

Shepherding Notes

2 Corinthians

By Caleb Bunch

Apostolic Authority

VS. 1–2

The letter of 2 Corinthians is not actually the second letter written to this church. After 1 Corinthians was written to correct many ungodly practices and doctrinal distortions, the church responded in disobedience to Paul's apostolic leadership. He wrote them a letter that theologians call the "harsh letter" or the "severe letter." (We will see some textual evidence of this severe letter in chapter 2.) Paul's rebuke was used in a mighty way by the Lord to bring about repentance and transformation in the church at Corinth. But not everyone was on board — there was still an element of the body at Corinth that rejected his biblical authority. For this reason, Paul spends the first seven chapters of this book defending his God-given responsibility and authority as an apostle.

Perhaps you are thinking to yourself, "Isn't it a bad thing to defend yourself? Was Paul just personally offended? Why is it okay for him to make such a big deal about his apostleship in this manner?" The answer boils down to this: the gospel was at stake. In other places (such as Philippians 1:15–18) Paul has no personal problem when other Christians viewed him as a rival and even sought to add to his affliction — all that he cared about was that Christ is proclaimed. Paul's defense of his apostleship was not made for his own well-being, but for the benefit of the believers in that local church, and all future believers who would read God's Word, to see that Paul's instructions for worship were not personal preferences, but divinely inspired and authoritative commands from God Himself.

One Source of Comfort

VS. 3–7

One of the main sentiments identifiable in this letter is a softness and graciousness extended to those who have heard Paul's previous rebuke and repented. When a brother or sister in Christ has fallen into sin but turns and repents, our response should be an open-armed reception that rejoices with them and helps them bear their burdens. That is precisely what we see happening with Paul — which is why he opens this letter with a brilliant declaration of divine comfort.

There are two main ways that unsaved people attempt to comfort one another. The first is distraction — through entertainment, conversation, travel, relaxation, or pleasure,

people seek comfort by getting their mind off of the problem and onto something else. The second is assistance: "Just tell me what is wrong so I can fix it for you." Paul does not try either of these.

"God not only graciously saves us and promises to lead us to heaven — He also promises to comfort us in our afflictions as we carry our crosses."

Paul goes so far as to claim that distraction and assistance are inadequate and even counterfeit. Distraction only helps until it is over. Human beings cannot fix the deepest needs of the human heart. That is why Paul describes God as "the God of all comfort." There is no other place to find genuine comfort for the human soul. The comfort Paul speaks of comes from the Father (vs. 3) through the Son (vs. 5).

One Reason for Suffering

vs. 8–11

Paul informs the Corinthians that one reason the Lord allows us to experience affliction is so that we will be able to comfort others who are afflicted. This is partially about our innate ability to empathize with those who have suffered in ways identical to us. Paul, however, is not speaking only about empathy. He argues that suffering experienced "in all our affliction" allows us to "comfort those who are in any affliction."

One Criterion for Comfort

vs. 5–7

There is no indication in Scripture that unsaved people are able to experience any true comfort — distraction and assistance are the best alternatives they have. Paul writes, "For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too." (vs. 5) At the very least, this indicates that the God of all comfort gives comfort only through His Son Jesus Christ.

"Just like all comfort, all suffering also comes directly from God's hand. When we can recognize that, we can trust that He knows what He is doing."

Christians suffer — some expressly because they are Christians. When we suffer for the sake of Christ in persecution, or circumstantially in accordance with God's providence, we can either view our trials as attacks from the devil, random happenstance, or

wickedness abounding in the world. What we are supposed to do is recognize that God has allowed these trials. When we can lean on Him with that kind of trust, it is then that we are also able to comfort others in their affliction.

Today we focus on the end of the chapter and zone in on two particularly powerful metaphors employed by Paul.

