

BIBLE SURVEY

2 CORINTHIANS

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

Confronting Conflict and Controversy

The Corinthians were Paul's most difficult church. As a result, his two letters to the Corinthians, which are preserved in the Scriptures, are treasure troves of teaching - rich in relevance for our churches today. The letters to the Corinthians give us practical teaching on how to live in hostile, heathen environments and how churches should regulate their activities and discipline their members. 2 Corinthians also gives us an intriguing insight into how the Apostle Paul dealt with opposition and character assassins. Paul's teachings in 2 Corinthians provide an excellent model for God's servants to follow. 2 Corinthians is the least methodical of Paul's letters and also the most personal.

Comparing and Contrasting the Two Letters

1 Corinthians is aimed primarily at church members. 2 Corinthians is aimed primarily at church leaders and ministers of the Gospel. In 1 Corinthians we learn what Paul thought about the Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians we learn what the Corinthians thought about Paul.

The Attacks of the Judaizers

The church in Corinth was extraordinarily divided and divisive. The criticisms against Paul and opposition to him seems to have come primarily from the Judaizers, who were seeking to bring the people under legalism, under their interpretation of mosaic law, including the necessity for circumcision and Saturday Sabbath worship. It was the teaching of the Judaizers that was condemned at the first Church Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15). The Books of Hebrews and Galatians were especially written to refute the heresies of the Judaizers.

False Charges Against Paul

From 2 Corinthians we learn that the accusations against Paul included: fickleness, of always changing his plans: (Although the Apostle Paul seems extraordinarily disciplined, focused and dedicated.) The Judaizers accused Paul of being cowardly. (Although it would appear that he was extraordinarily courageous and bold. Paul risked his life and liberty repeatedly in the face of fierce opposition, to advance the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.) The critics accused Paul of being timid! (Yet the Apostle Paul seems to have been one of the most bold and brave preachers in history.) Much of the letter of Corinthians deals with the criticism that he did not come with any letters of recommendation, whereas the super apostles had come with impressive resumes, credentials and certifications from Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. (The Apostle Paul makes clear that the real test of a man's ministry is not his academic qualifications, or formal training, but the fruit of his ministry and the disciples he produces.) The critics accused Paul of being secretive, distant, aloof, unfeeling and uncaring. They accused him of not being a polished speaker and they despised him for the fact that he did not charge any fees for his service!

Defence and Attack

The first nine chapters of 2 Corinthians includes Paul's defence against these many charges and accusations. The last part of 2 Corinthians, chapters 10 to 13, are Paul's attacks on the false apostles.

Living Epistles that Testified to His Apostleship

Paul makes clear that he is *“an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.”* (1:1). Paul points out that he does not need letters of commendation from others to the Corinthians. 2 Corinthians 3:2-3: *“You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.”*), the very existence of the Church at Corinth testified to the authenticity of Paul’s Apostleship. He was the one who had brought them to Christ and disciplined them in the first place.

Evangelism vs. Subversion

He contrasts his ministry with the subversion of the Judaizers. Their ministry is authenticated by ink, his by the Spirit of the Living God. They are calling people back to the Law that was written on tablets of stone. Paul is a servant of the New Covenant, where God’s Law is written on the heart. The result of their legalism is death and condemnation, for *“the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”* (2 Corinthians 3:5-6: *“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the New Covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”*).

Deceit and Death

Paul categorises the ministry of the Judaizers as *“the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones.”* (3:7), *“the ministry of condemnation”* (3:9). He describes the Jews: *“...their minds are blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in their reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart...”* 2 Corinthians 3:14-15.

Blinded by Unbelief

Paul condemns these Judaizers in 2 Corinthians 4:2-4: *“But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. **But even if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.**”*

Testifying to the Light of Christ

Paul describes his ministry: *“For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”*

Gospel Treasure in Clay Pots

Paul describes his ministry as: *“**But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.**”* 2 Corinthians 4:7

What are the Marks of True Christian Ministry?

*“**We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.**”* 2 Corinthians 4:8-9. Opposition does not negate a ministry, but is its vindication. For Jesus Christ Himself suffered for us and left us an example that we should follow in His footsteps (1 Peter 2:21).

