

Second Corinthians



Sermon Outlines

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Table Of Contents

True Comfort (1:3-5)	3
The Devices Of Satan (2:11)	6
Transformed By Beholding (3:18)	10
We Do Not Lose Heart (4:1)	14
The Ministry Of Reconciliation (5:18-21)	18
Hearts Wide Open (6:11-13)	21
True Repentance (7:9-11)	24
Giving Par Excellence (8:1-7)	27
Becoming A Cheerful Giver (9:6-15)	30
Weapons Mighty In God (10:3-5)	34
A Different Jesus, Spirit And Gospel (11:4)	37
Paul's Thorn In The Flesh (12:7-10)	41
Examine Yourselves (13:5)	44

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True Comfort

2 Corinthians 1:3-5

INTRODUCTION

1. Have you ever known people who despite tragedy were able to offer comfort to others?
 - a. I know a woman who within two years lost her husband, her father, and her two sons
 - b. Yet when I saw her at the funeral of the last one to die, I was impressed by the way...
 - 1) She graciously went around welcoming those who came to pay their respects
 - 2) She offered comfort to others, when you would think she would be the one needing it
2. On the other hand, some people are devastated by personal hardships...
 - a. They find no peace, no consolation
 - b. They certainly are in no position to help others
3. What is the difference? Where do those who are able to comfort others while enduring their tragedy receive the strength to help others?
 - a. The apostle Paul was one individual who had learned the secret
 - b. And he passed it along to us in his second letter to the Corinthians

[It is in **2 Co 1:3-5** where we learn about “**True Comfort**” (read). Note first of all regarding...]

I. THE SOURCE OF TRUE COMFORT

A. MANY SEEK FOR COMFORT “IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES”...

1. Some in thinking their problems are no worse than those of others
2. Some in thinking that things will improve
3. Some in believing that it can't be helped
4. Some in trying to forget
5. Some in exciting and dissipating pleasures of the flesh
6. Some in complaining and repining

B. BUT TRUE COMFORT COMES FROM GOD...

1. He is called the “*God of all comfort*” - **2 Co 1:3**
2. Why Him?
 - a. Because He is also the “*Father of mercies*” - cf. **2 Co 1:3**
 - 1) The term “father” implies “source”
 - 2) Thus He is the source of all kinds of goodness and mercy - cf. **Ja 1:17**
 - b. Comfort is just one of His many mercies, and so He is described as:
 - 1) The “*God of all comfort*” - **2 Co 1:3**
 - 2) “*The God of patience and comfort*” - **Ro 15:5**
2. As the God of ALL comfort, there is no limitation to the comfort He provides

[The source of “**True Comfort**”, then, is God. But when does it come, and how...?]

II. THE BESTOWAL OF TRUE COMFORT

A. IT IS BESTOWED “IN ALL OUR TRIBULATION”...

1. God comforts us when it is most needed - **2 Co 1:4**
2. As taught elsewhere, God does not desert us in time of need...
 - a. **“I will never leave you nor forsake you.” - He 13:5b**
 - b. He will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to bear - **1 Co 10:13**
 - c. Yes, even in **“the valley of the shadow of death”**, He is there to comfort us - **Psa 23:4**
3. Indeed, the greater the affliction, the greater the comfort! - **2 Co 1:5**
 - a. As the sufferings abound...
 - b. ...so does the consolation!

B. IT IS BESTOWED “THROUGH CHRIST”...

1. **“...so our consolation also abounds through Christ” - 2 Co 1:5**
 - a. Just as with all other spiritual blessings, it is found only “in Christ” - **Ep 1:3**
 - b. To receive the comfort that comes from God, then, we must be “in Christ”!
2. Being “in Christ”, there are two avenues through which comfort is dispensed...
 - a. The Word of God - cf. **Ro 15:4**
 - b. Prayer - cf. **Ph 4:6-7**

[Actually, there is a third avenue by which the “**True Comfort**” God gives us in Christ is bestowed, but that will become apparent as we consider...]

III. THE PURPOSE OF TRUE COMFORT

A. TO COMFORT OTHERS...

1. **“...that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble” - 2 Co 1:4**
 2. The comfort God provides through Christ is not just for our private consumption
 3. **“God does not comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters.”**
- John Henry Jowett (1817-1893)
- **Yes, our comfort is designed to be shared!**

B. A CASE IN POINT...

1. How God comforted Paul - **2 Co 7:4-7,13**
 - a. The Corinthians comforted Titus in the way they received him
 - b. So comforted by the Corinthians’ reception, Titus’ coming then comforted Paul
 - c. Yet Paul saw that the source of this comfort was ultimately from God!
2. This reveals another avenue by which God bestows His comfort
 - a. It may come **directly** from God (e.g., through His Word - **Ro 15:4**)
 - b. It may also come **indirectly** from God, through the exhortations of others - cf. **1 Th 4:18**
3. Sadly, many people neglect all avenues through which God offers “true comfort”
 - a. They do not feed upon the Word and pray, to receive comfort directly
 - b. Nor do they develop the network of relationships with other Christians, through which

God might comfort them indirectly when needed!

- **But when all avenues are utilized, then “true comfort” is possible, and we can then pass it along!**

[Finally, let's also notice...]

IV. A CONSEQUENCE OF TRUE COMFORT

A. GRATITUDE, MINGLED WITH ADORATION...

1. Paul began our text with these words: *“Blessed be the God and Father...”* - 2 Co 1:3
2. It was the “true comfort” he had received that moved him to praise God

B. SUCH PRAISE IS ONLY NATURAL...

1. Not only because of the comfort we have received
2. But also because of the comfort we can now pass along to others!

CONCLUSION

1. Are you lacking in this “true comfort?”
 - a. Perhaps you have been looking in the wrong places...
 - 1) It comes only from “the God of all comfort”
 - 2) And it comes only “through Christ”-- **Are you in Christ? - cf. Ga 3:27**
 - b. Perhaps you are not benefiting from the comfort God gives others...
 - 1) There are those who would be happy to share their comfort with you
 - 2) But you must be willing to develop the relationships necessary for such comfort to travel from them to you!-- **Are you working on your relationship with fellow Christians? - cf. Ph 2:1-5**
2. For those who are faithful Christians, having delighted in fullness of “true comfort,” remember these exhortations...
 - a. *“Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.”*
- 1 Th 5:11
 - b. *“Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.”* - 1 Th 5:14

Do these things, and we will all experience the “true comfort” by which we will want to say:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort...” (2 Co 1:3)

The Devices Of Satan

2 Corinthians 2:11

INTRODUCTION

1. When Paul wrote his second epistle to the Corinthians, he alluded to the possibility that Satan might take advantage of them:

“lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.”
(2 Co 2:11)

2. Informed Christians, however, need not be in a position to be caught off guard...
 - a. Satan's advantage is based upon one being “ignorant of his devices”
 - b. But if we are aware of the methods Satan uses to lead people astray, we can resist him successfully!
3. What are some of “**The Devices Of Satan**”? How can we defend ourselves against them?

[In study we shall attempt to answer these questions. We begin by noticing a “device” of Satan that Paul described later in this same epistle...]

I. BLIND THE MINDS OF PEOPLE

A. REGARDING THIS “DEVICE” OF SATAN...

1. There are some whom “the god of this age” has blinded - cf. **2 Co 4:3-4**
 2. The Spirit warned this would be done through “doctrines of demons” - **1 Ti 4:1-3**
 3. Today, many minds are blinded to the truth...
 - a. By the doctrine of **atheism** - there is no God
 - b. By the doctrine of **evolution** - we are simply animals
 - c. By the doctrine of **humanism** - man is the measure of all things, and in him alone is the solution to our problems
- **Those who are so blinded are hindered from receiving the truth**

B. OUR BEST DEFENSE AGAINST IT...

1. Is actually a strong offense, involving a war for the “thoughts” of men - **2 Co 10:3-5**
 2. Our greatest weapon is **truth**, which can defeat the false arguments and free those who have been blinded into captivity - cf. **Jn 8:32**
 - a. Thus the need for discussion and debate, in order to cast down “arguments” - **2 Co 10:5**
 - b. Consider the example of Paul, who “reasoned” with others - **Ac 17:2-3; 19:8-9**
 3. Other weapons involve **Christ-like attitudes** that are “mighty in God”
 - a. E.g., the meekness and gentleness of Christ - cf. **2 Co 10:1-4**
 - b. E.g., patience and humility in correcting others - cf. **2 Ti 2:24-26**
- **“Speaking the truth in love” (Ep 4:15), we can be defeat this “device of Satan”!**

[Another “device of Satan” is to...]

II. GET PEOPLE HOOKED ON THE THINGS OF THE WORLD

A. REGARDING THIS “DEVICE” OF SATAN...

1. I am referring to those things described in **1 Jn 2:15-17**
 - a. The lust of the flesh
 - b. The lust of the eyes
 - c. The pride of life
2. Satan used these tactics against Eve - cf. **Gen 3:6**
 - a. What she saw was “*good for food*” (the lust of the flesh)
 - b. It was “*pleasant to the eyes*” (lust of the eyes)
 - c. It was “*desirable to make one wise*” (pride of life)
3. Satan also tried these tactics in tempting Jesus - **Mt 4:1-11**
 - a. “*command that these stones become bread*” (lust of the flesh)
 - b. “*If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down...*” (pride of life)
 - c. “*All these things I will give you if...*” (lust of the eyes)
4. Today, Satan uses these tactics with a vengeance, tempting people through...
 - a. **Immorality** (lust of the flesh)
 - b. **Materialism** (lust of the eyes)
 - c. **Arrogance** (pride of life)

B. OUR BEST DEFENSE AGAINST IT...

1. Saturate ourselves with the Word of God!
 - a. This is how Jesus overcame His temptations by the devil
 - b. Note how He answered each temptation by saying “*It is written...*” - **Mt 4:4,7,10**
 2. Develop a strong love for the Father!
 - a. For that love is incompatible with a love for the world - cf. **1 Jn 2:15**
 - b. One cannot be a friend of the world and maintain friendship with God - **Ja 4:4**
- **By saturating ourselves with God's Word and being strong in our love for Him, we will effectively submit to Him and be able to resist the devil, causing him to flee!**
- **Ja 4:7**

[Yet let’s not think that Satan will give up easily; there are other “devices” up his sleeve, including...]

III. PERSECUTE THOSE TRYING TO DO RIGHT

A. REGARDING THIS “DEVICE” OF SATAN...

1. Peter warned that the devil sought to devour Christians through persecutions - **1 Pe 5:8-9**
2. Paul worried that afflictions brought about by Satan might tempt the Thessalonians to give up - **1 Th 3:1-5**
3. Even today, Satan persecutes Christians!
 - a. Some literally, through great suffering as Christians
 - b. Others through social pressures that are often equally effective:
 - 1) Peer pressure

- 2) Ridicule
- 3) Ostracism

B. OUR BEST DEFENSE AGAINST IT...

1. Encourage one another!
 - a. This is what Peter sought to do - cf. **1 Pe 5:8-10**
 - b. Paul sent Timothy to do the same - cf. **1 Th 3:2-3**
2. Adopt the proper attitude: Rejoice!
 - a. Knowing that trials can make us stronger - cf. **Ja 1:2-4; Ro 5:3-4**
 - b. Knowing that those who endure are blessed by God - cf. **1 Pe 4:12-14; Mt 5:10-12**
3. Commit yourself to God in doing good - cf. **1 Pe 4:19**
 - a. God is a faithful Creator
 - b. He takes note of our suffering, and will one day repay those who trouble us (including Satan himself!), and give us rest - cf. **2 Th 1:4-8; Re 20:10**

[There is another “device” of Satan, that often has deadly effect...]