Triumphal Procession

VS. 14

One of the most iconic structures in the city of Paris is the Arc de Triomphe — a testament to the men who fought and died in the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. Such arches reach far back into the classical era of the Roman Empire. They would be built when a great general or Caesar defeated a powerful enemy. When the victorious army returned home, they would parade through the city starting at the arch that signified their triumph.

"Jesus 'always leads us in triumphal procession.' Your entire life is supposed to be dedicated to proclaiming the victory of Jesus to whoever is watching."

2 COR. 2:14

This imagery brilliantly highlights the fact that Jesus has already won the battle. The war is over. Through the cross and resurrection, Jesus defeated sin, death, and the devil. Paul describes the Christian life as a victory march behind the chariot of our victorious King — simply following Him in a parade of celebration for His successful conquest. Whether you serve in missionary service like Paul, or you are employed in the secular workforce, your entire life is supposed to be dedicated to proclaiming the victory of Jesus to whoever is watching.

An Aroma of Life and Death

VS. 15–17

Your sense of smell has the ability to produce extreme reactions. Consider the way you feel when walking into a bakery full of freshly baked bread — you breathe deeply and slowly, doing everything you can to soak in the glorious aroma. Your olfactory nerve causes positive emotions and even memory to kick into high gear. Contrast this with the smell of an open sewer. There is no odor more naturally repulsive than the scent of death and decomposition.

Paul describes Christian ministry as spreading the fragrance of the knowledge of Jesus everywhere we go. There is one scent we produce — yet not everyone responds to it the same way. For those who are perishing, the gospel smells like death. It is repulsive to anyone whose heart is opposed to God. But to those who are "being saved," the gospel is the aroma of "life to life."

"Don't be afraid to put on the perfume of the gospel. Soak yourself in it. But don't be surprised when that scent repels those who do not believe."

Paul's purpose is to highlight that he and those who serve with him are not "peddlers of God's word." There were, and still are, many people who preach the gospel as a way to make money or for some other earthly gain. Such people typically say whatever their crowd wants to hear. Paul is essentially saying, "Look at my track record. The gospel I preach is life to those who are being saved, but it is as repulsive as a rotting corpse to those who are enemies of God."

When someone becomes a Christian, their life typically changes in many tangible and visible ways — often including a change in friendships. A new believer will draw closer to fellow Christians, and their old friends will often quickly depart. The gospel is offensive. Don't be surprised when unbelievers in your life respond to your faith the same way they might respond to the scent of death.

The New Covenant is far better than the Old Covenant. That is Paul's main argument in this chapter. The ways in which this covenant excels should cause us to worship the Lord for all that He has done in covenanting with us for our salvation.

VS. 1-18

- The Old Covenant Law was written on tablets of stone. The New Covenant is written by God directly onto the hearts of His people. (vs. 3) This is why Christians don't treat God's rules like a speed limit — we view them as a way to show love to our Good Father.
- The Letter (the Old Covenant Law) kills, but the Spirit gives life. (vs. 6) The Law has no ability to give life because we have no ability to keep it. The Holy Spirit does not require us to adhere to a moral code before regenerating us. Life is not earned, but given as a gift from a gracious God.
- Paul describes the ministry of Moses as a "ministry of condemnation." (vs. 9) The New Covenant, by contrast, is the "ministry of righteousness" — a covenant that gives righteousness rather than simply highlighting its glaring absence.
- Paul draws attention to the way Moses' face shone when he came down from the mountain after meeting with God. (Ex. 34:29-35) The radiating face of Moses carried a kind of glory — but the glory of the New Covenant is much better. That glory was temporary and faded; the New Covenant is permanent and will never come to an end.
- The reason Moses wore a veil in Exodus 34 was the fearful response of the people. Paul uses this as a metaphor for hard-hearted rejection of the gospel — failure to understand it is like having a veil over our hearts, removed only by Christ when we respond to the gospel with faith. For "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."

*"William Blake is credited with the saying, 'We become what we behold.'
When the Spirit unveils our eyes and we freely gaze upon the glory of Christ,
we begin to be transformed into His image."*

2 COR. 3:18

This process is not instantaneous, but gradual — as we are changed from "one degree of glory to another."