Personal Insights to the Apostle Paul and His Ministry

In 2 Corinthians we read details about the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul which are revealed only in this letter. This includes Paul’s escape from Damascus in a basket. (2 Corinthians 11:32-33: *“In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a*

garrison, desiring to arrest me; but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped from his hands.”); Paul’s experience of being caught up to the third Heaven (2 Corinthians 12:1-4: “It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows - such a one was caught up to the third Heaven. And I know such a man - whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows - how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”); His thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7: “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.”); some of his sufferings in ministry (2 Corinthians 11:23-27: “Are they ministers of Christ? - I speak as a fool - I am more: in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.”).

Sacrificial Service and Steadfastness in Suffering

*“We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: **in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the Word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers and yet true; as unknown and yet well known; as dying and behold we live; as chastened and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing and yet possessing all things.**” 2 Corinthians 6:3-10*

True Love is Measured by Sacrifice

Our Lord Jesus Christ, by His great example, showed us that true love is measured by sacrifice. In the words of a famous Christian prayer: *“Teach us O Lord to serve You as You deserve; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to ask for rest; to labour and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do Your will.”*

Love in Action

Love gives and does not count the cost. Love rejoices in giving and wants to give – not out of duty, but out of a glad and willing heart. Love entails intense enthusiasm, a longing to be near and a desire to serve. As Anselm prayed: *“Let me seek You in longing, let me long for You in seeking, let me find You in love and love You in finding.”* As the Apostle Paul taught: *“...let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”* 1 John 3:18

True Riches

The wife of Romanian Pastor, Richard Wurmbrand, Sabina Wurmbrand, in her book *The Pastors Wife*, reveals that before she was condemned to five years hard labour in a communist concentration camp in Romania, she was very poor, but when she was imprisoned, she became very rich. This was because while she was poor in the things of this world, she was rich in her knowledge of the Scriptures, which were the only currency of value in their state of servitude and suffering. Having so much of the Word of God stored up in her heart and mind and memory, she was able to make many other people rich with the Scriptures.

An Aroma of Life and Death

“Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?” 2 Corinthians 2:14-16

The savour unto life and death is a figure of speech based on the incense scented triumphal processions with which conquering emperors and generals returned to Rome, with long lines of captives. Some of these captives were to be put to death, while others were to be permitted to live. So, here, the Apostle Paul describes the ministries of God's servants as being the fragrance of God, which, depending upon a person's reaction to the Gospel, could mean death or life. Our ministries are, by the sovereignty of God, in a sense, a march of triumph which brings life to those who turn in faith and obedience to Christ and it signals death to those who reject the Gospel, turn their back on the Salvation provided in Christ and offered so graciously by Almighty God.

Comfort in Corinthians

The Epistle **begins** with comfort: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.”* 2 Corinthians 1:3.

It **closes** with comfort: *“Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.”* 2 Corinthians 13:11.

In the middle we find the **reason** for this comfort: *“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.”* 2 Corinthians 9:8.

The **source** of this comfort is: *“...‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’...”* 2 Corinthians 12:9.

Enduring Trials and Tribulations is Part of our Job Description

Nowhere does Christ promise that a Christian will be free from suffering or sorrow. Indeed the Lord warned that in this world, you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (John 16:33). Noah was not protected **from** the Flood, but **in the midst of the Flood**. Moses and the Children of Israel were not air-lifted over the Red Sea, but were led by God **through** the Red Sea. Daniel was not saved **from** the Den of Lions, but protected **in** the Lions Den. Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego were not saved **from** the fiery furnace, but preserved **in** the fiery furnace. The Lord allowed Paul to be shipwrecked and saved him **through** that ordeal.

Victory Through Resurrection Power

The Apostle Paul finds comfort for his sufferings in the fact of Christ's Resurrection and His promise that our weak and suffering bodies, like a tent, will one day be exchanged for resurrected and glorified bodies in eternity. For to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Do Not Seek Unity with Those Who Reject or Distort the Scriptures

As the Judaizers were seeking to bring the Corinthian Christians back under legalism, bondage and condemnation, by rejecting the reality and substance that is in Christ and going back to the Old Testament shadows, the Apostle Paul challenged them: ***“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the Temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God and they shall be My people.’ Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean and I will receive you.’ ‘I will be a Father to you and you shall be My sons and daughters’, says the Lord Almighty.”*** 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

God does not live in Jerusalem! The Lord no longer has a Temple for His people. Now He has a people for His Temple. There is no Salvation in Judaism. They have rejected Christ.