IV. GET PEOPLE TO ENJOY EVIL COMPANY

A. REGARDING THIS “DEVICE” OF SATAN...

1. The wrong companions can defeat one’s effort to do good - cf. **1 Co 15:33**
2. Amnon was led astray by the counsel of his “friend,” Jonadab - **2 Sam 13:1ff**
3. Today, many Christians are hindered in their spiritual growth...
 - a. By the company they keep
 - b. By the activities in which such company engages

B. OUR BEST DEFENSE AGAINST IT...

1. Realize the danger of the wrong companions - cf. **Pr 13:20**
2. Heed the advice Paul made to the Corinthians:
 - a. “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers...” - **2 Co 6:14-16**
 - b. “Come out from among them...” - **2 Co 6:17-18**
 - c. “...perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” - **2 Co 7:1**

[Finally, let’s look at one more “device” of Satan...]

V. DISCOURAGE PEOPLE THROUGH UNCHRIST-LIKE CHRISTIANS

A. REGARDING THIS “DEVICE” OF SATAN...

1. This relates to Paul’s concern in our text - cf. **2 Co 2:6-11**
 - a. A sinning brother was disciplined, and had repented
 - b. The need now was for the church to confirm their love and forgiveness
 - c. Otherwise, Satan might take advantage of this situation:
 - 1) Defeating the church by their unwillingness to forgive
 - 2) Overcoming the weak brother by his being swallowed up in sorrow if forgiveness was not granted by the congregation
2. Today, Satan sometimes wins many souls by this “device”

- a. Christians who are unloving, unmerciful, and unforgiving, becoming stumbling blocks to others
- b. Christians who are apathetic, sluggish, in their service and devotion to God, adversely influencing new Christians

B. OUR BEST DEFENSE AGAINST IT...

1. Place our ultimate faith in the Lord, not in brethren - cf. **2 Ti 4:16-18**
 - a. This is not to suggest that brethren can't be trusted
 - b. But brethren are fallible, the Lord is not!
2. Remember that not all brethren set the proper example - e.g., **3 Jn 9-12**
 - a. Imitate the good examples
 - b. Don't let the bad ones discourage us

CONCLUSION

1. This is not an exhaustive list, rather only a sampling of "**The Devices Of Satan**"
 - a. The Scriptures certainly reveal much more about how the "Great Deceiver" works
 - b. There is also an interesting work of fiction that provides some interesting insights; it is called "The Screwtape Letters," by C. S. Lewis
2. I trust this study has been sufficient to show, however...
 - a. That our adversary is indeed strong
 - b. That ignorance of his devices make us susceptible
 - c. That if we are not diligent, he can indeed take advantage of us!

Remember, therefore, these important words of the apostle Paul...

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (Ep 6:10-13)

Transformed By Beholding

2 Corinthians 3:18

INTRODUCTION

1. What is the goal of the Christian life? What is it we are to become?
 - a. In **Ro 8:29**, we learn what is the ultimate goal of the Christian as predetermined by God
 - b. It is simply this: “...*to be conformed to the image of His Son*”
 - To become like Christ is our ultimate goal!
2. But how does this take place? How does one become like Christ? Take a look at these words of Paul:

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Co 3:18)

3. In this verse, with the help of its context, we learn how it is possible...
 - a. To reach that ultimate goal as predestined by God
 - b. To be “...*conformed to the image of His Son*”

[The passage which serves as our text (**2 Co 3:18**) is not an easy one, but since it reveals important insights into the goal of the Christian life, it is worth taking the effort to carefully consider what it says. For example, we first observe that...]

I. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS ONE OF TRANSFORMATION

A. “WE ALL...ARE BEING TRANSFORMED...”

1. The word “transformed”...
 - a. Comes from the Greek word **metamorphoo** {met-am-or-fo’-o}
 - b. Which means “to change into another form, to transform, to transfigure”
 - c. The word “metamorphosis” is derived from this word, which we use to describe the process of a caterpillar changing into a butterfly
 - d. It is used to describe Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration - cf. **Mt 17:1-2**
 - 1) He was “*transfigured before them.*”
 - 2) His face “*shone like the sun*” and His clothes “*became as white as the light*”
2. Christians likewise are to undergo a transformation...
 - a. Not only based upon our text (**2 Co 3:18**)
 - b. But also **Ro 12:1-2**, where our transformation is so we may “prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”
3. Note in our text that Paul said “we all”
 - a. Transformation is for ALL Christians
 - b. Not just for a select few!

B. “...TRANSFORMED INTO THE SAME IMAGE...”

1. Here we learn the object of our transformation, which is to become like Christ
2. As we noticed in **Ro 8:29**, this is part of God’s predetermined plan for those in Christ
3. Jesus intimated as such in **Lk 6:40** (“...everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.”)

C. “...FROM GLORY TO GLORY...”

1. This phrase suggests that our transformation is progressive
 - a. It does not happen all at once, but gradually
 - b. As Paul said we are “being transformed” (present tense), not “have been transformed” (past tense)
2. Transformation therefore involves a growth process
 - a. We expect those who have been Christians but a short time to have made only some progress
 - b. But we should also expect those who have been Christians a good while to have made much progress!
3. The Christian life is not to be static, but a dynamic process...
 - a. In which changes are taking place
 - b. In which a person is becoming more and more like their Savior, Jesus Christ!

-- **Compare this with what Solomon wrote about the just - Pr 4:18**

[When transformation does not take place, something is wrong, and it may be a failure to appreciate and utilize our second point gleaned from this passage...]

II. TRANSFORMATION COMES BY BEHOLDING

A. “WITH UNVEILED FACE, BEHOLDING AS IN A MIRROR...”

1. We must remember the context of Paul’s words to appreciate his point
 - a. He had alluded to how Moses out of necessity put a veil on his face when speaking to the people - cf. **2 Co 3:13**
 - b. For when Moses had gone to Mount Sinai to receive the commandments of the Lord, being in the presence of God made his face shine brightly - cf. **Exo 34:29-35**
2. In like manner our transformation takes place as we “behold...”
 - a. Note that we do it with “unveiled face”
 - 1) The Israelites were unable to behold any of the glory that shone from Moses’ face because his was veiled
 - 2) But Christians are able to look upon the Lord’s glory without impediment
 - b. “Beholding as in a mirror” is actually just one word in the Greek and has three possible different ways to be translated:
 - 1) “beholding as in a mirror (or glass)”
 - 2) “reflecting as in mirror”
 - 3) “beholding” (with no necessary reference to a mirror)

-- In view of the context and the comparison with Moses, the main idea seems to be the “beholding”, without any particular reference to a mirror
 - c. “Beholding” suggests contemplation and meditation, not a momentary glance
3. Thus the Christian life is to be one of contemplation, if transformation is to take place

- a. That Christians are to engage in contemplation is evident from several passages
 - b. Such as **Ph 4:8; Co 3:1-2**
 - c. Sadly, our fast-paced lifestyles often discourage the kind of contemplation needed to adequately “behold”
- **Without contemplation (beholding), however, there can be no transformation!**

B. “BEHOLDING...THE GLORY OF THE LORD”

1. Here is the object of our contemplation: the Lord’s glory!
 - a. It is not just the act of contemplation, but the object of our contemplation that transforms us!
 - b. Just as it was the “glory of the Lord” that caused Moses’ face to shine, so it is “the glory of the Lord” that transforms us!
 2. What is “the glory of the Lord” we are to behold?
 - a. It would involve the glory He manifested while on earth - cf. **Jn 1:14**
 - b. For the glory of the Lord is reflected in every aspect of His birth, life, teaching, miracles, good deeds, death, resurrection, ascension, and current reign as our king and high priest!
- Thus the Scriptures (especially the gospels) are the tools we use to “behold His glory”, as we read on...

C. “...JUST AS BY THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD”

1. This phrase reminds us of the role the Spirit has in our “beholding”
 - a. What we know of Jesus came through the ministry of the Spirit
 - 1) The Spirit’s ministry was to glorify Jesus - **Jn 16:12-14**
 - 2) He reminded the apostles, and inspired their writings - cf. **Jn 14:26; 1 Co 2:12-13**
 - b. So as we contemplate upon the Word, we are able to behold the glory of the Lord by virtue of what the Spirit has done!
2. Indeed, this may explain what Paul meant in saying “Now the Lord is the Spirit...” - **2 Co 3:17**
 - a. In verse **16**, he had said “...when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away”
 - b. But how can one “turn to the Lord” today?
 - 1) Only through the Spirit Whom the Lord Jesus sent to continue His work
 - 2) Paul had already spoken of “the new covenant...of the Spirit” which “gives life” - **2 Co 3:6**
 - a) One finds “liberty” (from sin, the Old Law, death) where “the Spirit of the Lord” is found - **2 Co 3:17**
 - b) For it is the new covenant of the Spirit that offers such things
 - c. In this context, the Spirit is therefore “the Lord” (verse 17) before Whom we must stand with “unveiled face” in order to be transformed
 - d. Of course, the “ministers” of this “new covenant...of the Spirit” were the apostles and inspired writers of the New Testament - **2 Co 3:5-6**
 - 1) Thus when we turn to their writings, we are turning to the Spirit!
 - 2) And when we turn to the Spirit, we are turning to the Lord!
 - 3) And when we turn to the Lord, we can behold Him in all His Glory!
 - 4) And when we behold His glory, we are gradually changed “into the same image from glory to glory”!

CONCLUSION

1. In Co 3:9-11 we are told...

“Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.”

2. This verse by Paul is yet another reminder that the Christian life is one that involves a transformation...
 - a. In which we are being “renewed”
 - b. And that the object of our “renewal” is to become like Jesus Christ!
3. From our study, I hope that we been impressed with the importance of “beholding” the glory of the Lord if we wish to be transformed
 - a. The Christian life must include contemplation and meditation upon the glory of the Lord as revealed by the Spirit through the apostles and writers of the New Testament
 - b. We cannot be transformed by infrequent and casual glimpses of the Lord’s glory!

Are you “*beholding...the glory of the Lord*”? Do you take the time to contemplate upon the glory of our Lord as revealed by the Spirit of God in the Holy Scriptures? Consider what time you spend in studying the Bible as you seek to answer these questions...