What does it mean to lose heart? It is a mashup of losing confidence and feeling depression — an attitude of defeat and futility. In this chapter, Paul explains why he does not lose heart. "Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart." (vs. 1) Here are four brief observations regarding Paul's reasons.

VS. 6 · 1 — THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

The central reason Paul does not lose heart is his salvation through Jesus Christ. "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (vs. 6) He does not lose heart because God has shone something very specific into his heart — a light that causes us to see the glory of God the Father in the person of God the Son.

VS. 7-9 · 2 — JARS OF CLAY

Paul describes himself as a common, fragile vessel intended for temporary use. He does this to highlight the fact that the jar is not special — what is in the jar is. He does not lose heart in afflictions because he knows that part of their purpose is to display the glory of God.

VS. 8-11 · 3 — AFFLICTED, BUT NOT CRUSHED

"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed." (vs. 8-9) All of this suffering results in the "life of Jesus" being "manifested in our bodies." When the world sought to break Paul down, the Lord Jesus drew near to him.

VS. 16-18 · 4 — NO COMPARISON

The word "glory" means heavy. Paul plays on that meaning by describing the weight of our trials versus the weight of glory that awaits those who live for Jesus. The eternal blessings that come from our suffering far outweigh the temporary agony we experience. Paul looked at beatings and imprisonments and described them as "light" and "momentary" — but only because he immediately compared them to an eternal weight of glory that is, by his own admission, "beyond all comparison."

"All of the suffering we see and experience here on earth is described as 'transient.' But the blessings of our heavenly joy are 'eternal.'"

2 COR. 4:17-18

A New Creation

vs. 17

There are many metaphors the Bible uses to describe salvation:

Lost, then found (Luke 19:10)	Dirty, then purified (1 Cor. 6:11)
Enslaved, then set free (John 8:34)	Darkness, then light (John 8:12)
Guilty, then justified (Rom. 3:23–24)	Enemies, then friends of God (James 4:4)
Captive, then ransomed (Heb. 9:15)	Orphaned, then adopted (Eph. 1:5)
Blind, then given sight (2 Cor. 4:4–6)	Strangers, then citizens (Eph. 2:19)
Dead, then alive (Eph. 2:1–5)	

2 Corinthians 5:17 adds another by utilizing the metaphor of creation. If you are a Christian, the Lord has spoken your spiritual life into existence. Who you were before salvation is, in a very real sense, gone. The new has come.

An Ambassador for Christ

vs. 18–20

Ambassadors live in a foreign land but are not citizens of it. They have no actual political authority of their own — they are present only to represent the ruler of their kingdom. Paul describes his ministry as communicating on behalf of the Lord to the kingdom of this world. Though he is speaking of apostolic authority, there is a genuine sense in which all of us are also ambassadors for Jesus as we live here on earth.

"God, who does not need us, allows us to take part in the process of reconciling sinful people to a sinless God. That should humble you — but it should also light a fire under you."

An Unfair Trade

vs. 21

The gospel is all about substitution — Jesus in my place. 2 Corinthians 5:21 is the clearest description of substitutionary atonement in the entire Bible. Jesus, the one who had

never known sin, became sin. What a brutal statement. Just meditate on that for a bit. The sentence, however, does not end there. He made a beautiful but unfair exchange — when He took our sin, He replaced it with His righteousness. As weighty and enormous as our sin is, it pales in comparison with the mountain of Christ's righteousness. Jesus gives His perfect record of righteousness to everyone whose sins were paid for at the cross.

Recognizing Reality

VS. 1-13

When someone asks you, "How are you doing?" what aspects of your life do you consider before answering? In the first half of this chapter Paul highlights the stark difference between how the Corinthians treat him and how God sees him. Their church was living in a sinful pattern of slanderous and dishonoring speech about Paul and his fellow ministers of the gospel.