Resisting Babylon and the Beast

It was this very passage that Rev. Richard Wurmbrand quoted to the Communists when they organised a great public gathering for ministers of the Gospel to announce their support of the Communist Party. As one after the other of these compromisers and traitors stood up and made obligatory statements that Jesus Christ was *“the first communist”* and Communism is *“Christianity in action”*, *“all true Christians must support Communism”*, etc. Sabina Wurmbrand turned to her husband, Richard and challenged him: *“Go and wipe the shame from the body of Christ!”* Richard Wurmbrand stood up, went onto the platform and quote this very passage: ***“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers... Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean and I will receive you!”***

Tortured for Christ

For this bold and brave Biblical stand, Richard Wurmbrand was condemned to prison. He ultimately served 14 years hard-labour, including many years in solitary confinement, in hideous conditions, as testified in *Tortured for Christ*. But as he pointed out, those traitors who lied and compromised their Faith, bearing false witness, in order to appease their communist masters, ended up in the same prison cells as he did. They just got there a little bit later. However, as he pointed out, the difference was that he was imprisoned with a clear conscience.

In the Light of Eternity

*“Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. **For we must all appear before the Judgment seat of Christ**, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men...”* 2 Corinthians 5:9-11. Believers know the healthy fear of God which leads us to please, serve, honour and obey Him. For unbelievers, there is only the fear and terrors of hell and condemnation.

A Ministry of Reconciliation

***“For the love of Christ compels us*, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died and He died for all, **that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again**. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new**. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that **God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself**, not imputing their trespasses to them and has committed to us the Word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, **be reconciled to God**. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Corinthians 5:14-21**

The Love of Christ Compels Us

We have been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation, as ambassadors for Christ to implore people, on Christ’s behalf, to be reconciled to God. The love of Christ compels us. We should no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who died for us and rose again, has ascended on high and is coming again to Judge the living and the dead.

The Fear of God Inspires Us

This is the greatest story, which we have the privilege to be involved in, of God reconciling His rebellious world to Himself. *“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”* 2 Corinthians 7:1

The Lamb and the Lion

The first time Jesus came to this earth He came as the Lamb of God, as the Son of Abraham, destined to be the sacrifice on the altar of the Cross. The second time the Lord Jesus will not come as a Lamb, but as the Lion, the Son of David, destined for the Throne, as our Eternal Judge and Sovereign God. Those who have not submitted to Christ as Lord and Saviour, will be forced to bow before Him as the Eternal Judge. The question is, **is Jesus Christ your Saviour, or your Judge?**

Godly Sorrow Leads to Repentance and Life

The Apostle Paul speaks of "...**Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to Salvation, not to be regretted, but the sorrow of the world produces death.** For observe this very thing that you sorrowed in a Godly manner: What **diligence** it produced in you, what **clearing** of yourselves, what **indignation**, what **fear**, what **vehement desire**, what **zeal**, what **vindication!** In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter." 2 Corinthians 7:10-11. Godly sorry which leads to repentance produces diligence, a clearing of ourselves, indignation, fear, vehement desire, zeal and vindication, which proves us to be true Disciples of the Lord. The result is "we rejoice exceedingly." True repentance leads to joy.

A Ministry of Faith

The enemies of Paul criticised him for working with his hands and supporting himself with Tent Ministry. They declared that no Apostle would work with their own hands. Paul explains that while he had the right to expect support from the Corinthian church, yet because of money-grabbing manipulators and false teachers, who commercialised the ministry, he preferred not to be a burden to the churches that he founded. "Freely you have received, freely, freely give." "To whom much is given, much is required." To whom much more is given, much more is required. Paul responds that he had accepted no payment from any of the churches for his work, except from Philippi. God has promised to reward the generous giver. God is no man's debtor. We should give out of our poverty, generously, willingly, proportionately, cheerfully, bountifully.

Generosity in Giving

"But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; **for God loves a cheerful giver.** And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work." 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

Christian Stewardship

In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 we have the most complete instructions of our church-giving. It is to be voluntary, proportionate, systematic, regular and generous. This is called "the ministering to the saints". "As a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation." (9:5). "Now may He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God." 2 Corinthians 9:10-12