We Do Not Lose Heart

2 Corinthians 4:1

INTRODUCTION

1. Twice in the chapter in which our text is found Paul makes the statement “*we do not lose heart*” - **2 Co 4:1,16**
 - a. The phrase “lose heart” means to “be discouraged”
 - b. If anyone ought to have been discouraged as a Christian, it should have been Paul
 - 1) Consider some of the things he suffered - cf. **2 Co 11:23-29**
 - 2) And yet note what he says in **2 Co 4:8-9**
 - **I.e., Paul says “we do not lose heart”!**
2. However, it is not uncommon for Christians today to “lose heart” or to become discouraged
 - a. This is both strange and sad
 - b. Strange, because we do not experience near the hardships Paul did
 - c. Sad, because as Paul wrote in **Ga 6:9b**, “*...in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*”
3. In this lesson, I want us to examine various aspects of “losing heart”...
 - a. We shall consider some **signs** of losing heart
 - b. And identify **reasons** people lose heart
 - c. And then identify **Paul’s secret** to not losing heart

I. SIGNS OF “LOSING HEART”

A. LACK OF PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER (NOT SO VISIBLE TO OTHERS)...

1. Christ equated fervent prayer with not losing heart - cf. **Lk 18:1**
2. Most often, the first sign of losing heart is being haphazard in our prayer life
3. In contrast, a strong Christian life is characterized by fervent prayer
 - a. “With all prayer and petition pray at all times.” - **Ep 6:18**
 - b. “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it.” - **Co 4:2**
 - c. “Pray without ceasing.” - **1 Th 5:17**
 - d. “I want the men in every place to pray” - **1 Ti 2:8**

B. GROWING WEARY IN DOING GOOD (VISIBLE TO OTHERS)...

1. Paul equated this with losing heart in **Ga 6:9**
2. Some examples of growing weary in doing good...
 - a. Neglecting opportunities to help others in need - **Ga 6:10**
 - 1) Such as visiting the sick and afflicted
 - 2) Such as telling others of the gospel of Christ
 - b. Forsaking the assembling of ourselves together - **He 10:24-25**
 - 1) Which in itself is designed to encourage others
 - 2) And encourage ourselves as well!

[Both of these are clear symptoms that one is losing heart. But when there is **peace** to be found in prayer and **joy** to be found in doing good, what would cause some people to be discouraged and “lose heart”...?]

II. REASONS SOME “LOSE HEART”

A. ONE ANSWER: TRIBULATIONS...!

1. This is alluded to in Paul’s remarks to the Ephesians - **Ep 3:13**
 - a. He was concerned that they not lose heart over HIS tribulations
 - b. If such was possible over his troubles, how much more over their own!
2. Jesus warned in His parable of “The Sower” that some would be affected this way - **Mt 13:20-21**
3. Tribulations can take different forms
 - a. Both Paul and Christ had reference to those peculiar to Christians
 - 1) Ridicule, ostracism, even physical abuse by those of the world
 - 2) Sometimes even from those we least expect it...brethren who sin against us
 - Many Christians have “lost heart” being discouraged in these ways
 - b. But there are also tribulations common to all men
 - 1) Sickness and death
 - 2) Frustrations at job and home
 - These also take their toll

B. ANOTHER REASON: LAWLESSNESS...!

1. Jesus said this would happen in **Mt 24:12**
2. “Lawlessness” is lack of respect for God in both:
 - a. Attitude (toward God’s word)
 - b. Obedience (in doing God’s will)
3. Such “lawlessness” is infectious
 - a. For when many people demonstrate a lack of respect for God’s Will ...
 - b. ...it discourages the faithful and even encourages them to unfaithfulness - cf. **1 Co 15:33**
4. I suspect that today...
 - a. More Christians are “losing heart” because of lawlessness rather than tribulations
 - b. Because in our country...
 - 1) Most severe forms of tribulations are forbidden
 - 2) The most severe forms of lawlessness are practiced and even encouraged!

[Yet Paul stands before us as an example of one who despite the worst of tribulations, and living in the most lawless of cultures could still say “we do not lose heart”! What was Paul’s secret? For the answer we must look at the context in which his statement is found...]

III. SECRETS TO NOT “LOSING HEART”

A. APPRECIATE THE GLORIOUS NATURE OF OUR MINISTRY...

1. Paul refers to the relationship of this ministry and not losing heart in **2 Co 4:1**
2. “Therefore” refers to the previous chapter, in which Paul contrasted the **New Covenant** with

- the **Old - 2 Co 3:5-18**
3. Compare the **Old** with the **New...**

The OLD Covenant		The NEW Covenant
a. Of the letter	vs.	Of the Spirit (6)
b. Kills	vs.	Gives life (6)
c. Glorious	vs.	More glorious (7-11)
d. Ministry of condemnation	vs.	Ministry of righteousness (9)
e. Ministry passing away	vs.	Ministry which remains (11)
f. Ministry with a veil	vs.	Ministry which is unveiled (12-17)
g. Ministry which hardens hearts	vs.	Ministry which gives liberty (14-17)
h. Transformed one	vs.	Transforms all (3:18)
 4. The glory of the New is seen to be even greater when we remember what is said about the value of the Old! - cf. **Psa 19:7-11**
 - a. If this is true with what David had in his day (only part of the OT)...
 - b. ...then consider what must be true when we have the completed OT and NT!
 5. It is in view of such a wonderful ministry that prompted Paul to say “since we have this ministry, as we have mercy, we do not lose heart.”
- **Do we really appreciate the nature of the ministry we have in Christ? It would help us not to “lose heart”!**

B. REALIZE THE POWER OF CHRIST WHEN WE ARE WEAK...

1. Paul is referring to this when he makes the statement again in **2 Co 4:16**
 2. As we have seen, Paul suffered greatly for Christ - cf. **2 Co 4:8-9**
 3. But he saw it as opportunities for God’s power through Christ to be shown - cf. **2 Co 4:7, 10-11**
 4. This was a lesson Christ taught Paul, when he struggled over his “thorn in the flesh” - cf. **2 Co 12:7-10**
 - a. When we are weak, that is an opportunity to depend upon the Lord for strength!
 - b. So infirmities and tribulations can be occasions to rejoice, not despair!
- **Have we learned this lesson? It would help us not to “lose heart”!**

C. LOOK AT THINGS NOT SEEN...

1. This is what renewed Paul inwardly day by day (i.e., enabled him not to “lose heart”) - **2 Co 4:16-18**
 2. Things “not seen” refer to:
 - a. The “far more exceeding and eternal weight of **glory**”
 - b. Which makes our **affliction...**
 - 1) Light
 - 2) Momentary, temporary
 - c. This “glory” is further described in **2 Co 5:1-5**
 3. Looking at things “unseen” renewed Paul daily!
- **Do we let such a hope of glory renew us? Or do we lose heart because we never take the time to dwell an such things?**

CONCLUSION

1. In closing, read with me what Paul wrote to the Galatians...

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”

“For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

(Ga 6:7-9)

2. Hopefully, we will not grow weary and “lose heart” in our service to the Lord
 - a. But if you ever find ourselves growing weary...
 - b. Review what Paul wrote in **2 Co 3-5**, where you will find the secrets to not “losing heart”

We spoke briefly of the glorious nature of the ministry we have in Christ, a ministry of in which **we all** can be **transformed**. Have you begun this “transformation” process with your obedience to the gospel of Christ?... - cf. **2 Co 5:17; Ga 3:26-27**

The Ministry Of Reconciliation

2 Corinthians 5:18-21

INTRODUCTION

1. An important concept fundamental to the gospel of Christ is that of “**reconciliation**”
2. In **2 Co 5:18-21**, Paul expounds upon this subject...
 - a. He discusses how there is some sort of reconciliation between God and man
 - b. He describes the role he played in what he calls the “ministry” of reconciliation
3. There are a couple of questions I would like to address in this lesson...
 - a. Exactly what is the nature of the reconciliation between God and man?
 - b. What roles might we play in the gospel of Christ in the “ministry of reconciliation”?

[It is important that we first properly understand the meaning of “reconciliation” and its concept as it relates to God and man...]

I. THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION

A. DEFINING RECONCILIATION...

1. Vine’s definition of the word “**reconcile**” (Grk., *katallasso*)...
 - a. “It properly denotes to change, exchange (esp. of money)”
 - b. “Hence, of persons, to change from enmity to friendship, to reconcile”
2. He goes on to add: “With regard to the relationship between God and man, the use of this and connected words show that primarily reconciliation is what **God** (emphasis mine, *mac*) accomplishes...”
 - a. I.e., there is enmity between God and man (because of man’s sin, cf. **Isa 59:1-2**)
 - b. Yet the gospel proclaims how **GOD** has taken the initiative to reconcile man back to Himself
3. We should note this fine distinction:
 - a. God is not reconciled to man, as though God were partly to blame for the enmity
 - b. Rather, man is reconciled to God, for it is man who moved away from God!
4. Thus the reconciliation between man and God is slightly different, though the difference is important!
 - a. When people need to be reconciled to one another, it normally involves a situation where fault lies on both sides to some degree
 - b. Not so with the case between man and God; man has moved away from God, and it is man who needs to be reconciled back to God, not God back to man!

B. HOW RECONCILIATION IS MADE POSSIBLE...

1. It is possible because of the initiatives that **God** took first!
2. It is possible through Jesus Christ, in particular by His death for our sins!
 - a. Note these verses that teach reconciliation comes through Jesus - **2 Co 5:18; Co 1:**

19-20a

- b. Note these verses that teach reconciliation comes through Jesus' death on the cross
- **2 Co 5:19,21; Ro 5:10; Co 1:20b-22**
- c. In other words...
 - 1) God took Christ, who knew no sin, to represent our sin and to receive the punishment due for sin in His death on the cross
 - 2) So that we, who were enemies, alienated from God by our sins, might be reconciled back to God!
 - 3) And through Christ's death:
 - a) We might become the righteousness of God in Him - **2 Co 5:21a**
 - b) We might be holy, blameless and irreproachable in His sight, because our trespasses are not imputed to us - **Co 1:22; 2 Co 5:19; cf. Ro 4:6-8**
- 3. Indeed, reconciliation is possible because God has offered Jesus as a "**propitiation**" for our sins!
 - a. The word "propitiation" describes a sacrifice that is designed to appease for sins
 - b. It was used to describe those sacrifices that Gentiles offered to their gods
 - c. But in the NT, it is **God** who offers the "propitiation", not man!
 - 1) Cf. **1 Jn 2:1-2; 4:10**
 - 2) This illustrates the great love God has for us, and how far He has gone in trying to reconcile man back to Himself!

[It is when we understand the meaning and process of "reconciliation" (along with "propitiation") that we begin to appreciate the wonderful extent of God's grace and His love for mankind. But God went beyond just sending His Son to die on the cross as a propitiation designed to reconcile man back to God; He has also developed...]

II. THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

A. GOD SENT "AMBASSADORS"...

- 1. Note that Paul says God:
 - a. "...has given to us the ministry of reconciliation" - **2 Co 5:18b**
 - b. "...has committed to us the word of reconciliation" - **2 Co 5:19b**
 - There is a ministry (service) in which the word of reconciliation is to be made known to others!
- 2. The apostles in particular had this "ministry"...
 - a. The word apostle means "one sent"
 - b. In a special way they were sent to serve as Christ's "ambassadors" to the world!
- **2 Co 5:20**
- 3. Therefore, through the apostles...through their word...
 - a. God is pleading with us...
 - b. Christ is imploring us...
...be reconciled to God! - **2 Co 5:20**
 - **Thus God's great love is manifest in the fact that He also sent ambassadors to tell the world what He has done to reconcile man back to Himself**

B. HIS "AMBASSADORS" TODAY...

1. The “ministry of reconciliation” continues today!
 - a. For people are still lost in their sins
 - b. And God still loves those who are lost
 2. But who are God’s “ambassadors” today?
 - a. Who will take the “word of reconciliation” to others?
 - b. Who along with God and Christ will plead and implore: “Be reconciled to God!”?
 3. While there may not be “formal” ambassadors like the apostles were, Christ still has His ambassadors:
 - a. The people of God, who proclaim His praises - cf. **1 Pe 2:9-10**
 - b. Faithful individuals, who properly taught can teach others - cf. **2 Ti 2:2**
 - c. In fact, **all Christians** should be involved in “the ministry of reconciliation”!
 - 1) Some may “go”, while others may “send” - cf. **Ro 10:14-15**
 - 2) Some may “teach”, while others may “invite” - cf. **Jn 1:45-46**
- **In whatever way we serve, we must remember that we play an important role in God’s ministry of reconciliation today!**

CONCLUSION

1. How important is “**reconciliation**” and “**the ministry of reconciliation**”?
 - a. If God is “pleading” and Christ is “implores”, then it must be very important!
 - b. Indeed, the eternal destiny of one’s soul depends upon whether he or she has been reconciled to God!
2. Does this not move us?
 - a. First to be reconciled ourselves?
 - b. And then to participate in the ministry of reconciliation for the sake of others?
3. A final thought: The fact that God “pleads” and Christ “implores” us to be reconciled tell us some things that are very important for us to realize...
 - a. Reconciliation is not unconditional (we must respond!)
 - b. Reconciliation is not universal (some will be lost!)

