), that the right hand was the hand of blessing, and the left hand was the hand of cursing. The origin of the custom was the common practice of eating with a hand (not knives, forks, spoons, or other table utensils) and cleaning oneself after going to the bathroom with a hand and water (not toilet paper). In the biblical culture, it was the custom that people ate with their right hand and washed after using the bathroom with their left hand. Thus, the right hand became the hand of blessing, and the left hand was known as the hand of cursing. As the use of the right hand was dominant in the culture, it was almost always the strongest hand, and so also strength and power are attributed to the right hand. Gifts and blessings were given with the right hand (Ps. 16:11; Ps. 80:17; Gal. 2:9; Rev. 1:16). Oaths were made with the right hand (Isa. 62:8). An honored person was placed at the right hand (on the right-hand side; Ps. 110:1; Matt. 26:64; Rom. 8:34). If someone was very deceitful, then his right hand was false (Ps. 144:8, 11). Joseph was upset with his father Jacob when Jacob blessed Joseph’s two children because Jacob put his right hand on the head of the younger child, when by custom the right hand of blessing should have been placed on the older child (Gen. 48:9-20).

When we understand the custom of the right and left hands, 2 Corinthians 6:7 becomes a very graphic and powerful verse. The things in the right hand (the hand of blessing) and the left hand (the hand of cursing) can both be aids to righteousness if we have the proper attitude toward them. Both good and evil things can help us become more like Christ. Those people who are good to us certainly help us, but we also learn from those who are not good to us. We learn the value of kindness from the unkind, the value of patience from the impatient, the value of controlling what we say from those whose words are caustic, the value of staying calm from those who are easily angered, and so forth.

Thus, this verse is similar to Romans 5:3-4, “…we also boast in our hardships, knowing that hardship produces endurance; and endurance, character; and character, hope.”

2Co 6:8

This is another instance in which the verses in the English versions are obviously divided awkwardly. The shift from *dia* to *hos* is very clear.

2Co 6:9

**“behold.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

2Co 6:10

**“as having nothing, and *yet* possessing all things.”** Many Christians have a lot of material possessions and wealth, and that is okay with God, but it is not the point of this verse. Material things can come and go quickly and unexpectedly, and Christians are to realize this and not trust in any wealth they may have. Wealth is untrustworthy, but the rewards a faithful Christian will receive at the judgment are everything, and will endure (1 Cor. 9:25).

2Co 6:12

**“You are not restrained by us.”** There was nothing that Paul or his companions were doing that caused the Corinthians to hold back, it was simply that the Corinthians were not giving themselves totally to the relationship.

**“feelings.”** The Greek is *splagchnon* (#4698 σπλάγχνον). Although *splagchnon* means “bowels,” it was used in the Greco-Roman world for the center and source of emotion, hence the translation “feelings.” It would not have communicated to the modern reader to say, “you are restrained by your own bowels” even though that did communicate to the ancient reader. The translation could also read, “You are restrained by your own emotions.”

The book of 2 Corinthians reveals Paul’s love and depth of emotion for the people he has converted and his fellow believers. Paul pours out his soul to them. Although Paul founded the Church in Corinth, after he left, Judaizers and others came in and disparaged Paul and his teaching, and began to turn the Corinthians against Paul. That fact shows up throughout the whole Epistle as Paul tries to win the Corinthians back to him and his teaching. It is perhaps best displayed in 2 Corinthians 11. The Corinthians had no real cause to turn from Paul other than the empty words and false criticisms coming from the so-called “super-apostles” who came to Corinth and opposed him and undermined his teaching (2 Cor. 11:5). In verses such as 2 Corinthians 6:12, Paul boldly challenged the Corinthians to recognize that fact and reconnect with him. Paul pointed out that he was open to them (2 Cor. 6:11), and they were only closed to him due to their own feelings, not any actual reality.

Sadly, what was true 2,000 years ago in Corinth is still going on today. Many Christians are held back from being who they could fully be in Christ by their own self-limiting thoughts and emotions. In 1970, Walt Kelly, the author of the at that time well-known comic strip “Pogo,” coined the phrase, “We have met the enemy and he is us” (“Pogo” ran from 1948 to 1975). The saying is often true and basically is the equivalent to “We are our own worst enemy.” Many times in life nothing holds us back but our own thoughts and emotions, and that was the case in Corinth. The Corinthians needed Paul’s outside advice and counsel to get back on track with God, and Christians who are limiting themselves often need that kind of outside counsel too: “Without wise guidance people will fall, but with a multitude of advisors there is deliverance” (Prov. 11:14).

[For more on “bowels” being related to feelings and emotions see commentary on Phil. 1:8.]

2Co 6:13

**“(I speak as to *my* children.)”** This is the figure of speech interjectio, or interjection.[[44]](#footnote-13321)

2Co 6:15

**“Belial.”** The Hebrew word means “worthlessness,” and the phrase son or daughter of Belial is used many times (Cf. Deut. 13:13; Judg. 19:22; 20:13; 1 Sam. 1:16; 2:12; 10:27; 25:17; 30:22; etc.). By New Testament times it was clearly being used as a term for the Devil, as we see in this verse. For other names for the Slanderer (the Devil), see commentary on Luke 4:2).

2Co 6:17

**“stop touching.”** See Lenski.[[45]](#footnote-15581)

**2 Corinthians Chapter 7**

2Co 7:1

**“Therefore, having these promises.”** 2 Corinthians 7:1 should be the last verse of 2 Corinthians 6.

**“spirit.”** This is not referring to the “gift of holy spirit,” but is a use of “spirit” as “soul.” There are things that are specifically in the category of “flesh,” that defile us, such as sexual sin or other sins directly involving the body. In contrast to the flesh, however, is the soul, which as a kind of “spirit,” is sometimes referred to as spirit. In this context, “soul” type things that we need to cleanse are our thoughts and attitudes.

2Co 7:9

**“I am rejoicing.”** The Greek is *chairō* (#5463 χαίρω), rejoice, as it is in the present active. Paul was in the act of rejoicing.[[46]](#footnote-21321)

2Co 7:14

**“put to shame.”** See commentary on Romans 9:33.

2Co 7:15

**“deep affection.”** The Greek text literally reads, “bowels.” The bowels and guts are a center of a person’s emotional life, and that is reflected in the biblical text. Titus had deep feelings and affection for the people of Corinth, so the Greek text has “bowels,” and reads, “And his bowels abound toward you all the more when he remembers the obedience of you all,” but that translation will not communicate to a modern reader. In this context, the emotion being communicated by the “bowels” is affection.

[For more on “bowels” see commentary on Phil. 1:8.]

2Co 7:16

**“confident.”** See commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:6. It is a wonderful feeling to have confidence in someone, and Paul had confidence in the believers in Corinth.

**2 Corinthians Chapter 8**

2Co 8:2

**“abundant joy.”** The Greek is literally “abundance of their joy,” but the genitive (“of...joy”) is likely functioning as an attributed genitive where the head noun “abundance” is functioning adjectivally to modify the word “joy.”

**“generosity.”** The Greek word for “generosity” (*haplotēs* #572 ἁπλότης) can also mean “sincere concern, simple goodness.”[[47]](#footnote-24136)

2Co 8:6

**“this *act of* grace.”** That act of grace refers to giving to the believers who were in need.

2Co 8:8

**“as a command.”** The Greek phrase *kata epitagē* (κατά ἐπιταγή) is a technical phrase that means “by the command of; by order of.” In this case, the command would have been given by Paul to the people of Corinth. See commentary on 1 Timothy 1:1. It is unclear whether Paul is saying he had not received a specific command from the Lord about this, or if he is saying that he is not giving a specific apostolic command about it. However, as far as the Corinthians were concerned, there was not a specific command about the situation.