They would treat Paul as a poor, punished, unknown, dying imposter who lives in perpetual sorrow. Paul rebuts each of those positions and unveils the curtain of reality — spiritual realities are more significant than temporal ones. He doesn't deny all the accusations; he reframes them in light of what is truly real.

"Having Jesus is the same thing as possessing everything. 'All I have is Christ' is not a statement of lack — it is the declaration of infinite abundance."

We often sing the song "All I Have Is Christ." Generally speaking, when you put the word "all" at the beginning of a statement like this, it indicates lack or limitation — like pulling out your pockets at the checkout line and saying, "All I have is five bucks." When the Corinthians looked at Paul, they were essentially saying, "You have nothing but Jesus." Even so, Paul rightly understood that having Jesus is the same thing as possessing everything.

In verses 11-13, Paul makes a plea to the Corinthians to see this heavenly perspective and to "widen your hearts." He did not wield his apostolic authority like a cudgel. Rather, he graciously pointed out that the Corinthians needed a change of thinking about what is truly valuable in order to have their affections about Paul transformed.

Through which lens do you look at your own life? How do you judge the "success" or "credibility" of other believers? The Corinthians were looking for worldly benchmarks. Paul looked to fixed spiritual realities.

Good Grief

VS. 8–13

One of the most iconic scenes in animation history is when Lucy van Pelt retracts the football at the last second, right before Charlie Brown was ready to kick it. Then we get the famous line, "Oh, good grief." According to the American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms, this term originated as a euphemism for the blasphemous exclamation, "Good God!" What English philologists and etymologists seem to miss is that the concept of "good grief" actually has a far older — and far more God-honoring — emergence.

Paul begins this chapter by referring back to the "harsh" or "sorrowful" letter he wrote to the Corinthians. It must have been a particularly biting rebuke. In verse 8, Paul reveals that he had experienced regret after writing it because of how much it grieved them. This is not the grief we experience when a friend moves away or a family member dies — this is the grief we experience when someone points out our sin.

"Good grief — or as Paul calls it, 'godly grief' — leads to repentance. That is what makes grief over sin into something good."

2 COR. 7:9

The clearest picture of this is seen in two men who both dishonored the Lord Jesus in jaw-dropping fashion. Judas betrayed Jesus, and immediately experienced immense guilt. He changed his mind, tried to undo his act, verbally acknowledged his sin, returned the silver, and even tried to punish himself. And yet this was not godly grief. What was Judas missing? A turning to the Lord in repentance. Even in his grief, it seems to have totally slipped his mind that the chief target of his evil actions was God Himself. Paul calls this kind of grief "worldly grief" — and it produces death.

Peter, by contrast, denied Jesus three times in increasingly loud and blasphemous terms. While he was still speaking his final denial, the rooster crowed. Then came the intimate detail recorded by Luke: "And the Lord turned and looked at Peter... And he went out and wept bitterly." (Luke 22:61–62) Peter wept over his sin, just like Judas. But the big difference is that Peter truly turned to the Lord for forgiveness. The Lord granted Peter repentance — for repentance never occurs in the heart of a person without the work of

God. (Acts 11:18, 2 Tim. 2:25)

"For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret."

2 COR. 7:10

Commending Ministers

VS. 16–24

Paul starts this chapter by making an argument for generosity — a theme that carries over into chapter 9. Today we zone in on an easily missed element: commending ministers.

One of the most challenging times in the life of most churches is when a long-time pastor retires or resigns. The importance of finding the right man for the job cannot be overstated — it is truly astounding how quickly an ungodly or unqualified man can decimate a formerly healthy church. Similarly, a man with abhorrent theology can subtly change the trajectory of a church into a deadly direction. How can a church find a pastor who will be faithful? The best way is to raise him up from within the congregation. When that is not possible, the church needs to ask other faithful pastors and churches who they would commend.