Indeed, the grace and mercy of God offered in the death of His Son must not be received in vain! As Paul goes on to say:

“We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.” (2 Co 6:1)

Only through an obedient faith can we be sure to receive God’s grace, and have Jesus as the author of our eternal salvation! - cf. **He 5:9** Have **you** been reconciled to God?

Hearts Wide Open

2 Corinthians 6:11-13

INTRODUCTION

1. The apostle Paul was a man who loved his brethren...
 - a. He loved his **coworkers** - **2 Ti 1:2; Phile 1-2**
 - b. He loved the **congregations** he worked with - **2 Co 11:28**
-- **Because of his love, he was willing to give of himself and become close to them - e.g., 1 Th 2:7-12; 2 Co 12:14-15**
2. The passage in **2 Co 12:15** indicates that sometimes Paul's affection was one-sided; he elaborated on this in **2 Co 6:11-13**...
 - a. Paul's heart was "wide open" towards the Corinthians - **11**
 - b. But their love for him was "restricted" - **12**
 - c. His exhortation, therefore, was "be open"! - **13**
3. In our study, I would like to...
 - a. Offer reasons why we all need to have "**Hearts Wide Open**"
 - b. Explain why some may have "restricted hearts"
 - c. Suggest how we can be sure to have our "**Hearts Wide Open**"

[Let's first examine...]

I. WHY WE NEED "HEARTS WIDE OPEN"

A. BROTHERLY LOVE IS A MARK OF TRUE DISCIPLESHIP...

1. Note what Jesus said about brethren loving one another in **Jn 13:34-35**
2. Such love would be a visible sign by which the world would know Christ's true disciples
3. People with "restricted hearts" would have a difficult time displaying a visible love!

B. BROTHERLY LOVE IS AN INDICATION OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH...

1. Peter lists brotherly kindness (and love) among those graces involved in growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ - **2 Pe 1:5-8**
2. Whereas having a "restricted heart" is an indication of:
 - a. Spiritual immaturity - cf. **2 Co 6:13**
 - b. Spiritual ailments (shortsighted, even to blindness) - **2 Pe 1:9**

C. BROTHERLY LOVE IS AN ASSURANCE OF OUR SALVATION...

1. It is one way that we know we have passed from death to live - **1 Jn 3:16-19**
2. The one who truly loves is one who is born of God - **1 Jn 4:7-8**
3. Having "restricted hearts" would not be very reassuring in light of such verses!

[Notice **2 Pe 1:10-11**...If we want assurance, if we want to convince the world, we need to have

“Hearts Wide Open”! Now let’s consider some reasons...]

II. WHY SOME HAVE “RESTRICTED HEARTS”

A. IT MIGHT BE DUE TO “IGNORANCE”...

1. Some Christians may not have been give proper “follow-up”
2. Their follow-up may have been “unbalanced”
 - a. With an emphasis upon the externals
 - b. To the neglect of the internals
3. This cannot be our excuse any longer - **1 Jn 4:20-21**

B. IT MIGHT BE THE RESULT OF “SPIRITUAL AMNESIA”...

1. As Peter indicated in **2 Pe 1:9**
2. Which occurs when we...
 - a. Forget God’s love for us in purging us from our sins - **2 Pe 1:9**
 - b. Do not apply “all diligence” - **2 Pe 1:5,10**
3. With the passing of time, we may simply forget how important love is in the mind of God - cf. **1 Co 13:13**

C. IT MIGHT BE WE HAVE “SKELETONS IN THE CLOSET”...

1. Some people refuse to get close to others for fear some hidden secret may became known
2. If we have such “skeletons in the closet”, we had better get rid of them!
 - a. For they will eventually become known - cf. **Num 32:23**
 - b. It may be now or later, but eventually it will come out - cf. **1 Ti 4:24**
3. With skeletons removed, we won’t mind how well people know us
 - a. Besides, no one is perfect, and we can use the help brethren can give - **Ga 6:1-2**
 - b. Of course, this requires that brethren be trustworthy and not gossip!

D. IT MIGHT BE WE HAVE A “FEAR OF GETTING HURT”...

1. Loving does involve the “risk of rejection”
2. Paul experienced rejection, not only at Corinth, but also at Rome - **2 Ti 4:16**
3. But the joy of true fellowship and love can more than make up for the few times some may reject us
 - a. The apostle John had experienced both love and rejection -cf. **3 Jn 1-4,9-11**
 - b. But if he had never taken the risk of running into a “Diotrophes”, he would have never found a “Gaius”!

E. IT MIGHT BE THAT “TRUE CONVERSION HAS NOT TAKEN PLACE”...

1. As indicated before, brotherly love is an assurance of salvation; similarly, it is an indication of true conversion! - cf. **1 Jn 3:14-15**
2. Unfortunately, some people simply go through the “form” of conversion
 - a. Conforming, not converted
 - b. Out of convenience, not conviction
 - When this happens, there is no “life” to begin with!
3. Those with “restricted hearts” might need to examine themselves
 - a. A process that all Christians should undergo periodically - **2 Co 13:5**

- b. While there are reasons why true Christians may not love as they should (see above), we can't discount the possibility that the problem may be more serious!

[Whatever the reason, there is really no excuse for having "restricted hearts". What can be done to "open wide" our hearts? Here are some...]

III. SUGGESTIONS FOR HAVING "HEARTS WIDE OPEN"

A. LET GOD'S LOVE TEACH YOU...

1. This is what enabled the Thessalonians to excel in love - **1 Th 4:9**
2. So take to contemplate upon God's love for you!
 - a. As manifested through the blessings He has bestowed upon you
 - b. Especially the blessing of being His child! - **1 Jn 3:1**
 - c. And the blessing of Jesus as our propitiation - **1 Jn 4:9-10**
3. This will help motivate us to love as we ought - **1 Jn 4:11**

B. NEVER BE CONTENT WITH THE PRESENT STATE OF YOUR LOVE...

1. Paul did not let the Thessalonians rest on their laurels - cf. **1 Th 4:10**
2. The key idea is to "increase more and more"; or as Peter would say, "abound" - **2 Pe 1:8**
3. So we need to look for more people and more ways to express our love

C. LOVE TAKES TIME, SO TAKE TIME TO LOVE...

1. Take advantage of opportunities to be with brethren
 - a. I.e., **accept** invitations
 - b. E.g., to people's homes, potlucks, church services, gospel meetings, etc.
2. Make opportunities to be with brethren
 - a. I.e., **offer** invitations
 - b. E.g., practice hospitality - **1 Pe 4:8-9**

CONCLUSION

1. What is the condition of our hearts?
 - a. Are they "**restricted**", suffering from "spiritual hardening of the arteries"?
 - 1) Where the love of God is hindered from freely flowing?
 - 2) By the "plaques" of ignorance, selfishness, hypocrisy?
 - b. Or are they "**wide open**"?
 - 1) Where God's love flows freely
 - 2) Nourishing not only our own lives, but the lives of those around us!
- **May we all be "taught of God" to have "Hearts Wide Open"!**
2. For those who may not yet be Christians...
 - a. Consider God's love for you, which is wide open in Jesus Christ - **Jn 3:16**
 - b. Why not open wide your love for God...by keeping His commandments? - cf. **1 Jn 5:3; Jn 14:15**

True Repentance

2 Corinthians 7:9-11

INTRODUCTION

1. A prominent theme in the preaching of the Gospel is the call to repent...
 - a. Jesus wanted it to be preached in His name to all nations - **Lk 24:46-47**
 - b. Peter proclaimed the call to repent in his first two sermons - **Ac 2:36-38; 3:19**
 - c. Paul spoke of repentance to philosophers and kings - **Ac 17:30-31; 26:19-20**
2. However, the call to repentance is often neglected in modern day preaching...
 - a. By some who preach “faith only”
 - b. By some who in reaction stress “baptism”
3. One cannot truly preach the gospel of Christ without the call to repent; and yet...
 - a. What is repentance?
 - b. How is it produced?
 - c. What are some indications that repentance has occurred?

[Perhaps the most elaborate discussion on repentance is found in **2 Co 7:9-11**, which serves as the text for this lesson entitled “**True Repentance**”. Let’s begin by...]

I. DEFINING “TRUE REPENTANCE”

A. SOME MISCONCEPTIONS OF REPENTANCE...

1. That repentance is “sorrow”
 - a. **2 Co 7:9-10** shows that repentance is an **outcome** of sorrow
 - b. Sorrow leads to repentance; sorrow itself is not repentance
2. That repentance is “a changed life”
 - a. Some understand that repentance is a converted life
 - b. But **Ac 3:19** shows that repentance and conversion are two separate things
 - 1) Peter says “Repent therefore and be converted”
 - 2) If repentance is the same as conversion, then Peter is being redundant
 - c. As we shall see, the order is actually this:
 - 1) First, sorrow
 - 2) Then, repentance
 - 3) Finally, a changed life

B. A PROPER DEFINITION OF REPENTANCE...

1. W. E. Vine’s definition ...
 - a. “change of mind”
 - b. “involves both a turning from sin and a turning to God”
2. So think of repentance as simply “a change of mind” in which we **decide** to “turn from sin and turn to God”

- a. Which is **preceded** by sorrow
- b. And is **followed** by a changed life

[Repentance is therefore a decision of the mind in which one decides to change their life; but what prompts one to make such decision?]

II. PRODUCING “TRUE REPENTANCE”

A. IT IS “GODLY SORROW” THAT PRODUCES REPENTANCE...

1. This we glean from our text (**2 Co 7:9-10**); but note carefully:
 - a. It is not simply “sorrow”, but sorrow that is “godly”
 - b. For there is a sorrow that is “of the world”
2. Note the difference between “godly sorrow” and “worldly sorrow”...
 - a. “Worldly sorrow” is a **selfish** kind of sorrow
 - 1) E.g., when one is sorry because HE got caught
 - 2) E.g., when one is sorry because what one did made HIM look bad
 - In “worldly sorrow”, one is more concerned about SELF!
 - b. “Godly sorrow” is sorrow directed toward **God** (“godly” is lit. “according to God”)
 - 1) I.e., one is sorry because their actions are sins against a Holy God -cf. **Psa 51:4**
 - 2) Also, one is sorry for the price GOD must pay to have our sins removed
 - In “godly sorrow”, one is more concerned with GOD than self!
3. Some more differences...
 - a. “Worldly sorrow” produces regret; “godly sorrow” suffers loss in nothing
 - b. “Worldly sorrow” produces death; “godly sorrow” produces repentance to salvation
 - If “godly sorrow” leads to repentance, how best to produce this “godly sorrow” in others?