**“*comparing it with*.”** Cf. NET, NIV. By comparing the Corinthians’ love to the earnestness of others, Paul proves whether their love passes the test. It is when their love stands in contrast to the giving of others that this test can occur.

2Co 8:9

**“the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** In this case, the “grace” of Jesus Christ refers to him giving himself as a gift (see commentary on 2 Cor. 12:9).

**“that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor.”** As the Son of God, Jesus was born rich. In the biblical culture, a son, especially a firstborn, adult son, was generally considered to have access to the authority and wealth of the father. One of the reasons for that was that death often came swiftly and unexpectedly in ancient times, and a man who was a son in the family in the morning could be the lord over the family and property in the afternoon. Also, the son was usually delegated increasing authority and autonomy as he grew and matured.

In Jesus’ case, as the Son of God, Jesus had access to considerable wealth, power, and a very comfortable lifestyle. We see this reflected in the Word of God. For example, in Psalm 2:8, God says to His Son, “Ask of me, and I will give the nations as your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession.” On a similar note, when Jesus was being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and his disciples started to resist the people who came to arrest him, he stopped them saying that if he did not want to be arrested, he could immediately ask his Father for more than 12 legions (up to 72,000) of angels for his defense.

So, by virtue of being the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus had access to wealth and power, and could have lived a life of luxury and comfort. But Jesus did not use his Father’s resources when living his life on earth. He followed in the footsteps of his stepfather Joseph and became a builder (Mark 6:3), then an itinerant rabbi. He obediently followed the prophecies that had been given, such as those of the Servant of God (Isa. 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-11 and 52:13-53:12; see commentary on Isa. 42:1), including that he would be “despised and rejected by men; a man of suffering, and one who knew sickness (Isa. 53:3).

It was the grace of Jesus that he lived the humble and obedient life that he did, and it was “for your sake,” i.e., for us. Jesus learned much from the life that he lived. For example, Hebrews 5:8 tells us, “although he was a son, *yet* he learned obedience by the things that he suffered.” Also, the low estate that he chose opened him to temptations he would not otherwise have faced, and thus he was “one who has been tempted in every way just as *we are, yet* without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Another thing that Jesus did by living as he did was set a wonderful example for us. 1 Peter 2:21 says, “Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you follow in his footsteps.” As the only-begotten Son of the Living God, Jesus did not have to go through all that he did, but he did it for us and in doing so became an example of how we should live.

Also, although it is almost universally taught by Trinitarians that Jesus’ being rich and becoming poor refers to his incarnation, that is not correct. For one thing, it is an assumption based on the doctrine of the Trinity that when the Bible says Jesus became poor it is referring to an incarnation. As we see from the information above, there are other ways Jesus was rich but became poor. More to the point, however, is that Scripture does not teach that Jesus was God and incarnated in a human body. Jesus was a fully human man.

[For more information on Jesus not being God in the flesh, see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, *One God & One Lord: Reconsidering the Cornerstone of the Christian Faith.* Also see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

2Co 8:10

**“who began a year ago.”** There is some controversy about the exact meaning of the Greek behind this phrase in 2 Corinthians 8:10. The NASB translates the Greek words as: “who were the first to begin a year ago,” and versions such as the ASV, NIV, NJB, and NLT have similar translations. The Greek word that causes the difficulty is *proenarchomai* (#4278 προενάρχομαι). Thayer’s Greek lexicon notes that the word means, “to make a beginning before.” Some translators take it to mean simply “begin before,” or “begin earlier,” while others take it to mean “to make a beginning before others,” or “to be the first to make a beginning.” In defense of the simple meaning, “to begin before, or earlier,” Philip Hughes noted that it seems if Paul meant to say that the Corinthians had started a collection before any other churches, he would not “have left it to be inferred,” but would have more clearly stated his meaning.[[48]](#footnote-11294) We agree, and the REV translation supports that position.

Although the exact year 1 Corinthians was written is not certain (c. AD 55), Paul wrote it during his three-year stay at Ephesus (Acts 20:31; 1 Cor. 16:1-9), which was on his third missionary journey. He had stayed with the Corinthians for over a year and a half on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18). It is possible that while he was there he told them to take a collection, but a more natural reading of 1 Cor. 16:1ff is that he did not ask them to take it while he was with them, but rather told them to take one in his first epistle to them. Also, he stated in 1 Cor. 16:1 that he had given orders for there to be a collection in Galatia, which he may also have done by letter or messenger. If he did it personally, then there are two possibilities. The less likely is that he told them personally on his second missionary journey, before he ever reached Corinth, at which time he would have spoken to the Corinthians about it too. What is more likely is he told the Galatians when he passed through Galatia on his way to Ephesus.

The point is that the chronology of Paul’s speaking to the Corinthians about taking a collection is not clear. Given that, Hughes’ point that Paul likely did not just infer that the Corinthians were the “first” to start a collection seems to be correct. Other churches may have been first, but no matter who was first, the Corinthians had definitely started a collection the year before but somehow lost their focus on the project and stopped. Now Paul directed them to complete the collection (2 Cor. 8:11).

2Co 8:13

**“as a matter of equality.”** This phrase comes from a Greek idiom, literally, “out of equality.” See the BDAG entry on the word for “equality,” *isotēs* (#2471 ἰσότης): “state of matters being held in proper balance… *as a matter of equality*.”[[49]](#footnote-13016)

**2 Corinthians Chapter 9**

2Co 9:3

**“I am sending.”** This is what is known as the epistolary aorist.[[50]](#footnote-19495) The Greek is in the past, “I sent,” but at the time Paul was writing he had not yet literally sent the brothers. They would actually be coming with the letter. To avoid confusion we have translated according to the present tense meaning, as do many versions (ESV, NET, NIV, NRSV).

2Co 9:4

**“put to shame.”** See commentary on Romans 9:33.

2Co 9:5

**“generous gift.”** The Greek word for “generous gift” is the same word for “blessing” in the verse, *eulogia* (#2129 εὐλογία).[[51]](#footnote-21950) We agree with BDAG that the sense of “blessing” here is that of a generous gift. The idea of “gift” comes out as “bounty” in the KJV. Because “bounty” seems an archaic translation, and the English word “bounty” has acquired other meanings that could cause confusion here, most modern versions read “gift” (cf. ESV, HCSB, NAB, NASB, NET, NIV, NRSV).

2Co 9:7

***“Let* each one *give* as he has previously decided in his heart.”** The first time in the Bible that a “tenth,” a “tithe,” is mentioned is in Genesis 14:20, when Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils of war to Melchizedek. However, the “tenth” that Abraham gave was not the same as the regular “tithe” in the Mosaic Law for two major reasons. What Abraham gave to Melchizedek was a one-time offering, not a regular offering, and Abraham gave a tenth of what he had captured as war booty, not a tenth of his flocks or herds (Abraham was a shepherd).

About 400 years after Abraham gave his tenth to Melchizedek, just after Israel’s Exodus from Egypt, God told Moses to establish the regular tithe to support the Tabernacle and the system that supported it. When God established the Tabernacle and the Levites (those from the tribe of Levi) to maintain it, He commanded the other 11 tribes of Israel to give a tenth of what they produced to the Tabernacle system to sustain it, and the Levites and Levitical priests. Today, in the Church Age, there are no more Levites or Levitical priests, and the Body of Christ is the Temple, so God changed the rules about giving back to what they had been before the Tabernacle existed, when people gave what they wanted from their heart.