Titus was sent by Paul to multiple places as a temporary minister. He was trustworthy and wise — responsible to appoint elders in every town on the island of Crete (Titus 1:5). In 2 Corinthians 8 we discover that Titus was also sent to serve the people of Corinth, described by Paul as his own "partner and fellow worker for your benefit." (vs. 23)

"Beneath all of Titus's technical skill and intellectual understanding was a heart that loved the people of Corinth. Paul called it 'earnest care.'"

2 COR. 8:16

Titus was not looking for a promotion or a pay raise, nor was he taking the position to become famous or gain some level of prestige or authority. He went to Corinth to humbly serve people he truly loved. A second man — only called "brother" in this passage — was well known as a preacher and was appointed by multiple churches. Together they would receive a gift of money from the Corinthians for the suffering church in Jerusalem. Pastors and ministers are not supposed to give themselves these titles. They are appointed by God through the ministry of the local church. And when they serve well, they should be commended for their ministry.

The last thing to see is the way the universal church is described in vs. 23. Paul refers to "the churches" as "the glory of Christ." This is a fascinating way to describe the church — especially after seeing just how messy a church can be in 1 and 2 Corinthians. Jesus is glorious, and the way His glory shines to the world is through the faithful ministry of individual churches who faithfully carry out their work before a watching world.

Giving as an Act of Worship

vs. 1–15

What is your relationship to money? Of course you need money to live. Jesus was not afraid to talk about it — 11 of the 39 parables have at least some focus on money and possessions, and roughly 15% of his preaching ministry in the gospels is centered on it. There is a very good reason for that. Money is one of the chief idols that people worship. Even for people who want to love and honor God, it is not always easy to discern how to best love God with their wealth.

In 2 Corinthians 9, Paul speaks to the church about what Christian giving is really all about.

"A philanthropist mindset says, 'I own an abundance, so I will give to someone with great need.' A biblical mindset says, 'I don't own anything — I am simply a steward of what God has given me to use for His purposes.'"

Paul does not ground his argument for giving in need, sacrifice, emotion, or even rewards. He grounds it in the gospel itself. He quotes Psalm 112:9 to reveal that God is the ultimate giver. What did God give? Paul had already answered that in the previous chapter: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

We are not to give under compulsion. The external compulsion cannot make you give — it can only make you give for the wrong reasons. Motives matter to God. He not only wants you to give of your abundance. He wants you to give joyfully and with a heart of worship.

If you cannot give without resentment or reluctance, then don't give. Determine in your heart how you are best able to worship the Lord, then give freely. The blessings God promises (vs. 6–7, 10–13) are not financial — if you give money, you will have less money. The blessings are much bigger than a pile of cash. Chief among them is that your giving produces a harvest of thanksgiving to God from the people blessed by your gifts (vs. 11). The more you look to the God who gives, the more you will become a generous giver to God's endeavors throughout the world.

Paul shifts tone in the final section of the letter beginning here in chapter 10. He begins to directly defend his apostolic ministry and authority against critics in Corinth — the so-called "super-apostles" who were false teachers. He addresses accusations that he is bold and forceful in his letters but timid and unimpressive in person. Rather than boasting in worldly terms or comparing himself to others, Paul argues that he is imitating the meekness of Jesus. He also outlines the limits and boundaries of what God had called him to do.

VS. 1–2 · THE MEEKNESS AND GENTLENESS OF CHRIST

The true mark of a Christian leader is not his dominance — it is his Christlikeness. In 1 Peter 5:3, Peter states that pastors must not be domineering. Paul personally pleads with the Corinthians using the example of Christ's humility rather than forced authority or raw power. He calls them to repent so he does not have to be severe when he arrives.

VS. 3–6 · SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Though we live "in the world," our warfare is not worldly. Our weapons are not carnal (human strength, rhetoric, or manipulation) but through Christ we have been given divine power to demolish strongholds — specifically "arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God." This battle does not begin when false teachers arrive. It begins in our own heart and mind. Paul tells us to take every thought captive to obey Christ in ourselves first, then to stand ready against outside attacks.