B. PRODUCING “GODLY SORROW” THAT LEADS TO REPENTANCE...

1. Nathan’s rebuke to David in **2 Sam 12:7-12** provides some insight ...
 - a. He made an appeal to God’s love (**7-8**)
 - b. He revealed the sin (**9**)
 - c. He warned of the consequences (**10-12**)
2. The Gospel of Christ, when properly taught, is designed to so produce “godly sorrow”, and in turn, repentance...
 - a. It appeals to God’s love as a basis for repentance - **Ro 2:4**
 - b. It reveals our sin - **Ro 3:23**
 - c. It warns of the consequences - **Ro 2:5-11**
3. Our best hope for producing repentance in others that leads to salvation is proclaim the gospel in its entirety
 - a. Not just the “commands” (believe, repent, be baptized)
 - b. Nor just the “promises” (remission of sins, eternal life, gift of the Holy Spirit)
 - b. But also the “facts” (man’s sin, God’s love, the coming judgment)

[If people are not responding to the “commands” of the gospel, perhaps we need to consider whether we are providing proper emphasis to the “facts” of the gospel. Finally, consider the...]

III. INDICATIONS OF “TRUE REPENTANCE”

A. OUR TEXT (2 CO 7:11) MENTIONS SEVERAL...

1. **“diligence”** (KJV, carefulness)
 - a. This can be defined as “earnestness, zeal, sometimes with haste accompanying it”
 - b. I.e., being quick to do what is right!
 - c. Examples of conversion in ACTS demonstrate this diligence in that every case described in detail shows people obeying the gospel after just one lesson!
2. **“clearing of yourselves”**
 - a. To clear one’s self of blame
 - b. E.g., quick to stop doing what is wrong, if such is the case
 - c. E.g., quick to respond to the offer of forgiveness when one realizes their guilt
3. **“indignation”**
 - a. This involves a sort of anger, or moral outrage
 - b. I.e., toward the SIN which required the repentance
4. **“fear”**
 - a. Lest the sin should be repeated
 - b. Lest the sin should not be entirely removed
5. **“vehement desire”**
 - a. I.e., a fervent wish
 - b. Especially to be right in God’s eyes
6. **“zeal”**
 - a. This involves an “eagerness and ardent interest in pursuit of something”
 - b. In this case, to turn from sin and turn to God
7. **“vindication”** (KJV, revenge)
 - a. As the NIV puts it, “what readiness to see justice done”
 - b. I.e., to do the right thing!

B. SUCH ARE THE “SIGNS” OF TRUE REPENTANCE...

1. Not apathy, not halfhearted service
2. But a desire to do “works befitting repentance” - **Ac 26:20**

CONCLUSION

1. Is this indicative of **our** repentance?
 - a. Can we look at our lives and see signs that we have really had “a change of mind”
 - b. That we have truly made “a decision to turn from sin and to turn to God”?
 - 1) If we have not yet obeyed the gospel ...we have not repented!
 - 2) If we have become slack in our service...we are in need of repentance!
2. If so, then we are in need of a healthy dose of “godly sorrow”, brought about by realizing...
 - a. God’s love for us
 - b. The fact we have all sinned
 - c. And the consequences if we do not repent!

May the love of God and the reality of the coming judgment move us all to “True Repentance”! The blessings for those who do repent are wonderful... - cf. **Ac 2:38-39; 3:19**

Giving Par Excellence

2 Corinthians 8:1-7

INTRODUCTION

1. An important element of Christian service is that of “giving”...
 - a. Following the NT pattern of taking up a collection, we lay by in store on the first day of the week - **1 Co 16:1-2**
 - b. With such benevolence we seek to provide for needy saints, and support the work of the church
2. What is the best way to **motivate** Christians to give liberally?
 - a. Many often appeal to OT examples of giving
 - b. E.g., the Israelites and how they were expected to tithe
 - c. The argument goes something like this:
 - 1) God required the Israelites to give a tithe (ten percent)
 - 2) In the New Covenant we enjoy greater blessings than those under the Old Covenant
 - 3) So our giving should be at least ten percent if not greater
3. Yet the apostle Paul, seeking to inspire the Corinthians to abound in the grace of giving, used the example of the churches of Macedonia - **2 Co 8:1-7**
4. Shouldn't we do the same?
 - a. Why use an example where people gave out of **compulsion** (as was the case in the OT practice of tithing)...
 - b. ...when our giving is to be a **freewill** offering? - cf. **2 Co 8:12; 9:7**
 - Indeed, I believe the Macedonians provide a much better role model when it comes to Christian liberality!

[With that in mind, let's take a closer look at the churches at Macedonia who are set before us as examples of “**Giving Par Excellence**”...]

I. WHO WERE THE CHURCHES OF MACEDONIA?

A. THE CHURCH AT PHILIPPI..

1. We read of its beginning in **Acts 16:11-40**
 - a. With the conversion of Lydia and her household
 - 1) Note her hospitality - **Ac 16:15**
 - 2) Was this an indication of things to come?
 - b. And the conversion of the Philippian Jailor and his family
 - 1) He too showed hospitality - **Ac 16:34**
 - 2) Another example which may help us to appreciate what we learn later on
 - c. Paul then had to leave abruptly because of the persecution - **Ac 16:39-40**
2. The epistle to the Philippians was written to them, in which we learn...

- a. They helped Paul throughout his ministry - **Ph 1:3-5; 4:10,14-18**
- b. They had continued to suffer for Christ - **Ph 1:27-30**

B. THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA...

- 1. We read of its beginning in **Ac 17:1-10**
 - a. Many were converted - **Ac 17:4**
 - b. Persecution against them soon arose - **Ac 17:5-9**
 - c. Requiring Paul to leave suddenly - **Ac 17:10**
- 2. The epistles to the Thessalonians were written to this church
 - a. They too had continued to have trouble - **1 Th 2:14; 2 Th 1:4-5**
 - b. They excelled in the matter of brotherly love - **1 Th 4:9-10**

[With this background on the churches of Macedonia, we should not be surprised that they are presented as a case of “**Giving Par Excellence**”. As we return to our text (**2 Co 8:1-7**), let’s seek to answer the following question...]

II. WHAT CHARACTERIZED THEIR GIVING?

A. THEY GAVE “SACRIFICIALLY” - 2 Co 8:2-3a

- 1. We have seen that they were in the midst of great affliction (**2**)
- 2. They were experiencing poverty themselves (**2**)
- 3. Yet they gave “beyond their ability” (**3a**)
- 4. This they were not expected to do - cf. **2 Co 8:12-13**

B. THEY GAVE “JOYFULLY” - 2 Co 8:2

- 1. Somehow they had discovered “the joy of giving”
- 2. Perhaps they took to heart the teaching of...
 - a. The Lord relating to the blessedness of giving - **Ac 20:35**
 - b. James to the value of persecution - **Ja 1:2-4**
- 3. In any case, this is the kind of giving that God loves - **2 Co 9:7**

C. THEY GAVE “VOLUNTARILY” - 2 Co 8:3

- 1. They were “freely willing”
- 2. This is the kind of giving God requires today...
 - a. We can not command people to give against their will - cf. **2 Co 8:8**
 - b. We can only command how it is to be done to help needy saints abroad - cf. **1 Co 16:1-4**
 - c. Giving must come from “a willing mind” - **2 Co 8:12**
 - d. Giving must never be done “begrudgingly” or because you “have to” - **2 Co 9:7**
 - e. Otherwise, you might as well not give at all

D. THEY GAVE “PERSISTENTLY” - 2 Co 8:4

- 1. As Paul says, “implored us with much urgency”
- 2. They wouldn’t take “no” for an answer (or for an easy way out!)
- 3. With the Philippians, we know their giving to Paul persisted throughout his life

E. THEY GAVE “THEMSELVES” - 2 Co 8:5

1. Perhaps this explains how they were able to give as they did!
2. They gave themselves “first to the Lord”
 - a. When a person does this, they do not worry about “the cost of giving”
 - b. For they have the promise of Jesus in **Mt 6:25-34**
3. Having given themselves first to the Lord, it is only natural that they would give “then to us (others)”
 - a. For such is a mark of true discipleship - cf. **Jn 13:34-35**
 - b. And it is a mark of true love for God - cf. **1 Jn 4:20-21**

CONCLUSION

1. What an example to motivate us in the art of giving!
2. Here are churches that were not expected to give because of their own poverty
 - a. Yet they gave:
 - 1) Sacrificially
 - 2) Joyfully
 - 3) Voluntarily
 - 4) Persistently
 - 5) Themselves
 - b. They gave:
 - 1) To support preachers in the spread of the gospel
 - 2) To help needy Christians in a foreign land
 - 3) To help an old preacher in his time of need
3. Their example is much better than the “tithing” in the OT!
 - a. And there are others we could have referred to: Jerusalem, Antioch, etc.
 - b. Of course, the supreme example is that of Jesus Christ - cf. **2 Co 8:9**
4. Brethren, what kind of givers are we?
 - a. Those who give out of compulsion, with a grudging obligation?
 - b. Or those who like the Macedonians “begged” for the opportunity to help?
-- **May the churches of Macedonia serve to remind us of what is involved in “Giving Par Excellence”!**

Finally, have you thought about what kind of **recipient** you are? Christ became poor that we might be rich (**2 Co 8:9**). Have you accepted His gracious offer properly, or has it been offered in vain...

“We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: “In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Co 6:1-2)

Let the Jews on the Day of Pentecost be your example of “receiving par excellence” as how one ought to receive the grace of God today! - cf. **Ac 2:36-41**

Becoming A Cheerful Giver

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

INTRODUCTION

1. In the NT, Jesus and His apostles call us to a high standard of **giving**...
 - a. The teaching of Jesus - **Lk 6:30,34-36; 14:12-14**
 - b. The example of Paul - **Ac 20:33-35; Ga 2:9-10**
 - c. The teaching of Paul - **Ga 6:9-10; Ep 4:28; 1 Ti 6:17-19**
2. The NT is also filled with notable examples of liberal giving...
 - a. Churches in Jerusalem, Antioch, Macedonia, etc.
 - b. Individuals like Barnabas, Dorcas, etc.
3. Today, however, it is common for people to give **sparingly**, and even then, it is often **begrudgingly**...
 - a. But Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive - **Ac 20:35**
 - b. I.e., giving can be a joyful experience, even when one is poor himself - cf. **2 Co 8:1-5**
4. What is the secret to giving joyfully and willingly? I.e., how can we truly become **cheerful givers**?
 - a. In **2 Co 9:6-15** Paul discusses the matter of giving to help needy Christians
 - b. In this passage, we find several principles and truths which, when kept in mind, can help us become **cheerful givers**

[The first principle to remember is...]

I. GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER (2 Co 9:7)

A. SINCE THIS IS TRUE...

1. A “cheerful giver” can rest assured that God will watch over him and provide for his own needs!
2. Note how God cares for the one who gives to others...
 - a. As David taught in **Psa 41:1-3**
 - b. As the LORD spoke through Isaiah in **Isa 58:6-11**

B. SINCE THIS IS TRUE...

1. One who gives in service to God need not worry - cf. **Mt 6:30-33**
2. For “God loves a cheerful giver”, and watches over those He loves! - cf. **Lk 12:6-7**

[Understanding this principle should certainly encourage us to give more cheerfully! Here is another principle to keep in mind...]