Thus, the Church Epistles encourage people to give from their heart (2 Cor. 9:7), and they encourage people to give to the poor (Rom. 15:26; Gal. 2:10), to the Lord’s people who needed it (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8:14), and to those who serve the Lord (1 Cor. 9:6-14; 1 Tim. 5:17-18). The Mosaic tithe supported the Tabernacle system, while giving today supports many different needs in society. God loves a cheerful giver, and will reward people for the gifts and good deeds they do today (2 Cor. 9:6-8).

So, things have now gone back to where they started after the Fall of Adam and Eve. From Adam and Eve to Moses (about 2,600 years) there was no Tabernacle and no tithe. Then from the Tabernacle to Christ (about 1,400 years), there was a tithe to support that system. Now, in the Chuch Age, the Temple is the whole Body of Christ, and the system of giving is back to pre-Tabernacle times, when people gave from their heart the amount that they wanted to give. Giving is very important to God, but the amount Christians are to give is not specified in the Church Epistles. Based on how God has blessed them, some Christians should give more than ten percent, while some will give less. But each person is to give whatever they decide in their heart.

Upon noting that Jesus pointed out that the Pharisees were diligent to tithe even their garden herbs such as mint and rue (Luke 11:42), R. C. H. Lenski wrote that tithing was not a part of the New Covenant or of the doctrine of the Christian Church. Lenski wrote: “One of the plain facts is that the Gospels mention tithing only three times, in three condemnations of the Pharisees, and all three are scathing in their severity. Three other references are found in Hebrews 7:5-9 and are merely historical. Although all the apostles were originally Jews and reared to tithe, with not one word did any one of them even suggest that in the new covenant Christians might find tithing a helpful method of making their contributions to the work of the church. This strong negative is re-enforced immensely by the totally different method suggested by Paul when he called on the churches for a great offering, 1 Corinthians 16:1, etc.; 2 Corinthians 8:4, etc. Exegetically and thus dogmatically and ethically the New Testament is against tithing as being valid in the new covenant. Desire for more money, also for more money in and for the church, should not blind our eyes to the ways that are employed for getting it.”[[52]](#footnote-23314)

[For more on Abraham’s tithe and the tithe in general, see commentary on Gen. 14:20.]

2Co 9:10

**“increase the harvest of your righteousness.”** The phrase “harvest of your righteousness” means the rewards given to people by Christ for their righteous deeds. God will cause our harvest to grow, meaning he will increase the rewards we reap at Judgment Day. Righteousness here is to be understood in the sense of *righteous acts* accomplished by the believer (e.g., Acts 10:35), and not to be understood as the state of righteousness given by God (e.g., Rom. 5:17). Galatians 6:9 gives the key to understanding this verse: “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (ESV). Hence, Williams translates this phrase: “enlarge the harvest which your deeds of charity yield.”[[53]](#footnote-22976)

2Co 9:11

**“through us.”** The meaning of this phrase is not specified, and can be broadly applied. It seems the most natural meaning is that Paul is writing as if he and his companions are middlemen, who bring the gift that the Corinthians give to those in need, which then produces great thanksgiving to God. However, the phrase can also refer to the fact that it was “through” Paul that the Corinthians were encouraged to give in the first place, so the whole process of the gift, from the encouragement to give it to the actual delivery of it, was “through” Paul and his companions.

That God would inspire this phrase shows us that He always keeps in mind those who are encouraging others to do good works, and those who help others do good works. Not everyone can help out with the things of God in the same way, or the same level of visibility to others, but God sees every heart and every effort we put forth to help with His work.

**2 Corinthians Chapter 10**

2Co 10:1

**“Now I myself, Paul, entreat you by the meekness and clemency of Christ…”** The verses that open 2 Corinthians 10 must be understood in light of the fact that false apostles had entered the Church and were spreading lies and false doctrine. This can be easily seen by reading chapters 10-12. These false apostles were accusing Paul of being two-faced, being bold in his letters when he was away from Corinth, but being timid when he was personally present in Corinth. Furthermore, they accused Paul of living by the standards of the world. Paul begs the Corinthians to listen to him and hopes that he will not have to be bold with them as he will have to be with the pretenders. Paul uses the analogy of a war in this section of Scripture and asserts that he fights with spiritual weapons, and with them demolishes arguments, lies, and false doctrines, and will take captive the lies (thoughts) that are circulating in the Church. Furthermore, he will bring these disobedient people to justice, but he will only be able to do that when the Corinthians themselves are ready to stand firmly on the truth.

**“clemency.”** See commentary on Acts 24:4, and commentary on 1 Timothy 3:3. The Greek is *epieikeia*, (#1932 ἐπιείκεια), “consideration springing from a recognition of the danger that ever lurks upon the assertion of legal rights lest they be pushed to immoral limits. The virtue that rectifies and redresses the severity of a sentence.”[[54]](#footnote-32062) Occurs only here and Acts 24:4. Paul is being very calm here, asking to be heard on the basis of the meekness and clemency of Christ. Thus, even if there are Corinthians who are set in their mind against Paul, they should still be meek enough to hear him out, giving clemency to Paul.

**“timid… bold.”** This was the accusation of Paul’s accusers. They accused him of being timid (actually, “low”) when he was with them, but “bold” in his letters when he was away. Paul uses their words to obviate their arguments, and hopefully make the Corinthians aware that they are lies. Paul was very bold when he was in Corinth, debating in the synagogue, standing against the Jews, and even being dragged into court before Gallio (Acts 18:1-18); and he had been just as bold in his letters (cf. 1 Corinthians).

2Co 10:2

**“Yes, I implore you…”** For the *de* meaning “yes,” see Lenski.[[55]](#footnote-26641)

**“daring.”** Greek is *tolmaō* (#5111 τολμάω), “to show boldness or resolution in the face of danger, opposition, or a problem, *dare, bring oneself to (do someth.)*…have the courage, be brave enough.”[[56]](#footnote-15365) Paul’s accusers say he is timid when he is present, but now they will find out the truth, for Paul will be daring with them, showing firm resolution in the face of their opposition. Having established the Church himself, he now goes to war, fighting with courage and even daring, wielding the sword of the spirit to keep the people sound in the faith.

2Co 10:5

**“We are destroying arguments and every high-minded thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God.”** This verse is about Paul’s defense of the truth against the arguments of the “super-apostles” (2 Cor. 11:5; 12:11) and others who brought in ideas that were against Paul and opposed to Christ. Although we often use this verse to teach that each Christian should take captive his own thoughts so that he can be an obedient Christian, that is not the primary reading of the text. The “thoughts” that needed to be taken captive were the false logic, lies, and false doctrines of those people who came in after Paul. They taught another Jesus and another gospel (2 Cor. 11:4), and Paul calls them “false apostles,” and “deceitful workmen” (2 Cor. 11:13). If a Church is going to be healthy, the false doctrines and beliefs have to be “taken captive.” The general principle still applies, however, for a healthy church is made up of healthy Christians, and if a person is going to be spiritually healthy and obedient to Christ, he must take his own thoughts captive to Christ. The fact that the primary meaning of the verse is taking captive the lies and false doctrines in the Church explains 2 Cor. 10:6 (see commentary on 2 Cor. 10:6).

**“thought.”** Greek is *noēma* (#3540 νόημα), “a mental perception, thought; 2. specifically, (an evil) purpose”[[57]](#footnote-12420)

2Co 10:6

**“as soon as your obedience is complete.”** Paul states that he is ready to bring to justice the people who are disobedient, but he must wait until the obedience of the Corinthians is complete. The point of bringing the disobedient ones, the ones spreading lies and false teaching, to justice is to have a healthy church. But if the Church itself is not ready to discipline those who are bringing lies and false doctrine, what is the point? The Church at Corinth “put up” with false teaching too easily (2 Cor. 11:4), so Paul writes that he is ready, but will only be able to act when the Corinthians are ready. It is never easy, fun, or “nice” to confront lies and false doctrine, and there are many who are even critical of that, elevating the importance of “self-expression” and “personal beliefs” above the truth, but we must make no mistake; there is a truth, and it comes from God to the Church. We must be willing to fight for it and defend it or we might as well not “play church” at all.