Systematic Targeting of Paul

At his conversion, the Lord had said of Paul: "I will show him how many things he must suffer for My Name sake" (Acts 9:16). The Jews plotted to kill Paul in Damascus (Acts 9:24) and in Jerusalem (Acts 9:29), drove him out of Antioch (Acts 13:50), attempted to stone him at Iconium (Acts 14:5), stoned him and left him for dead at Lystra (Acts 14:19). In Philippi the Jews beat him with rods and put him in stocks (Acts 16:23-24). In Thessalonica, the Jews rioted against Paul (Acts 17:5), they drove him out of Berea (Acts 17:13-14). The Jews plotted against him in Corinth (Acts 18:12), in Ephesus they almost killed him (Acts 19:29; 2 Corinthians 1:8-9). In Corinth, shortly after he had

written this Epistle, they plotted his death (Acts 20:3), in Jerusalem, the Jews again attempted to kill Paul. Except for the intervention of Roman soldiers they would have succeeded (Acts 22). Paul was then imprisoned in Caesarea for two years and in Rome for two more years. Besides these attacks and imprisonments, Paul endured other beatings, shipwrecks and privations of every kind.

The Credentials of Paul

*“Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? - I speak as a fool - I am more: in **labours** more abundant, in **stripes** above measure, in **prisons** more frequently, in **deaths** often. From the Jews five times I received **forty stripes** minus one. Three times I was **beaten with rods**; once I was **stoned**; three times I was **shipwrecked**; a night and a day I have been **in the deep**; in journeys often, **in perils of waters**, in perils of **robbers**, in perils of my **own countrymen**, in perils of the **Gentiles**, in perils in **the city**, in perils in **the wilderness**, in perils in **the sea**, in perils among **false brethren**; in **weariness** and **toil**, in **sleeplessness** often, in **hunger** and **thirst**, in **fastings** often, in **cold** and **nakedness** - besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.”* 2 Corinthians 11:22-28

Evaluate a Leader’s Track Record and Fruit

Paul goes on the attack against his critics, challenging them to compare themselves with his service and suffering for Christ. True love is measured by sacrifice. The real credentials of a servant of God is his track record, not merely his academic credentials, or endorsements from officials.

Visions and Dreams

It is interesting that the Apostle Paul tells us nothing concerning what he heard or saw, when he was caught up into Heaven. He describes what he heard as: *“...inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”* 2 Corinthians 12:4. What a contrast this offers to modern day super Apostles who write books, produce films and regale audiences of millions on television with their imaginative descriptions of what they claim they saw and heard when they were caught up into Heaven!

Strength Made Perfect in Weakness

*“And He said to me, ‘**My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.**’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”* 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

Exposing False Teachers

From chapter 10 through 13, the Apostle Paul goes on the attack against the false apostles, the Judaizers. He describes them: *“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.”* 2 Corinthians 11:13-15

Tolerating Evil

In a passage dripping with sarcasm, Paul tells the Corinthians: *“For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise! For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face. To our shame I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold - I speak foolishly - I am bold also.”* 2 Corinthians 11:19-21

Beware of Your Mind Becoming Corrupted

*“But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches **another Jesus** whom we have not preached, or if you receive **a different spirit** which you have not received, or a **different gospel** which you have not accepted - you may well put up with it!”* 2 Corinthians 11:3-4

Do Not Despise and Devalue Those Who Live by Faith

“Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the Gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. And when I was present with you and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you and so I will keep myself.” 2 Corinthians 11:7-9. *“For we are not, as so many, peddling the Word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.”* 2 Corinthians 2:17

Examine Yourself

Paul condemns the church at Corinth for: *“...contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, back-bitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults”* 2 Corinthians 12:20.

Paul challenges the Corinthians: **“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the Faith. Test yourselves...”** 2 Corinthians 13:5.

Paul urges them: *“...that you should do what is honourable...”* 2 Corinthians 13:7.

Paul prays: *“...that you may be made complete...”* 2 Corinthians 13:9.

Paul’s prayer for the Corinthians: *“Finally, brethren, farewell. **Become complete.** Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.”* 2 Corinthians 13:11.

Soli Deo Gloria

The Reformation principle of **Soli Deo Gloria** is emphasised: *“But **he who glories, let him glory in the Lord’.**”* 2 Corinthians 10:17. (Also a quote from Jeremiah 9:24 *“But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight...”*). *“For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may **cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.**”* 2 Corinthians 4:15

Take up the Cross of Christ

We are called to have a Christ-centered ministry, taking up our cross, *“Always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.”* 2 Corinthians 4:10.

Christian Liberty

The principle of Christian liberty is taught: *“Now the Lord is the Spirit and **where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.**”* 2 Corinthians 3:17. True Freedom is a fruit of the Gospel. Freedom from sinful habits and addictions. Freedom from drunkenness and drug addiction. Freedom from the fear of man. Freedom in Christ.