II. GOD PROVIDES SEED FOR THE SOWER (2 Co 9:6,8-11a)

A. VERSE 6 IS OFTEN MISUSED...

1. By those who teach “the gospel of health and wealth”
2. Who seek to motivate people to give (sow) more by saying this passage teaches they will receive (reap) more
3. Implying that if you give more so you can have more for your own consumption!

B. BUT THE CONTEXT TEACHES OTHERWISE...

1. What’s the purpose of reaping “bountifully”?
 - a. Look carefully at **verse 8**...
 - 1) To have all sufficiency (what you need), yes...
 - 2) But then to “have an abundance **for every good work**”!
 - I.e., not to spend the abundance on one’s self, but to help others!
 - b. Now consider **verse 9**...
 - 1) This is quotation from **Psa 112:9**; yet note the context - **Psa 112:5-9**
 - 2) Paul uses this verse to further confirm that the abundance would be for every good work (not self-consumption)!
2. And so in **verses 10** and **11**...
 - a. Paul prays that God will supply and multiply the seed sown
 - 1) Supply the seed to **sow** to begin with
 - 2) And multiply (**reap** bountifully) the seed
 - b. Why?
 - 1) To increase the fruits of their righteousness (to increase their good works!)
 - 2) To be enriched in everything “*for all liberality*” (so they can give even more to others!)

C. HERE IS THE POINT...

1. We ought to be willing to give cheerfully...
 - a. Because the more we give...
 - b. ...the more God will enable us to give!
2. Now bear in mind that giving is not limited to money
 - a. It may be that God may empower us to give, not financially, but in other ways
 - b. Such as with our talents, time, etc.
3. But the point remains the same...
 - a. The more we give ourselves to others in the service of God
 - b. The more He will bless us to be even more useful!

[Indeed, the ability to give (because we have been materially blessed) is a gift from God, one that should be used liberally (**Ro 12:6-8**). Knowing that those who give liberally will be blessed to give even more should help us become “cheerful givers”! Here is something else that ought to encourage us...]

III. GIVING PRODUCES THANKSGIVING & GLORY TO GOD (2 Co 9:11b-15)

A. OFFERED BY THOSE WHOSE NEEDS ARE BEING MET...

1. Not only thanking God, that their own needs were supplied
2. But also glorifying God, because of His grace at work in the lives of the givers
 - a. Note that **cheerful giving** is an indication the grace of God has been active in one’s life

- b. This is point stressed by Paul repeatedly - cf. **2 Co 9:8,14; 8:1-2,6-7**
- **Thus the people we help will be moved to thank God and praise Him for His working in our lives!**

B. SHOULDN'T THIS HELP US TO GIVE MORE CHEERFULLY?

- 1. For what disciple is there who does not want to give glory and thanksgiving to God?
- 2. Like any good work, we can bring glory to God by our giving! - cf. Mt 5:16

[Another thing to remember in order to be a “cheerful giver” is that...]

IV. GIVING INCREASES AFFECTION (2 Co 9:14)

A. ESPECIALLY WHEN GIVING TO HELP YOUR BRETHREN...

- 1. They understand that your giving is a sign of God's grace in you
- 2. And this causes them to love you and long for you even more
- 3. As a case in point, consider Paul and the Philippians - **Ph 1:3-13**

B. IT CAN ALSO HAVE THE SAME AFFECT AMONG NON-CHRISTIANS...

- 1. They see the truth of what you teach by your example
 - a. We teach a gospel concerning One Who became poor, that we might become rich - cf. **2 Co 8:9**
 - b. Who would believe such a story? Perhaps those who have seen it illustrated in the lives of His disciples, that's who! - e.g. **2 Co 8:1-2**
- 2. They may be more receptive to the gospel when they hear it, even though they may at first ridicule you - cf. **1 Pe 2:12**

[One last point I wish to glean from our text as to how we can become “cheerful givers”...]

V. PURPOSEFUL GIVING LEADS TO CHEERFUL GIVING (2 Co 9:7)

A. PLANNING ONE'S GIVING IS KEY TO GIVING CHEERFULLY...

- 1. They are less likely to give “grudgingly or of necessity”
 - a. Because they have already set aside what they want to give
 - b. They are not caught off guard when someone asks them to give
 - 2. This is how Paul instructed the Corinthians in their giving
 - a. To lay by in store on the first day of the week - **1 Co 16:1-4**
 - b. To prepare their gift beforehand, so when it was time to give, the resources were ready - cf. **2 Co 9:5**
 - 3. An early Christian apologist, Aristides, wrote of how even slaves were able to give cheerfully through purposeful planning: “And if there is any that is a slave or a poor man, they fast two or three days and what they were going to set before themselves they send to them (Christians in prison), considering themselves to give good cheer even as they were called to give good cheer.” (Apology 15)
- **So plan your giving if you wish to give cheerfully!**

B. A PRACTICAL SUGGESTION FOR PLANNED GIVING...

1. Plan your giving to help needy people the same way we plan our giving to provide for the collection for the saints
 2. As you prosper, set so much aside for “individual benevolence”
 - a. E.g., start a separate account into which you put aside a certain amount each pay period
 - c. E.g., or send that amount to some charitable organization
- **However you plan your giving, it is much easier to give when you are prepared to give!**

CONCLUSION

1. In our text, then, we find the key to **“Becoming A Cheerful Giver”**; it involves keeping in mind...
 - a. God loves a cheerful giver
 - b. God provides seed for the sower
 - c. Giving provides thanksgiving and glory to God
 - d. Giving increases affection between giver and recipient
 - e. Giving becomes one of generosity when it is planned
2. I hope that I have challenged your thinking in regards to your own giving, and how we can become “cheerful givers”
3. To a great extent, what kind of givers we are depends upon what kind of recipients we are!
 - a. For unless we receive the grace of God in our own lives, we will be unlikely to give gracefully to others
 - b. With that thought in mind, please remember this warning:

“We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: ‘In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Co 6:1-2)

Have we received the grace of God **“in vain”**? Have you received the grace of God **“at all”**? - cf. **Ac 22:16**

Weapons Mighty In God

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

INTRODUCTION

1. In our text, Paul writes of a “war” in which Christians are engaged...
 - a. A war where weapons are used that are “mighty in God”
 - b. A war that has as its objective to:
 - 1) “pull down”
 - 2) “cast down”
 - 3) “bring into captivity”
2. Exactly what is this “war”? What “weapons” do we use?
3. Understanding the answers to these questions can help us be more useful and productive “soldiers” in the “army” of God

[Let’s begin our study by first identifying...]

I. THE SPIRITUAL WARFARE IN THIS TEXT

A. NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH THAT FOUND ELSEWHERE...

1. It is not quite the same war described in **Ro 7:23** or **1 Pe 2:11**
2. In those passages, a different war is being discussed
 - a. One in which there is a battle raging inside each one of us
 - b. In those passages, the warfare is one that is **internal**

B. THE WARFARE IN OUR TEXT IS EXTERNAL...

1. In which we are engaged in battle **with others**
 - a. The context of 2 Corinthians should make this clear
 - b. For Paul is defending his apostleship and ministry against false teachers
2. This “war” is one which involves:
 - a. “arguments”
 - b. “knowledge”
 - c. “thoughts”-- Such is the “field of battle” in this war
3. This is a war that is fought whenever we try to...
 - a. Lead a brother out of error
 - b. Convert someone to Christ
4. The “objective” in this war as described by Paul:
 - a. To defeat any argument or position which is “against the knowledge of God” (what He has revealed) - **2 Co 10:5a**
 - b. To bring a person who has held such thoughts...
 - 1) “into the captivity to the obedience of Christ” - **2 Co 10:5b**

- 2) I.e., to become a “servant of Christ”

[Such is the “warfare” of this passage. You might not have thought of it in this way, every time we are trying to teach someone, we are engaged in a “battle” for Christ! How are we to “fight” this war?]

II. THE “WEAPONS” OF THIS WARFARE

A. WHAT THEY ARE NOT: “CARNAL” OR “FLESHLY”...

1. E.g., weapons that may be used “**against**” the flesh...
 - a. Such as the sword, gun, bomb, etc.
 - b. These weapons may take “people” captive, but not necessarily their “thoughts”!
 - c. Their “bodies” may be enslaved, but not their “minds”
 - This was the flaw inherent in the Crusades
2. E.g., weapons that are “**of**” the flesh...
 - a. E.g., hatred, contentions, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions
 - b. Such emotions are “works of the flesh” and are referred to in **Ga 5:19-21**
 - c. Unfortunately, these “works of the flesh” are often used as weapons to win arguments
 - 1) At best all they can do is silence the opposition (through intimidation)
 - 2) But at what cost?
 - a) The opposition is not saved (which should be our goal)
 - b) And the Christian who uses such “weapons” falls under the condemnation of **Ga 5:21**

-- **So our weapons are not to be “carnal”, either against the flesh or of the flesh**

B. BUT WE DO HAVE WEAPONS, AND THEY ARE “MIGHTY IN GOD”...

1. First and foremost, we have “*the sword of the Spirit*” - **Ep 6:17**
 - a. Which is the Word of God
 - b. Unless we use this Word, all our efforts will be in vain
 - c. For it is the Word of God that is...
 - 1) Living and powerful - **He 4:12**
 - 2) Able to produce faith - **Ro 10:17; Jn 20:30-31**
 - 3) Able to save our souls - **Ja 1:21**
 - 4) Able to cause one to be born again - **1 Pe 1:23**
2. We must also “*speak the truth in love*” - cf. **Ep 4:15**
 - a. I.e., presenting the Word with a Christ-like attitude
 - b. This involves such qualities as:
 - 1) The “meekness and gentleness of Christ” (as used by Paul himself, **2 Co 10:1**)
 - 2) Also “patience” and “humility” (as Paul taught **2 Ti 2:24-26**)
 - c. These “qualities of character” are indeed powerful “weapons”
 - 1) They can do wonders to diffuse volatile situations
 - a) Notice **Pro 15:1**
 - b) In contrast, consider **Pro 26:21**
 - 2) They can make it possible for people to:
 - a) Discuss controversial issues without controversial behavior
 - b) Disagree without being disagreeable
 - c) Argue without being argumentative

- d) Contend without being contentious

C. TO BE EFFECTIVE, WE NEED THE “WHOLE” ARMOR OF GOD...

1. As soldiers of Christ, we need...
 - a. Not just the **sword** of the Spirit
 - b. But also the **fruit** of the Spirit - cf. **Ga 5:22-23**
 - Otherwise, we might do ourselves harm in mishandling the Word of God!
2. We need to “adorn” the truth of God with meekness, gentleness, patience and humility
 - a. Do not think that we are going to persuade people by the “force” of our actions
 - 1) Such is likely only to intimidate them into silence or reluctant acquiescence
 - 2) Unless they come to “believe with all their heart”, any obedience is futile - cf. **Ac 8:36-37**
 - b. If they are teachable, they must be won over by the “truth” of our arguments, assisted by the “application” of that truth in our own conduct

CONCLUSION

1. So the weapons that we have which are “**mighty in God**” include such graces as “meekness,” “gentleness,” “patience,” and “humility”
2. Such “weapons” greatly enhance the opportunities for our greatest weapon (**Truth**) to do its job; and should be utilized whether it be in...
 - a. Our evangelistic efforts
 - b. Our Bible classes
 - c. Our church business meetings
 - d. Our personal discussions
 - e. Public debates in defense of the truth
3. This is not to suggest there is never a time for “righteous indignation”; but I fear that what is often excused as righteous indignation may really be:
 - a. **Self**-righteous indignation
 - b. Our **carnal** nature
 - ...getting in the way of the progress of truth!