2Co 10:7

**“Look.”** The word for “look” in this verse is *blepete*, from *blepō* (#991 βλέπω). It can be understood in two different ways, either as a command (“look!”) or an indicative statement of fact (“you are looking”). This difference comes out in the varying translations: E.g., “Look at what is before your eyes” (ESV—command); compared with, “You are judging by appearances” (NIV—statement of fact). The difference amounts to this: is Paul at this point in the letter *chastising* the Corinthians for looking at people according to the flesh? Or is he *telling* them to look at the evidence that is before their eyes? According to the context of the letter, we understand the word to fit better as a command. Paul is here asking the Corinthians to consider the clear evidence of Paul and his companions’ lives compared to that of the “super-apostles.”

2Co 10:9

**“I do not want to.”** The word “want” comes out of the sense of the purpose clause (*hina* + the subjunctive mood). It is Paul’s *intended purpose* not to appear as though he were frightening; therefore, since it is his purpose, it is what he “wants.”

2Co 10:10

**“unimpressive.”** Cf. NASB, NIV. From *asthenēs* (#772 ἀσθενής), literally, “weak,” although here it carries the connotation of being physically “unimpressive.”[[58]](#footnote-26289)

**“is of no account.”** From *exoutheneō* (#1848 ἐξουθενέω).[[59]](#footnote-15885) See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:20.

**2 Corinthians Chapter 11**

2Co 11:1

**“senselessness.”** See Word Study: “Fool.”

2Co 11:2

**“virgin.”** The Christian Church is being compared to a virgin bride by the figure of speech hypocatastasis. The Church is not literally a virgin bride, but the things expected of a virgin bride such as spiritual chastity, purity, and devotion, all apply to the Church.

[See Appendix 12: “The Bride of Christ.”]

2Co 11:3

**“serpent.”** This is a reference to the Slanderer (the Devil). Since the Slanderer is not a literal serpent, his being called that is the figure of speech hypocatastasis (a comparison by implication; see commentary on Rev. 20:2, “dragon”). Calling the Slanderer a “serpent” compares him with a serpent, and imports the characteristics of a serpent onto him. This verse should have put to rest once and for all that the “serpent” in Genesis 3:1 was not some kind of snake, but rather a reference to the Slanderer himself. The Bible never tells us the personal name for the Devil, the one he had before he rebelled against God. We know the names of important angels such as Michael or Gabriel, but all we have for the Devil are appellatives and descriptions that let us know about his nature and his power.

The fact that God never gives the Slanderer’s proper name in the Bible put Him in a bind when it came to Genesis. How would He introduce his arch-enemy in the Genesis record? He did it by calling him, “the serpent.” Then, God gave enough clear references in the rest of the Word to let us know who “the serpent” is. Sadly, most Christians do not read the Bible carefully enough, or understand the figures of speech it uses such as hypocatastasis, to recognize who the serpent of Genesis actually was.

[For more on the serpent being the Devil, see commentary on Gen. 3:1. For a list of the names of the Slanderer, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

2Co 11:6

**“unskilled in *public* speaking.”** The Greeks, and even the Romans at that time in history, took great pride in public speaking and had schools, and even contests, for public oratory. In our modern world, we are attracted to “regular people” who speak in a casual, seemingly honest way. We like simple, straightforward vocabulary and often distrust people who have a highly developed vocabulary and who use words we do not understand. That was not at all the situation in the time of Paul.

The Greeks were attracted to flowery and stylistic vocabulary in which the speaker was trained to speak in a very specific way, and by Paul’s lifetime, long after the Romans had conquered the Greeks, the Romans were attracted to that kind of speaking as well. Gregory Aldrete points out that Roman aristocrats were expected to know both Greek and Latin and be able to give formal public speeches. Aldrete writes: “The hundreds of thousands of Greek citizens who were enslaved by Rome provided a ready source of teachers. …the structure of Roman education was such that the student, who was almost always a male, passed through a series of teachers, and the highest goal toward which all their education aimed was to produce an eloquent speaker.”[[60]](#footnote-11281)

In Greece, and especially in an important Greek city like Corinth, being a trained speaker was a mark of learning and sophistication that leaders were expected to have attained. Some of Paul’s enemies used the fact that Paul was not a trained speaker against him, as if one had to be a “trained speaker” to be logical and know and present the Word of God. Paul was trained as a Rabbi, so he certainly was trained, just not in the Greek form of oratory. Paul did not let his lack of formal training as a speaker stop him from powerfully presenting the message about Jesus Christ.

The average Christian can learn a lesson from Paul because today there is a tendency to discount the opinions of “laypeople,” Christians who have not been to seminary or been ordained. But today is no different from Paul’s time. Many highly trained pastors and teachers are not dedicated to God, whereas many lay people are. God does not care about formal seminary training; He reveals Himself to people who love Him and are dedicated to the Christian lifestyle, and who make Jesus the Lord in their life on a daily basis. Especially today when knowledge is so freely available, the dedicated layperson who loves the Lord and reads the Bible and literature about it often knows much more truth than many supposedly trained pastors.

2Co 11:12

**“as our equals.”** Cf. NIV, NRSV. Literally, the Greek reads “just as we are.”

2Co 11:14

**“the Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see commentary on Mark 1:13.

[For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“disguises himself as an angel of light.”** The Devil disguises himself as an angel of light or as an agent of good in many different ways. So, for example, there are people who use satanic power who deem themselves “good witches,” but using Satan’s power to accomplish things on earth is never “good.” There certainly was one time when it seems that the Devil did actually come into concretion as “an angel of light,” a brightly shining spiritual being, and that was in the Garden of Eden when he appeared to Eve and Adam. It seems certain that he did not come as a talking snake, but as a powerful “Shining One” from the spirit world (see commentary on Gen. 3:1).

2Co 11:17

**“senseless.”** See Word Study: “Fool.”

2Co 11:20

**“hits you in the face.”** This passage, 2 Corinthians 11:4, 19-21, sheds exposing light on the radical form of Christian pacifism that interprets Jesus’ teaching to “turn the other cheek” as meaning one should passively endure physical abuse. In these verses, Paul is expressing disappointment with the Corinthians. He says they “put up with” a list of things they should not be putting up with, including false Christs and spirits (2 Cor. 11:4), enslavement, domination, and being hit in the face (2 Cor. 11:20). The word for “hit in the face” is *derō* (#1194 δέρω), meaning “beat” or “strike.” It is clear from its inclusion in this list that a Christian ought not to put up with being physically struck in the face. The word Jesus used for turning the other cheek in Matthew 5:39 is a different word: *rhapizō* (#4474 ῥαπίζω), usually translated “slap.” It referred not to a fierce punch, but to a slight backhand meant as an insult. Jesus’ point was not that one ought to endure physical abuse; his point was to overlook foolish insults.

2Co 11:21

**“to *my* shame.”** This is a Greek idiom that is missed by the KJV translators. Literally, it reads, “I speak according to shame,” which comes out in the KJV as “I speak as concerning reproach.” However, this is unclear to the English reader and does not communicate Paul’s meaning. By saying “I speak according to shame,” Paul refers to his own hypothetical shame and speaks of it with sarcasm. The translation, “to my shame… we were too weak for that” captures the sarcastic sense of the verse very well.