"Take every thought captive to obey Christ in ourselves first — then stand ready against outside attacks."

2 COR. 10:5

VS. 7-11 · JUDGING BY APPEARANCES

The Corinthians are judging Paul by outward appearances. As we learn from Samuel and David, God looks at the heart. Paul challenges the Corinthians on their foolishness. He claims that he will not be ashamed to boast appropriately about the authority the Lord gave him. Paul's enemies were saying that his letters were "weighty and forceful," but his presence was weak and his speech amounted to nothing. Paul assures them his actions will match his words.

VS. 12-18 · PROPER BOASTING

Paul draws from Jeremiah 9:24 — "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord." He does not commend himself the way the false apostles do. His boast is in the Lord's work, not his own. And he expresses hope that their faith will grow so that he and his co-workers may extend the gospel even further.

How do you respond when you are facing criticism? We should imitate Paul as he imitated Christ. Respond with Christ-like gentleness first, then clear defense rooted in God's Word rather than a knee-jerk reaction of self-defense. Take every thought captive, especially the thoughts of pride that so naturally fill your mind when someone starts to criticize you. And in the end, remember that it is God who is your ultimate judge. He is the audience that matters.

Super-Apostles

VS. 1-6

Simmering under the surface of the first ten chapters has been the presence of a mysterious group that has gained influence within the church of Corinth. Paul swiftly turns from hinting at their presence to a head-on verbal demolition of them. He compares them to the serpent that used his cunning to tempt Eve. (vs. 3) Indeed they were satanic because they were preaching a different gospel. (vs. 4) These false teachers called themselves "super-apostles" (vs. 5) — a self-designation by which they claimed to be a higher authority than any other earthly leader. They argued they were better than Paul because they were better orators. (vs. 6) The skill of rhetoric was highly prized in that culture.

Holy Skepticism

VS. 7-11

The "super-apostles" are similar in many ways to modern day televangelists and mega-church pastors. Paul graciously chastised the Corinthians for not having a holy skepticism able to discern true gospel preaching from lies. Jesus Himself commended the church of Ephesus for having discernment about such men: "You cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false." (Rev. 2:2) 2 Corinthians 11 should serve as a stark warning to guard against an ungodly tolerance of false teaching. Have you let your guard down? Have you developed discernment about which podcasts you follow, which books you read, and which videos you watch? Not everyone who calls themselves a Christian, or who claims to be a spiritual leader, is actually leading you to Christ.

"Have you let your guard down? Not everyone who calls themselves a Christian, or who claims to be a spiritual leader, is actually leading you to Christ."

Satan's Minions in Disguise

VS. 12-15

In verses 12–15, Paul unmasks the super-apostles for what they really are — "deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ." When that mask is removed, who is underneath? Paul makes it clear that false teachers are servants of Satan himself. Some know they are false teachers. Others are self-deceived. Both are in the same boat, and "their end will correspond to their deeds."

Fool's Talk

VS. 16–33

At the conclusion of this chapter, Paul begins a speech that carries on through chapter 12 — known by theologians as the "Fool's Speech." He basically says, "I am going to talk the way that you are used to talking, even though this form of argument is foolish." The super-apostles have been playing a comparison game, so Paul stoops down to their level of understanding for a few minutes and tries to reveal the holes in their logic. But he does not boast in his achievements or his skills. He instead boasts of his suffering and his weaknesses.

"Paul put on display his weakness so that the Corinthians would see how powerfully God worked through him. His boasting was the opposite of pride."

Boasting is typically a form of self-aggrandizing, self-promoting, self-congratulatory speech — a way to make the world aware of your greatness. Whether loud and gregarious or a quiet humble-brag, boasting is usually a gross expression of pride. Paul's boasting is the opposite. We will finish this thought in chapter 12.