May we be quick to use the “meekness and gentleness of Christ” in all our efforts to win others to the truth, for they are truly “**Weapons Mighty In God**”!

A Different Jesus, Spirit, And Gospel

2 Corinthians 11:4

INTRODUCTION

1. In **2 Co 11:1-4**, Paul expresses his grave concern for the brethren in Corinth...
 - a. With a godly jealousy, he is fearful their minds may have been corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ - **2 Co 11:1-3**
 - b. With a touch of irony, perhaps even sarcasm, he refers to their seeming willingness to put up with someone who might teach **“another Jesus”**, **“a different spirit”**, even **“a different gospel”** - **2 Co 11:4**
 - 1) He most likely has reference to “Judaizing teachers”
 - 2) These were Jewish believers in Christ who taught Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses (cf. **Ac 15:1-29**; **Ga 2:1-5**)
2. The problem Paul faced is not unique to his day and age; even today...
 - a. There are people who teach a “Jesus” different than the one revealed in the Bible
 - b. Many claim to be led by the “Spirit”, who in fact may be heeding a different “spirit”
 - c. What is often proclaimed as the “gospel”, has been altered in its message so as to be different than the gospel proclaimed by the apostles of Christ
3. The danger of leaving “the simplicity that is in Christ” is very real, and so I wish to...
 - a. Identify how some actually preach **“A Different Jesus, Spirit, And Gospel”**
 - b. Briefly review what the Bible teaches about Jesus, the Spirit, and the gospel of Christ

[Let's begin with the idea of...]

I. A DIFFERENT JESUS

A. A DIFFERENT JESUS AS PREACHED BY SOME TODAY...

1. Some “non-Christian” religions, of course, teach a different Jesus
 - a. That Jesus was at best simply a good man or teacher (e.g., Judaism)
 - b. That Jesus was at best a prophet of God (e.g., Islam)
2. But some professing “Christian” religions also teach a different Jesus
 - a. That He is a created being (Jehovah Witnesses)
 - b. That He is a god among many gods (Mormons)
 - c. The “Jesus Seminar” has sought to redefine who Jesus was, by stripping Him of many of the teachings and miracles attributed to Him in the Bible

B. THE TRUE JESUS IS THE ONE REVEALED BY HIS APOSTLES...

1. As eyewitnesses who spent time with Him, only they are qualified to testify as to who Jesus was - cf. **Ac 10:39-41**; **2 Pe 1:16**; **1 Jn 1:1-2**
2. Their testimony, as recorded in the New Testament, reveal Jesus to be:
 - a. The Christ, the Son of the Living God - **Mt 16:16**

- b. The One who was with God, and was God - **Jn 1:1-2**
- c. The One in Whom all the fullness of God dwells bodily - **Co 2:9-10**
- d. The One Who died for our sins and rose from the dead, as foretold in the Old Testament scriptures - **1 Co 15:1-4**
- e. The One Who teaches that many will be lost, and requires an obedient faith - **Mt 7:13-14,21-23; 28:20**

[In truth, the only reliable historical record that we have of Jesus is the New Testament, written by those who either knew Jesus intimately, or were personal acquaintances of His apostles. If we desire to know the “true” Jesus, it is to them we must turn! As we continue, consider some thoughts related to...]

II. A DIFFERENT SPIRIT

A. MANY PEOPLE PROFESS TO BE LED BY THE SPIRIT TODAY...

1. It is quite common to hear people say, “The Spirit led me to do this, believe that...”
 - a. They believe the Holy Spirit leads through impressions, intuition, etc.
 - b. They believe the Holy Spirit is so leading people in all the denominations
2. Yet these same people teach conflicting doctrines
 - a. Some believe the Spirit tells them pray to Mary; others say the Spirit tells them that is blasphemous
 - b. Some believe the Spirit confirms to them that Joseph Smith is a prophet, others are convinced the Spirit tells them he is was a false prophet
 - c. In one highly publicized case, one church said the Spirit led them to sell their church building at a set price; but another church wanting to buy the building said the Spirit told them the price was too high!

-- **We can appreciate the wisdom of John’s admonition to “test the spirits” - 1 Jn 4:1**

B. THE TRUE SPIRIT IS THAT WHICH INSPIRED THE APOSTLES...

1. Who was to guide them into all the truth - **Jn 16:12-13**
 2. Who did not lead them through impressions that could be misinterpreted, but through audible and sometimes visual means that could be confirmed miraculously
 - a. Note that the Spirit “said” to Philip... - cf. **Ac 8:29**
 - b. Note that while Paul’s “impression” was to go one way, the Holy Spirit made it clear where He wanted them to go - cf. **Ac 16:6-7**

-- I.e., the Spirit did not, and does not lead people in ways that might be confused with impressions or wishes of the human spirit
 3. The Spirit led the apostles into “all” the truth
 - a. Paul had proclaimed the “whole counsel of God” - **Ac 20:27**
 - b. Peter had been given “all things that pertain to life and godliness” - **2 Pe 1:3**
 - c. The faith was “once for all” delivered unto the saints - **Ju 3**
 4. The Spirit “confirmed” the completed revelation by signs and wonders - **He 2:1-4**
 - a. Therefore our task is to “give the more earnest heed” to those things revealed by the Spirit through the apostles and prophets of the New Testament
 - b. Or as per Jude, to “contend earnestly for the faith once delivered” - **Ju 3**
- **We can “test the spirits” by comparing them with the revealed and confirmed Word of God, for that is how the Spirit speaks to us today!**

[So much religious confusion is the result of people listening to their own “human spirit”, when what we need to do is return to that Word of God which the Spirit revealed in the first place! Finally, it saddens me deeply to say that many sincere people are teaching...]

III. A DIFFERENT GOSPEL

A. MANY PEOPLE PROCLAIM A DIFFERENT GOSPEL TODAY...

1. Two extreme views of the gospel are often preached
 - a. Salvation by works (i.e., we are saved by meritorious deeds)
 - b. Salvation by faith alone (i.e., obedience not required)
 - Actually, these two extremes are simply overreactions against each other
2. To illustrate, consider the subject of baptism
 - a. Some teach that baptism without faith saves
 - b. Others teach that faith without baptism saves
 - Jesus taught that both faith and baptism saves - cf. **Mk 16:16**
3. As we seek to proclaim the true gospel, we need to remember that any change results in a “perverted gospel”, against which Paul warned - **Ga 1:8-9**

B. THE TRUE GOSPEL IS THAT WHICH THE APOSTLES PROCLAIMED...

1. Their gospel contained “**facts to believe**”, such as:
 - a. Jesus was crucified for our sins - **1 Co 15:1-3**
 - b. He was raised from the dead - **1 Co 15:4**
 - c. He is exalted as Lord and Savior - **Ac 2:33-36**
 - d. He is coming again to execute judgment and be glorified - **2 Th 1:7-10**
2. Their gospel also contained “**commands to obey**” (cf. **2 Th 1:8; 1 Pe 4:17**; in which we learn the gospel must be “obeyed”); such commands include:
 - a. Believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God - **Ac 8:35-37**
 - b. Confessing your faith in Jesus as Lord - **Ro 10:9-10**
 - c. Repenting of your sins - **Ac 2:38; 3:19; 17:30**
 - d. Being baptized for the remission of your sins - **Mk 16:15-16; Ac 2:38; 22:16**
 - e. Remaining faithful to the Lord until death - **Mt 28:19-20; Re 2:10**
3. And their gospel contained wonderful “**promises to receive**”, including:
 - a. The remission of sins - **Ac 2:38; 3:19**
 - b. The gift of the Holy Spirit - **Ac 2:38; cf. Jn 7:37-39; 5:32**
 - c. The gift of eternal life - **Ro 6:23**

CONCLUSION

1. The warning against receiving “**A Different Jesus, Spirit, And Gospel**” is a timely one...
 - a. There are literally thousands of different denominations, teaching conflicting doctrines
 - b. Many have developed doctrines that are distinctly different as it relates to:
 - 1) Who Jesus is
 - 2) How the Spirit reveals His truth to us
 - 3) What constitutes the gospel of Jesus Christ

2. Who, and what, is the true Jesus, Spirit and gospel? - cf. **2 Co 11:4**
 - a. **The true Jesus** is the One the apostles preached
 - b. **The true Spirit** is the One received by the early Christians, Who guided them into the truth which is fully and completely revealed in the pages of the New Testament
 - c. **The true gospel** is that one proclaimed by the apostles and received by the early church

3. Brethren, be careful lest “your minds...be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ”!
 - a. Satan would love to deceive us like he did with Eve
 - b. He has his own “ministers of righteousness” working in his behalf - cf. **2 Co 11:13-15**

The only way to avoid being deceived is to be like the Christians in Jerusalem who “*continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine...*” (**Ac 2:42**). Whose doctrine are you heeding?

Paul's Thorn In The Flesh

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

INTRODUCTION

1. In **2 Co 12:7-10**, Paul tells of “*a thorn in the flesh*” which greatly bothered him...
 - a. It was something for which he prayed the Lord to remove from him
 - b. The Lord did not do so, but gave Paul an answer that greatly encouraged him
2. We might not be able to know exactly what the “thorn” was, but there are some valuable lessons to be gleaned as we consider...
 - a. Why this “thorn” was given to Paul
 - b. Paul's initial reaction to the “thorn”
 - c. His reaction to the answer given him by the Lord

[In this study we shall consider each of these things, starting with the question...]

I. WHAT WAS PAUL'S “THORN IN THE FLESH”?

A. SEVERAL POSSIBILITIES HAVE BEEN PROPOSED...

1. A pain in the ear or head (Tertullian)
2. Unruly fleshly lusts (medieval commentators)
3. Stammering speech (MacKnight)
4. Malarial fever (Ramsay)
5. Acute eye problems (Farrar and others)
 - a. Such as a severe form of ophthalmia (inflammation of the eyeball)
 - b. Based upon comments in **Ga 4:13-15; 6:11**
 - c. Possibly brought on initially by the blinding vision on the Damascus road

B. I BELIEVE IT WAS THE “INFIRMITIES” PAUL SUFFERED...

1. I.e., the persecutions he suffered as an apostle of Christ
2. This view was proposed by **Chrysostom**: “And so by the “messenger of Satan,” he means ...those who contended with and fought against him, those that cast him into a prison, those that beat him, that led him away to death); for they did Satan's business.” (Homilies 26)
3. Peter H. David, in **Hard Sayings Of The Bible**, offers several reasons for this view:
 - a. In the OT adversaries are sometimes referred to as “thorns in your sides” (**Num 33:55; Judg 2:3**); there is no metaphorical use of “thorn” for illness or temptation
 - b. The term “messenger” in Paul's writings always refer to a person
 - c. The basic topic of **2 Co 10-13** is Paul's opponents, those who were troubling the Corinthians and Paul himself
 - d. Paul parallels the “thorn” with a “weakness” (or infirmity) in which he will glory; in the context of **2 Co 10-13** he connects his infirmities or weakness with persecution - **2 Co 11:30-33; 12:10; 13:3-4**
4. With Peter David I conclude that the “thorn” was “the opponents who dogged Paul's tracks

throughout his mission, confusing churches every time he left one church to plant another.”
(Hard Sayings Of The Bible)

[Whatever the “thorn”, it was “a messenger of Satan”. That is, it was something from Satan with evil intent. Yet it is evident that God allowed it to remain! This leads us to ask...]