2Co 11:24

**“…received from the Jews 40 *lashes* minus one.”** This was a tradition of the Israelites that originated from the Mosaic Law. Deuteronomy 25:2-3 says, “… the judge is to make him lie down and be beaten in his presence, according to his guilt, *and* by number. He may give him 40 lashes. He is not to exceed *that number,* lest, if he should exceed it and beat him with many more lashes than these, then your brother would be contemptible in your eyes..” To ensure that Israelites adhered to the Mosaic Law, the tradition was established to give 39 lashes to prevent breaking the Law if there was a miscount. The one giving the lashes was subject to punishment if the stripes exceeded 40. These lashes were originally administered with a rod, but later the rod was exchanged for a leather strap consisting of three leather thongs.[[61]](#footnote-31186)

2Co 11:25

**“adrift at sea.”** This is from the Greek phrase *en tō buthō*, “in the sea depth”; the word for “sea depth” is *buthos* (#1037 βυθός), and to be “in the *buthos*” is an idiom for “adrift at sea.”[[62]](#footnote-31180)

2Co 11:26

**“danger.”** In the Greek, the word is plural, “dangers,” but we often understand “danger” to have a pluralistic meaning, and it reads much more smoothly in English than does “dangers.” If someone says they were “in danger” on their journey, we do not generally think they were only in danger one time.

**“in danger from rivers.”** Travel has always been dangerous. In fact, the English words “travail” and “travel” apparently come from the same root word. The online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, says, “According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the first known use of the word *travel* was in the fourteenth century. It also states that the word comes from Middle English *travailen*, *travelen* (which means to torment, labor, strive, journey), and earlier from Old French *travailler* (which means to work strenuously, toil). …According to Simon Winchester in his book *The Best Travelers’ Tales (2004)*, the words ‘travel’ and ‘travail’ both share an even more ancient root: a Roman instrument of torture called the *tripalium* (in Latin it means ‘three stakes,’ as in to impale). This link may reflect the extreme difficulty of travel in ancient times.”[[63]](#footnote-17712)

In the Roman Empire, there were some major roads that were maintained by the army so they could travel quickly from one part of the Roman Empire to another and keep the peace. But except for those major routes, roads, which were mostly dirt paths, were not maintained unless the people of a nearby city cared to maintain them for some reason. This meant that the vast majority of the roads in the ancient world were generally in terrible condition and dangerous to travel on. Furthermore, when a road crossed a river, there was usually no easy, safe way across. Bridges were rare indeed. Even the bridges in the city of Rome, which were doubtless the best-maintained bridges in the Empire, needed constant repair, and no local dweller would risk his life or spend the time and money to build a bridge just so strangers could travel more easily. Furthermore, many roads crossed gullies that became rivers after any sizeable rain. Anyone who traveled over land in the ancient world knew that travel involved danger from rivers.

[For more on roads in the ancient world, see commentary on Mark 1:3.]

**“in danger from robbers.”** With the exception of some major cities in the Roman Empire in which soldiers were supposed to maintain public safety (but did a poor job of it), the ancient world did not have a police force to keep people safe. The best personal safety came from being a member of a large and powerful family, clan, or tribe that would seek revenge if anything happened to one of their members. If a family member was harmed, the person who avenged that family member was called “the avenger of blood” (Num. 35:19-27; Deut. 19:6-12; Josh. 20:2-9).

In the ancient world, robbers on the roadways were very common, and since there was no police force, and since travelers generally did not have a large family or tribe nearby, travel was very dangerous. It was especially dangerous for people traveling alone or in small groups because they were easy targets, and bandits watched for them. Bandits on roads between cities were so common that the Parable of the Good Samaritan was no doubt based on the robberies that happened to people who traveled alone in ancient Israel (Luke 10:30-35).

Gregory Aldrete writes, “Bandits were very common, and anyone venturing outside of large cities was literally risking his life. Roman literature is full of examples of people who simply disappeared, who set out on a journey and were never heard from again. …Rich Romans traveled with bodyguards and armed slaves, but even such protection was not proof against bandits. One senior magistrate and his entire party vanished only a few miles from Rome. …A common phrase on tombstones is *interfectus a latronibus*, ‘killed by bandits.’ In a list of the duties of a Roman governor, the first thing mentioned was to suppress bandits.”[[64]](#footnote-30257)

The apostle Paul would have been an easy target for bandits. He traveled far from home and he usually had only a few people with him. No wonder he wrote to the Corinthians that he was in danger from bandits. That Paul was in genuine danger of being killed by bandits on the road, yet braved traveling thousands of miles on them to bring the Good News about Jesus Christ to the people of the Greco-Roman world, shows his great passion and personal courage to bring people to Christ. He is indeed a great example to us. No wonder he could write that he was “not seeking my own benefit, but the *benefit* of the many *who do not believe*, so that they might be saved. Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 10:33-11:1).

**“*my own* people.”** The Greek is simply *genos*, “race; kind,” and here it refers to the Jews in contrast to the Gentiles, who are mentioned next. We would not say “race” because every human is of the “human race.” There is only one “race” of humans, which is why all humans can interbreed. The phrase, “my people” is a clear way to bring the Greek into English. Although many versions use “countrymen,” Paul was from Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia, in what is now Turkey, and technically his “countrymen” came from that area, but in this context, he meant the Jews, his “kind” or his “people,” and they were scattered all over the Roman Empire.

**“in danger at sea.”** Sea travel was dangerous, as we see from 2 Corinthians 11:25. Paul did more traveling over land than he did by sea, yet he was shipwrecked three times. Almost all the boats were small and not really capable of traveling across the Mediterranean Sea, so they traveled close to land, mostly keeping the shoreline in sight. But that meant they were in a very dangerous position at night or in a fog when they could easily lose their bearings. Also, although they depended on the generally reliable Mediterranean weather to sail at safe times, occasionally storms would come up and quickly endanger the ship.

Adding to the danger was the fact that there were no passenger ships at that time in history. With the exception of personal boats such as the emperor of Rome might have, all the ships were cargo or military ships, which meant that any would-be passenger traveled in a very uncomfortable setting. First, the passenger had to bargain with the captain over the cost of the ride. Then the passenger had to bring his own food, bedding, and shelter with him and was assigned a small space somewhere on the deck. No fires could be built on the wooden ship, so the food, and usually the passenger, was cold (occasionally a kind captain would let a passenger cook his personal food in the ship’s galley after the crew had eaten). If there was any rain, or if the sea was rough, the passenger was usually soaked with rain or seawater, adding the risk of exposure and hypothermia to the other risks of sea travel. Also, there was no “regular schedule” for the ships; they traveled when they could. So if a ship got delayed at anchor or in a port for any reason, the passenger just had to figure out how to get along. Indeed, the “perils in the sea” were very real for any person who chose to travel that way.

**2 Corinthians Chapter 12**

2Co 12:1

**“boasting.”** Although we usually think of “boasting” as a prideful, sinful thing, there are contexts when the word “boasting” means speaking out openly (and often loudly) in favor of something, and that is what it means here.

2Co 12:2

**“the third heaven.”** That is, the future heaven and earth. We today live in the second heaven and earth; the first was destroyed by water (2 Pet. 3:3-7). Paul describes this as “paradise” in 2 Corinthians 12:4 (see commentary on 2 Cor. 12:4).