When Suffering is Great...

vs. 1-7

Paul was a man well acquainted with suffering of many sorts. There has been much speculation about the particular form of suffering he refers to here as a thorn in his flesh — guesses range from cataracts to chronic back pain. The Holy Spirit has left this detail out of the Scriptures, perhaps so that we recognize it does not matter what kind of suffering we are experiencing — we can apply these truths to our own lives.

Where did this terrible suffering come from? Verse 7 gives two answers. The most noticeable is that Paul calls the thorn a "messenger from Satan." And yet, before he concludes his sentence, he reveals something deeper at play — it was given to him to "keep me from becoming conceited." Satan loves it when we are conceited. Why then would a messenger of Satan serve to prevent pride? Because God had a greater purpose in the suffering than Satan did. The Lord had allowed Paul to see behind the curtain of His providence to understand that this painful thorn was lovingly given by our sovereign God to develop Christ-like humility in the apostle's heart.

"When suffering is great in the life of a believer, it is because God is doing something powerful to bring us to maturity in Christ."

When God Says "No"

vs. 7-9

Paul prayed three times that the Lord would free him from his thorn — not a quick repetition, but three periods of extended prayer in which he poured out his heart before the Lord, pleading for relief. In love, God said "no." But God does not simply use the word "no." A flat denial could mean anything from indifference to judgment. The Lord has provided this passage so we might see that God never simply rejects our pleas for alleviation — instead, He promises to walk through that suffering with us.

Sufficient Grace

vs. 9-10

How did Paul reach the point that he could say, "I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities?" Two reasons. First, he recognizes that all of these things are "for the sake of Christ." Not all of the things listed are forms of persecution — Paul even views natural calamities, including health and circumstantial tragedies, as something to be endured for the sake of the Savior. Second, he holds to the promise that "when I am weak, then I am strong" — because God declared, "my power is made perfect in weakness."

The Puritan Richard Sibbes wrote in *The Bruised Reed*: "Weakness with watchfulness will stand, when strength with too much confidence fails. Weakness, with acknowledgement of it, is the fittest seat and subject for God to perfect his strength in; for consciousness of our infirmities drives us out of ourselves to him in whom our strength lies."

"God does not say, 'My power is sufficient for you.' He says, 'My grace is sufficient for you.' The grace of our Sovereign is sufficient to lead you through the valley of the shadow of death."

2 COR. 12:9

Examine Yourself

VS. 1-4

Paul's conclusion to this great letter is deeply sobering. God is instructing all of us to give ourselves an examination to determine whether or not we are in the faith.

Test Yourself

VS. 5-14

God does not give a test in order to reach eternal paradise — but there is a test, and it is supposed to be taken repeatedly and regularly while we are still alive. Paul tells us to test ourselves. Notice that he doesn't give a list of specific acts of obedience. He does not tell them to look at their track record of displaying the fruit of the Spirit. This entire book he has been building to this point — calling them to submit to the true teachings of the apostles. The so-called "super-apostles" were preaching a false gospel. To believe it would be to fail the test.

"Passing the test is not a matter of works, but a matter of faith in Jesus. 'Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?'"

2 COR. 13:5

Before you answer how to pass the test, consider the consequences of getting it wrong. Matthew 7 tells us that there will be many who believe they are followers of Christ who will be shocked at the last judgment to hear Jesus say, "I never knew you, depart from me you worker of lawlessness."

There are ways you can examine yourself that nobody else can. Anyone who knows your actions can put them under a microscope and determine whether they look like Christian holiness. What nobody but you can do is look at your motives. Examine them. Why are you involved in your church? Why do you do kind things? Why try to do what is right? Is it for the love of God? Does your obedience spring forth from a heart that has been forgiven by God? Or are your actions taken so that you might gain a reputation before men? Examine your heart. Do you have genuine affection for the Lord? Does that affection result in a transformed life? Examine yourself to see whether or not you are in the faith.