The Suffering is Temporary the Glory is Eternal

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” 2 Corinthians 4:16-17

The Testimony of Track Record

Far from the Apostle Paul needing academic degrees and commendations from famous people, his commendations were in the whippings, imprisonments, sufferings and tribulations he had endured with patience and steadfastness. The authenticity of his ministry was evidenced by the sacrifices he had made in the Lord’s service. The authenticity of his ministry was attested to by the Word of Truth that he taught, the power of God that was evident in his ministry, the fruit of the Spirit in his conduct and the fruit of his Evangelism and discipleship as witnessed by the churches he had established and strengthened.

Paradoxes in Christian Service

There are many paradoxes in Christian ministry. There is a certain amount of honour in serving the Lord, but there is also dishonour from those who oppose. Yes, there are good reports, but there are also evil reports. God's servants are often accused of being deceivers and yet they are true. They can be denigrated as unknown and yet in another sense, they are well-known. Their suffering, rejection and poverty may be sneered at by others, yet, they can always rejoice and make many rich in a true spiritual and eternal sense.

Not a Sacrifice

As Missionary, Dr. David Livingstone, declared: *“Can that be called a sacrifice, which is simply paid back a small part of a great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay? It is emphatically no sacrifice! Say rather it is a privilege!”*

No Sacrifice Too Great

Famous English Cricketer, turned Pioneer Missionary, C.T. Studd, declared: *“If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice that I can make can be too great.”*

Conduct is More Important Than Human Commendations

The teachers of the Jewish Law in Paul's day, carried letters of Introduction with them. They were the chief troublemakers of Paul's ministry. *“Who is this Paul?”* They would ask. *“What letters of recommendation from Jerusalem does he have?”* Paul makes clear that the Corinthian Christians themselves are his letter, written on hearts, known and read by everybody. The lives of all true Christians serve as communication. Most people may not study the Word of God, but many of them study our lives and conduct. This should inspire us as to the serious and solemn opportunity to lead people to Christ, not only by what we say, but by what we **do**. Not only by our lips, but by our **lives**.

Constructive vs. Destructive Criticism

There is a big difference between being destructively argumentative and divisive and constructive conflict and controversy for the Kingdom of God. If we are criticised, let it be for the stand we make for Christ and His Kingdom in seeking to be Biblical as we apply the Lordship of Christ to all areas of life. Let criticism not be legitimately raised because of bad manners on our part, lack of grace, tactlessness, divisiveness, argumentativeness, or an obnoxious personality syndrome.

Expect Opposition

Anything that moves creates friction. Opposition and criticism are to be expected in the Lord's service. As Dr. James Kennedy explains in his book *Delighting God*: *“If you rise just a little bit above the common herd, if you achieve just a modicum more success than your neighbours, most assuredly those barbs of criticism are going to be shot your way. To avoid criticism: do nothing, say nothing, be nothing. There is no defence against reproach – except obscurity.”*

Only God's Opinion Will Count for Eternity

Dr. Kennedy quotes one wise old man: *“If I try to read, much less answer all the criticisms made of me and all the attacks levelled against me, this office would have to be closed to all other business. I do the best I know how, the very best I can and I mean to keep on doing this, down to the very end. If the end brings me out all wrong, ten Angels swearing I'd been right, would make no difference. If the end brings me out all right, then what is said against me now will not amount to anything.”*

Adversity Builds Character

There is no doubt that adversity can build character. A faith that cannot be tested, cannot be trusted. Smooth seas do not make skilful sailors. Such trials should drive us to prayer, humble us and deepen our devotional life as we search the Scriptures and ask: *“What is God saying to me through this?”* It should also enable us to empathise with and comfort others who suffer such injustices. Christians suffering unjust criticism should find opportunities to glorify God and to witness for Christ. Ultimately,

God's opinion and approval is the only one that counts. It is He whom we should continually be seeking to please.

It Is Not the Critic Who Counts

As President Theodore Roosevelt declared:

*"It is not the critic who counts;
not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled,
or where the doer of deeds could have done better.
The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena,
whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood;
who strives valiantly;
who errs, who comes short again and again,
because there is no effort without error and shortcoming;
but who does actually strive to do the deeds
who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions;
who spends himself in a worthy cause;
who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement,
and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly,
so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls
who neither know victory nor defeat!"*

The Grace

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

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Part 1 of our **[New Testament Survey \(Matthew to Corinthians\) Manual](#)** is now available from Christian Liberty Books.

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