2Co 12:4

**“taken into Paradise.”** The Greek word translated “taken” is *harpazō* (#726 ἁρπάζω), and it means to seize, to carry off or carry away by force, and it can often have the connotation of carrying someone or something away speedily by force. Orthodox theology misunderstands this verse and teaches that “Paradise” is heaven, but it is not; “Paradise” is on earth in the future. Because orthodox theologians teach Paradise is in heaven, most English Bibles translate *harpazō* as “caught **up**” into Paradise. But “Paradise” is not “up.” They are both future. Paul was not caught “up” to them by a revelation vision, he was “taken,” “forcibly taken,” or “forcibly taken quickly” to them. Paul was “taken” to Paradise, the future earth, in a vision. Visions of the future, or of the presence of God, occur with some regularity in the Bible (see commentary on Acts 7:55, “Jesus standing at the right hand of God”).

The first heaven and earth existed in the past (some theologians say before Genesis 1:2, while some theologians say before the Flood of Noah). The second heaven and earth are now. The third heaven and earth are future. Revelation 21:1 speaks of the third heaven and earth when the apostle John, who is writing the book of Revelation, says, “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth.” This “new” heaven and earth are the third heaven and earth. They do not exist now, but they will in the future.

Much of the misunderstanding in orthodox Christianity about these verses is due to the fact that Christians confuse “heaven” and “Paradise.” Most commentators say being taken to the third heaven in verse 2 and being taken to Paradise in verse 4 are the same, but they are not. To understand “Paradise,” we must understand how it came to be used in the Bible, and we must start in Genesis.

The Hebrew word *eden* (#05731 עֵדֶן) means “delight” or “luxury,” and the “Garden of Eden” (Gen. 2:8, 15) is the “Garden of delight.” It is unhelpful to the understanding of the continuity of Scripture that the Hebrew word *eden* gets transliterated into English as “Eden” rather than being translated into “Delight.” The result of that decision is that very few Christians see that God so loved people that He created a “garden of delight” for us. When most Christians read about the “Garden of Eden,” they never think to ask what the phrase means; they only ask where it is on the face of the earth.

When the Old Testament was translated into Greek about 250 BC in the version we know as the Septuagint, the Greek language had a word that accurately captured the concept of a garden of delight: *paradeisos* (#3857 παράδεισος). The Greek language had acquired *paradeisos* as a loanword from the Persian language, and it meant an enclosed park or pleasure garden, a “garden of delight.” Thus, it was natural that the Hebrew phrase “garden of *eden*” (garden of delight) was translated by the Greek word *paradeisos*, meaning “garden of delight” (cf. Gen. 2:15 and commentary on Gen. 2:15). The Latin *paradisus* came from the Greek, and the English “paradise” came from Greek through the Latin.

“Paradise,” like the Garden of Eden itself, refers to a place on earth. In the Bible, the Greek word *paradeisos* occurs about 25 times in the Septuagint, sometimes referring to the Garden of Eden, sometimes referring to another garden, but always to a garden on earth; *paradeisos* never referred to “heaven” in the Old Testament. Furthermore, there is no biblical reason to suddenly say that when the Greek word *paradeisos* is used in the New Testament that it suddenly changed meanings and referred to heaven. Given that, the thief on the cross next to Jesus (Luke 23:43), Paul (2 Cor. 12:4), and the apostle John (Rev. 2:7) would have believed that “Paradise” was on the earth. (Some non-canonical books refer to paradise as a place for the dead, but those books are not the God-breathed Word (2 Tim. 3:16). The books of the Bible are consistent that *paradeisos* is a place on earth). When Jesus comes from heaven and conquers the earth (Rev. 19:11-21), and sets up his kingdom on earth, then the earth will once again be an “Eden,” a “Paradise.” The Old Testament prophecies made it clear that when Jesus Christ sets up his future kingdom on earth, there will be no war, no sickness, no hunger, no injustice, and even the animals will become peaceful.

2 Corinthians 12 starts out with Paul recounting a revelation vision that was given to him. Although he does not directly say it was given to him, verse 7 makes it clear he is the “man” who got the revelation. In his revelation vision, he was taken into the future and he saw, just like the apostle John did years later (Rev. 21:1), the third heaven and the third earth. He refers to the third heaven as “heaven” in 2 Corinthians 12:2, and he refers to the third earth as “Paradise” in 2 Corinthians 12:4. Thus, his mention of “heaven” and “earth” is a kind of polarmerismos (describing something in its entirety by mentioning the two extremes; see commentary on Acts 9:28). Paul had a “surpassingly great revelation” (v. 7; cf. NIV) which included seeing both the new heaven and the new earth.

The plan of God was to create the earth for humankind and to love and be loved by the people there. We can see both God’s plan and His love when we see that God originally put Adam and Eve in “Paradise,” a garden of delight (Gen. 2:5-8), and that paradise will exist on earth in the future and the saved people will live there (Luke 23:43; Rev. 2:7). However, it is hard to see that consistent plan in most English Bibles because the Old Testament (Hebrew) calls it “Eden” while the New Testament (Greek) calls it “Paradise.” If the whole English Bible were translated from one language, it would be easier to see the consistent and overriding plan of God, which has not changed. God wanted to have a paradise for His people to live in, and that plan will be realized someday in the future.

[For more on Paradise being a place on earth, see commentary on Luke 23:43. For more information on the kingdom of Jesus Christ being on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

2Co 12:7

**“to beat up on me.”** This translation is at once very literal, and yet communicates idiomatically in English. The Greek verb is *kolaphizō* (#2852 κολαφίζω), which indicates a beating with the fists, a violent and harsh treatment. Paul was physically beaten, as well as emotionally badgered.

2Co 12:8

**“Three times I pleaded with the Lord.”** This is a perfect demonstration of how we Christians are to handle trouble—take it to the Lord. Far too many times when we Christians are in difficult situations we complain or mope about it and forget to take our problems to the Lord. Of course, when we take our problems to the Lord, we would like to think he would just solve them for us, but what happened with Paul as recorded here in Corinthians is very typical of what happens to us: Jesus Christ reminds us that his grace is sufficient for us and that his power is actually brought to its goal (completed, perfected) through our weakness.

Victory in Christ is often very different from the world’s view of victory. To the world, victory involves winning, strength, health, youth, vitality, and having “a great life.” But we live in a fallen world and under the penalty of sin, and every person has problems and sicknesses, and “victory” involves being faithful to be loving and godly day after day. Many times we cannot escape our problems, but we are victorious in Christ if we bear our burdens while maintaining godly attitudes and actions.

Paul’s pleading with the Lord and the Lord answering him is an example of the “fellowship” (intimate joint participation) that we are to have with Jesus Christ. The Greek verb translated “pleaded” is *parakaleō* (#3870 παρακαλέω, pronounced par-a-ka-'leh-ō), and it literally means “to call to one’s side.” Of course, there are dozens of reasons a person might call someone to come near, and so it is natural that *parakaleō* has dozens of different meanings, including: to speak to, to exhort, to encourage, to comfort, to console, to entreat, to ask for something, to beg, and to teach. The wide semantic range of *parakaleō* explains the large number of different translations in the English versions (“besought” ASV, KJV; “made request to” BBE; “pleaded” HCSB, NIV; “implored” NASB1995; “asked” NET; “appealed to” NRSV). Each of these translations correctly represents an aspect of *parakaleō* that is applicable in this context, and the translators had to make the difficult choice of which aspect of *parakaleō* was most emphasized and pick an English word that represented it—a very hard choice indeed.

[For more information on our fellowship with Jesus, see commentary on 1 John 1:3.]

In this case, Paul had a problem, so he pleaded with the Lord about it, and this is written so we can follow Paul’s example, even as he said: “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). We are to talk to Jesus about our problems and pray to him for help.

[For more on prayer to Jesus Christ, see Appendix 13: “Can We Pray to Jesus?”]

The “Lord” in the verse is Jesus, not God, as can be seen from the context. Abridged, verses 8 and 9 read: “Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this…And he said to me, ‘My…power reaches its fulfillment in weakness.’ Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ will rest on me.”