II. WHY WAS THE “THORN” GIVEN?

A. LEST PAUL BE “EXALTED ABOVE MEASURE” (2 Co 12:7)...

1. Paul had been blessed to receive many revelations...
 - a. On the road to Damascus - **Ac 9:3-6**
 - b. In Jerusalem - cf. **Ac 22:17-21**
 - c. At Troas - **Ac 16:8-10**
 - d. In Corinth - **Ac 18:9-11**
 - e. In Jerusalem again - **Ac 23:11**
 - f. On his way to Rome - **Ac 27:22-25**
 - g. The vision of Paradise - **2 Co 12:1-6**
2. It would have been quite easy...
 - a. For Paul to be filled with pride over these revelations
 - b. For the church to exalt him too highly

B. TO “BUFFET” HIM (2 Co 12:7)...

1. The word “buffet” means “to strike with the fist”; thus to strive against, contend
 - a. Paul “buffeted” himself to keep his body under control - cf. **1 Co 9:27**
 - b. But this was something brought upon him by Satan
3. This external “buffeting” was allowed to remain, to keep Paul humble

C. THERE IS A PRACTICAL LESSON RELATED TO HUMILITY...

1. Humility is a necessary trait for God’s people - **Lk 18:13-14; 1 Pe 5:5-6**
2. Sometimes it is useful to have “outside help” to keep us humble!

[There are other lessons to be learned, which we will see as we consider...]

III. PAUL’S REACTION TO THE “THORN”

A. BEING HUMAN, HE WANTED TO GET RID OF IT! (2 Co 12:8)...

1. He pleaded with the Lord three times to remove it
2. Just as the Lord Himself prayed in the garden at Gethsemane - **Lk 22:39-43**
3. Notice the interesting similarities between Paul and the Lord...
 - a. Both prayed three times
 - b. Both did not receive the answer for which they prayed
 - c. But they both received answers that were sufficient...
 - 1) An angel came to minister to Christ
 - 2) The Lord told Paul:
 - a) *“My grace is sufficient for you”*
 - b) *“My strength is made perfect in weakness”*

B. THIS SHOULD REMIND US OF CERTAIN PRINCIPLES OF PRAYER...

1. We are to pray with persistence - **Lk 18:1-8**

2. We are to pray in earnest - **Mt 7:7**
3. We are to pray specifically (as Paul did)
- **Yet God knows what is best for us, so the answer may not be what we wish**

[Valuable lessons, indeed; but even more lessons can be gleaned as we consider...]

IV. PAUL'S REACTION TO THE LORD'S ANSWER

A. TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THE LORD'S ANSWER (2 Co 12:9a)...

1. ***"My grace is sufficient for you"***
 - a. The Lord would give Paul what he "needed"
 - b. But not necessarily what he "wanted"!
2. ***"My strength is made perfect in weakness"***
 - a. I.e., it is in times of weakness and hardship that the Lord's strength can be experienced most completely!
 - b. For in such times we really come to depend upon the Lord, and not upon our own strength or wisdom!

B. NOW CONSIDER PAUL'S REACTION...

1. ***"I will boast in my infirmities"*** - **2 Co 12:9b**
 - a. Rather than bemoan his trying circumstances, he will glory in them!
 - b. For it is in such infirmities that he has the opportunity to experience the power of Christ in his life as He helps him deal with them!
2. ***"I take pleasure in infirmities...for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."*** - **2 Co 12:10**
 - a. Infirmities can be a time for rejoicing! - cf. **Ro 5:3a**
 - b. For that can be a time in which to experience the strength Christ gives, and the development of character that pleases Him! - cf. **Ro 5:3b-5**; also **Ja 1:2-4**

CONCLUSION

1. It may be impossible to determine exactly the nature of **"Paul's Thorn In The Flesh"**...
 - a. Some commentators believe that this ambiguity was by design
 - b. Otherwise, those with other "infirmities" may think the spiritual lessons are not for them
2. But from a perplexing passage, we can glean powerful principles applicable to all...
 - a. In time of infirmity, pray!
 - b. But don't be surprised if the answer to your prayers are similar to those given to Paul
 - 1) "My grace is sufficient for you"
 - 2) "My strength is made perfect in weakness"
 - c. The Lord may choose not to remove the infirmity...
 - 1) Instead, He may choose to give you the strength to endure it
 - 2) If so, then rejoice that power of Christ rests upon you!

As we close, think about the Lord's statement as it relates to the problem of **sin**, and the **salvation** He offers (***"My grace is sufficient for you"***)... - cf. **Ti 3:4-7**

Examine Yourselves

2 Corinthians 13:5

INTRODUCTION

1. As Jeremiah lamented over the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, he called for the people to examine themselves and turn back to the Lord - **Lam 3:40-41**
2. In teaching on the proper observance of the Lord's Supper, Paul wrote that it was to be a time for self-examination - **1 Co 11:27-31**
3. Paul later challenged the Corinthians to "*examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves.*" - **2 Co 13:5**
 - a. In doing so, he employs the present tense for the verbs "examine" and "prove"
 - b. Indicating that such examination was to be an ongoing activity!
4. This should naturally raise some important questions...
 - a. Why should we examine ourselves?
 - b. By what standard should we examine ourselves
 - c. What sort of questions should we be asking ourselves?

[In this lesson, I would like for us to focus our attention on this call to "**Examine Yourselves**". As we do so, let's answer the questions already raised, beginning with...]

I. WHY SHOULD WE EXAMINE OURSELVES?

A. TO DETERMINE WHETHER WE ARE IN THE FAITH...

1. Paul said, "*Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith.*"
 - a. The expression "in the faith" refers to be a faithful Christian
 - b. Thus we are to examine whether or not we are remaining faithful to the Lord!
2. We need to remember that the danger of drifting is ever present
 - a. It is possible to drift away if we neglect our salvation - cf. **He 2:1-4**
 - b. It is possible to develop an evil heart of unbelief - cf. **He 3:12-14**
3. What our text implies, however, is that it is possible to **know** of one's standing before God
 - a. In fact, the Bible was written for this purpose, that we might know
 - b. One book in particular has this purpose in mind - **1 Jn 5:13; 2:3; 3:14,24**

B. TO DETERMINE IF JESUS CHRIST IS IN US...

1. Paul challenged the Corinthians to consider whether Jesus Christ was in them
2. That Christ indwells the Christian is a wonderful thought
 - a. It was promised by Jesus Himself - **Jn 14:21-23**
 - b. It begins when we put Christ on in baptism - **Ga 3:26-27**
3. We may wonder at times "how" He indwells, but the key here is...
 - a. To know that He does!

- b. To realize there are ways we can KNOW whether He does!
- Which is why we need to periodically examine ourselves!

C. TO DETERMINE IF WE ARE DISQUALIFIED...

1. It is a given that Christ is in Christians, unless they have become “disqualified”
 2. What does “disqualified” mean?
 - a. Here is how some other translations read...
 - 1) “ye be reprobates” (KJV, ASV)
 - 2) “you fail the test” (NASV, NIV)
 - b. Literally, “not standing the test”, and in the context it refers to the test of...
 - 1) Being in the faith
 - 2) Having Christ in you
 3. This verse is simply another among many that reveal that a Christian can indeed fall away from grace!
 - a. Paul warned of falling from grace - cf. **Ga 5:4**
 - b. Peter likewise warned of falling from one’s own steadfastness - cf. **2 Pe 3:17**
 - c. Jesus described what would happen to those branches who did not bear fruit - **Jn 15:1-2,6**
- Again, through self-examination one can **know** what their true condition is!

D. TO DETERMINE IF WE REALLY KNOW OURSELVES...

1. As Paul calls for self-examination, he asks “*Do you not know yourselves...?*”
 - a. We can easily fall into the trap of self-deception - e.g., **Ja 1:22-25**
 - b. The religion of such a person is “useless” - **Ja 1:26**
2. Only through periodic self-examination can we avoid deceiving ourselves!

[The need is ever present to “examine yourselves”, to “prove yourselves”. Our next question...]

II. BY WHAT STANDARD SHOULD WE EXAMINE OURSELVES?

A. NOT BY THE ESTIMATE OF SELF...

1. We cannot trust solely upon what we may think of ourselves
 - a. We are approved only if the Lord commends us - cf. **2 Co 10:18**
 - b. Therefore even though we might “think” we are right, we are not the final arbitrator - cf. **1 Co 4:4**
 2. We can be wrong in our basic assumptions, which can lead to wrong conclusions about ourselves
 - a. Paul had thought persecuting Christians was pleasing to God - **Ac 26:9-11**
 - b. There will be many people at the Judgment who thought they were pleasing God during their lifetime - **Mt 7:21-23**
- **We must look for a standard outside of ourselves by which to examine ourselves!**

B. NOT BY THE ESTIMATE OF MEN...

1. We cannot compare ourselves with others, or trust their approval
 - a. To compare ourselves with others is unwise - **2 Co 10:12**
 - b. The approval of others is a small thing - **1 Co 4:3**

2. People are often wrong in their thoughts and evaluations
 - a. The majority will find themselves lost on the day of judgment - **Mt 7:13-14**
 - b. Even many religious will be surprised - **Mt 7:21-23**
- **We must still look for yet another standard by which to examine ourselves**

C. WE MUST TRY OURSELVES BY THE STANDARD OF GOD'S WORD...

1. Again, it is the commendation of the Lord that makes one approved - **2 Co 10:18**
2. It is the Lord who is the ultimate Judge - **1 Co 4:4; 2 Co 5:10**
3. As the Lord Himself has said, we will be judged by His words - **Jn 12:48**

[The only appropriate standard to use when we examine ourselves is the Word of God. We cannot trust our feelings, or what others might say. Finally, let me share some...]

III. QUESTIONS TO HELP US EXAMINE OURSELVES

A. IS CHRIST IN ME...?

1. Have I put Him on in baptism? - **Ga 3:27**
2. Am I keeping His commandments? - **Jn 14:21**

B. ARE THE "MARKS" OF DISCIPLESHIP PRESENT IN MY LIFE...?

1. Am I abiding in His word? - **Jn 8:31**
2. Do I love my brethren like Christ loved me? - **Jn 13:34-35; 1 Jn 3:14-19**
3. Am I bearing fruit? - **Jn 15:8**
 - a. Such as the fruit of the Spirit - **Ga 5:22-23**
 - b. Such as the fruit of our lips in praising God - **He 13:15**
 - c. Such as the fruit of good works - cf. **Ti 2:14; 3:8,14**

C. DO I HAVE THE ATTITUDE OF THOSE WHO WERE TRUE DISCIPLES...?

1. Under inspiration, Paul wrote **2 Co 13:6**; what was his frame of mind?
2. We can glean the mind of a true disciple from **Ph 3:7-14**
 - a. We read of his goal in life (**7-11**)
 - b. We read of his attitudes in attaining that goal (**12-14**)
3. We will have this frame of mind if we are "in the faith" and "Christ is in us" - cf. **Ph 3:15-17**

CONCLUSION

1. Other questions might be appropriate to ask when examining ourselves, but I hope this illustrates how we need to use the Word of God to "prove" ourselves
 2. Consider the sad plight of those who are "reprobate", "disqualified", who "fail the test" ...
 - a. Paul describes some of them in **Ph 3:18-19**
 - b. Because they set their mind on earthly things, their end is destruction!
- **How much better to be like those described in Ph 3:20-21!**

To ensure that you will not be "disqualified", then frequently "**Examine Yourself**" in the light of God's Word!