The one with the power in this context is clearly Jesus. First Paul pleaded with the Lord about his problems. Then the Lord answered and spoke of his power. Then Paul identified the one who was speaking to him as the Lord Jesus Christ, saying that he will gladly boast in his weaknesses so that “the power of Christ” would rest on him (2 Cor. 12:9).

2Co 12:9

**“My grace is sufficient for you.”** “Grace” is undeserved favor, and Paul had certainly received much favor in his life and ministry. In this context, the “grace” of Christ refers in general to the grace Christ had given Paul throughout his life, but also to specific blessings of grace that Paul had received. For example, he had received many visions and revelations (2 Cor. 12:1, 7), and Jesus Christ had even taken Paul in a vision into the future and showed him the Paradise to come (2 Cor. 12:2-4).

As we normally use it today in the Church world, the Greek word *charis* (#5485 χάρις), usually translated as “grace,” means “undeserved divine favor.” But that definition of grace is not the only definition of charis in the New Testament, and furthermore, “undeserved divine favor” is a “Christian phrase,” it was not the meaning of *charis* in the ancient Greek world. The Greek word *charis,* “grace” is derived from the Greek verb *Chairō* “to rejoice,” and thus *charis* referred to things that made the giver or receiver happy: thus: “favor, beauty, gratification, thankfulness (Luke 6:32, 33, 34), homage, gracefulness, etc. So, for example, *charis* was used of a ruler’s favor or of a gift given by a ruler, and that meaning is in the New Testament, for example, when we read of the “grace” of Christ (2 Cor. 8:9). As the New Testament was written, it became clear that God had given a further meaning of *charis* that was not in the ancient Greek, and that meaning was “undeserved divine favor.” This meaning does not occur in secular Greek and it is missing from the Old Testament words that sometimes get translated as “grace” but which would generally be better translated as “favor.”[[65]](#footnote-26085)

**“reaches its fulfillment.”** The Greek verb is *teleō* (#5055 τελέω), and it means to bring something to its end, or finish; to complete something. In many cases, when something is finished, it is “perfected,” but it is not correct to say in English that Christ’s power is “made perfect” in our weakness, because Christ’s power is “perfect” no matter what state we are in. Our weakness does not make his power perfect, it is perfect on its own. Rather, when we are weak and Christ works in us, his power reaches its end, or fulfillment, in us. Through our weakness, Christ’s power reaches its goal and is shown to be Christ’s power, not our power.

**“rest on me.”** The word “rest” in the Greek literally means to “pitch a tent over, to set up a dwelling place,” from *episkēnoō* (#1981 ἐπισκηνόω). Paul is saying that the power of Christ will set up camp over his life and dwell over him.

2Co 12:11

**“senseless.”** See Word Study: “Fool.”

**“moral obligation.”** This is from the Greek word *opheilō* (#3784 ὀφείλω). It is stronger than what the Corinthians “ought” to have done; the word refers to an obligation or debt.[[66]](#footnote-22023) For clarity in English, we have switched the framing from “I” to “you,” like the NJB and NLT. The meaning is the same; it is easier to read “you have a moral obligation to me,” than “I have a moral obligation owed by you.”

2Co 12:12

**“signs of a *true* apostle were performed among you.”** Paul’s first journey to Corinth and his starting the Church there is recorded in Acts 18:1-18. However, Acts never mentions Paul doing a sign or miracle. Acts put the emphasis of Paul’s time in Corinth on his speaking the Word in spite of various problems, including his trial before Gallio, the Roman proconsul. But here in 2 Corinthians, we learn that Paul did perform signs, miracles, and wonders, which no doubt helped the Word move in Corinth. This shows us that reading the Church Epistles helps us understand Acts, and reading Acts sheds light on the Epistles.

2Co 12:13

**“Forgive me this wrong.”** Paul is employing the figure of speech eironeia, which we know as “irony” or, in this context, even as “sarcasm.” Bullinger defines eironeia as “The expression of thought in a form that naturally conveys its opposite.”[[67]](#footnote-17728) Paul said, “Forgive me this wrong,” but of course, his working for and not being a burden to the new church in Corinth was not “wrong”; in fact, it was the godly thing to do. By writing, “Forgive me this wrong,” Paul catches the attention of the reader and makes the point by sarcasm that he was being very good to the people of Corinth. Paul’s irony here is used with effect, and he uses it again in 2 Corinthians 12:16.

2Co 12:14

**“Look here.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

2Co 12:15

**“souls.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is used of the individual himself. Thus, while the verse could read something such as, “I will most gladly spend and be spent for you” (HCSB; cf. KJV), by saying “souls,” we can see that Paul is not just saying in general terms that he is willing to sacrifice himself for others, but is specifically concerned about their mental and emotional state as well.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Word Study: “Psuchē.”]

2Co 12:16

**“took you in by deceit.”** Paul is employing the figure of speech eironeia, which we would call “irony” or “sarcasm.” Bullinger defines this figure as “The expression of thought in a form that naturally conveys its opposite.”[[68]](#footnote-20745) By writing, “we took you in by deceit,” Paul shows the ridiculousness of such a statement and thus powerfully communicates the opposite.

2Co 12:19

**“defending ourselves.”** There is beautiful courtroom imagery in this verse that can be missed in English. Paul is here asking the Corinthians if they presume he has been attempting to clear himself of charges before them. He has not. Rather, in Paul’s mind, it is before God that he stands or falls, and God is his only Judge. The Greek word for “defending ourselves”—*apologeomai* (#626 ἀπολογέομαι)—refers to a public defense in a trial, and, by metaphor and extension, to defending one’s self in an everyday life situation. Paul is saying that it is not before the court of the Corinthians that he pleads his case, but before the court of God who sits as Judge, he is speaking in Christ.

2Co 12:20

**“selfish ambition.”** The Greek is *eritheia* (#2052 ἐριθεία). See commentary on Romans 2:8, “selfishly ambitious.”

**“arrogance.”** For this word, the KJV “swelling” is very literal, although unclear as to what the “swelling” indicates. It is from *phusiōsis* (#5450 φυσίωσις), which refers to “swelled-headedness,”[[69]](#footnote-13622) or “an inflated, puffed up, exaggerated view of one’s own importance”[[70]](#footnote-27834)—in other words, *arrogance*. Paul is referring to the phenomenon that often happens in arguments when love for the other person and what is right are pushed aside by a blinding force of care for one’s own pride and position.

2Co 12:21

**“impurity.”** The Greek word translated “impurity” is *akatharsia* (#167 ἀκαθαρσία), and it refers to being “unclean” before God. *Akatharsia* is “a state of moral corruption; immorality, vileness, especially of sexual sins”;[[71]](#footnote-28347) “in a moral sense, the impurity of lustful, luxurious, profligate living; used of impure motives in 1 Thess. 2:3.[[72]](#footnote-13698) The dominant use of *akatharsia* in the New Testament includes sexual sin.

[For more information on *akatharsia*, see commentary on Gal. 5:19.]

**2 Corinthians Chapter 13**

2Co 13:3

**“among you.”** In this case, it is best to translate the *en* (#1722 ἐν) as “among” you, rather than “in” you. The difference is this: “among you” refers to Christ’s power in the fellowship community of the Corinthians, while “in you” would speak of his power for each individual Corinthian believer. The translation “among you” is best because the context of 2 Cor. 13:1-2 is speaking of the Corinthians as a group, and the “you” is plural, also referring to the group.

2Co 13:4

**“we also are weak in him.”** The words “in him” mean “in union with him” (see commentary on Rom. 6:3). We are used to thinking of being “in Christ” and thus having been crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20), having died with Christ (Rom. 6:8), having been buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12), and being raised with Christ (Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1). However, we are also “weak” in Christ. Christians are not spiritual bullies, asserting ourselves and getting our way because we are so spiritually powerful. We are spiritually powerful, but our power is used the same way Christ and Paul used their spiritual power. Christ said to learn about him, for “I am meek and humble in heart” (Matt. 11:29). Christ became a sacrifice whose life was poured out for others, and that must be true of us too.

**“to *serve* you.”** This is coming out of the preposition *eis* (“unto”)*—*it is an *eis* of advantage, meaning “for you,” “for your advantage.” Cf. NIV and Kistemaker, who also render the phrase “to serve you.”

2Co 13:5

**“Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith.”** This is a quick but stinging rebuke to the church in Corinth seeking proof that Paul was in the Faith and that Christ was speaking via him (2 Cor. 13:3). Basically he was saying, “Don’t doubt my being in the Faith, test yourselves!”

**“Jesus Christ *is* in you, unless indeed you fail the test?”** Paul is writing to the whole church at Corinth, and there could easily be people in the church who had not actually accepted Christ as Lord. Lenski writes about people in the Church who fail the test, and notes that it means, “tested and found false, spurious, either not believing the real gospel but something else or only pretending to believe the gospel while not believing it.”[[73]](#footnote-31249) It occasionally happened that false believers infiltrated the Church (cf. Gal. 2:4). To be saved, a person had to confess that Christ was his Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9). That might have been a challenge for many Greeks because the mythology of Greece did not allow for a resurrection from the dead (Acts 17:31-32).

2Co 13:9

**“fully equipped**.” The Greek is the rare noun, *katartisis* (#2676 κατάρτισις), and it only occurs here in the New Testament (although the verb occurs in 2 Cor. 13:11). According to Louw-Nida, it means to make someone completely adequate or sufficient for something, to furnish completely, to cause to be fully qualified. It can refer to the completion or perfection or equipping of the person (“soul” in the classics), or the character. The word means more than just having a mature or complete character, although that is certainly included. Also, closing the letter by saying that Paul was praying for their character seemed unkind. Rather, he is praying that they be fully equipped in every way. Some versions read “restoration,” although that too seems harsh for the ending of an epistle. The fact is that if the believers are fully equipped, they would be in the will of God and need no “restoration.”

2Co 13:11

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek text is “brothers,” but that often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“rejoice.”** The Greek word *chairō* (#5463 χαίρω), literally meaning “rejoice,” was also used as the standard greeting; it means both “hello” and “goodbye.” In this verse, the versions differ on whether Paul employs the term as a salutation (“farewell”; cf. ASV, KJV, NIV84, NRSV) or as a command to “rejoice” (cf. ESV, HCSB, NAB, NASB, NET).

**“*Let yourselves*.”** The first two verbs are passive, hence “let yourselves,” which is necessary to communicate the passive. The last two are active. Importantly, the passive verbs point out that often we are our own worst enemies when it comes to godliness. We dig in our heels and refuse to let God do His perfect work in us, equipping and perfecting us, and we do not listen to the admonition of others. We have to be humble and meek (coachable), and let ourselves be guided in godliness.

**“*Let yourselves* be admonished.”** Paul has been urging and admonishing the Corinthians through the whole letter, and now he appeals to them to let his advice into them; into their lives; to allow themselves to receive his admonition. The Greek word for “admonished” is in the passive voice, which here is permissive in meaning; “be admonished” thus means “permit yourselves to be admonished.” The NIV is not literal here but captures the meaning well with the translation, “listen to my appeal.”

The word, *parakaleō* (#3870 παρακαλέω), “admonished,” could also mean “be encouraged” (e.g., NET, HCSB) or “be comforted” (e.g., NASB, KJV), so although we can only bring one meaning clearly into the English, there are other meanings that are important. Nevertheless, we feel the primary meaning, given the context of the reproof throughout the epistle, is an appeal for the Corinthians to receive Paul’s exhortation.

2Co 13:14

**“fellowship of the holy spirit.”** This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God.

[For more information on the uses of “holy spirit,” see Word Study: “Pneuma.”]

1. Cf. Heinrich Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians, 164; The International Critical Commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-30364)
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3. BDAG, s.v. “ἀπόλλυμι.” [↑](#footnote-ref-26480)
4. BDAG, s.v. “καπηλεύω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22764)
5. Frederick Danker, The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; s.v. “καθάπερ”; R. C. H. Lenski, First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 950; Paul Barnett, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians [NICNT], 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-14482)
6. Also, W. E. Vine, Lexicon; R. C. Trench, Synonyms, 217-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-19955)
7. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 804-06, “amphibologia.” [↑](#footnote-ref-30766)
8. Cf. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-27722)
9. R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 978-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-16930)
10. Philip Hughes, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians [NICNT], 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-11087)
11. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-12704)
12. Murray J. Harris, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians [NIGTC], 369-380. [↑](#footnote-ref-18768)
13. BDAG, s.v. “κατεργάζομαι.” [↑](#footnote-ref-26256)
14. BDAG, s.v. “θαρρέω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21112)
15. Friberg, s.v. “θαρρέω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13127)
16. Liddell and Scott, Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “πίστις.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21687)
17. Merriam-Webster Dictionary [↑](#footnote-ref-15216)
18. Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. “faith.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27290)
19. BDAG and EDNT, s.v. “εὐδοκέω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-23096)
20. Ralph Martin, 2 Corinthians, [WBC]; Moule, An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek, 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-20073)
21. Murray Harris, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians [NIGTC], 403. [↑](#footnote-ref-28372)
22. Cf. Ann Nyland, The Source New Testament, 340. [↑](#footnote-ref-20807)
23. Philip Hughes, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians [NICNT], 180. [↑](#footnote-ref-21191)
24. Vine, The Expanded Vine’s Expository Dictionary, s.v. “judgment-seat,” 612. [↑](#footnote-ref-14483)
25. Robertson, Word Pictures, 4:229. [↑](#footnote-ref-17389)
26. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 1017. [↑](#footnote-ref-14699)
27. Lenski, First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 1041. [↑](#footnote-ref-23329)
28. Cf. Lenski, Corinthians, 1041-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-28579)
29. Cf. Vincent, Word Studies, 3:321. [↑](#footnote-ref-12381)
30. Cf. Lenski, Corinthians, 1044. [↑](#footnote-ref-30885)
31. Paul Barnett, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians [NICNT], 310. [↑](#footnote-ref-32078)
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34. Barclay Newman, A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament, s.v. “ἁμαρτία.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18719)
35. Merrill C. Tenney, Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 242, 522. [↑](#footnote-ref-24923)
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37. F. F. Bruce, 1 and 2 Corinthians, New Century Bible Commentary, 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-27172)
38. Albert Barnes, Barnes’ Notes. [↑](#footnote-ref-18606)
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40. Thayer, Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “ἁμαρτία.” [↑](#footnote-ref-29494)
41. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 1059. [↑](#footnote-ref-12944)
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51. BDAG Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “εὐλογία.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21950)
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54. Zodhiates, Word Study Dictionary, s.v. “ἐπιείκεια.” [↑](#footnote-ref-32062)
55. R. C. H. Lenski, St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians, 1200. [↑](#footnote-ref-26641)
56. BDAG, s.v. “τολμάω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15365)
57. Thayer, s.v. “νόημα.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12420)
58. BDAG, s.v. “ἀσθενής.” [↑](#footnote-ref-26289)
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68. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 807, “eironeia.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20745)
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70. Louw and Nida, s.v. “φυσίωσις.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27834)
71. BDAG, s.v. “ἀκαθαρσία.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28347)
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