2 Corinthians

Chapter 1

1:10. “hope.” The Greek verb is elpizō (#1679 ἐλπίζω). To “hope” is to have a desire for, or an expectation of, good, especially when there is some confidence of fulfillment. It is used that way both in common English and in the Bible. However, the Bible often uses the word “hope” in another way—to refer to the special expectation of good that God has in store for each Christian in the future that is based on the Word and promises of God and therefore guaranteed to occur. This includes the “Rapture,” receiving a new, glorified body, and living forever on a new and wonderful earth. Today, the ordinary use of “hope” allows for the possibility that what is hoped for will not come to pass. However, when the Bible uses the word “hope” to refer to things that God has promised, the meaning of “hope” shifts from that which has a reasonable chance of coming to pass to that which will absolutely come to pass.

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

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

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

1:23. “soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is more broadly used of the individual himself while including his thoughts and emotions. Thus, while the verse could read something such as, “I call on God as a witness, on my life” (HCSB; NAB), or as “I appeal to God as my witness” (NET), using the word “soul” shows us that Paul is calling God to witness his testimony based on all who Paul is in himself and in his thoughts and emotions. All of us should strive to live such godly lives.
that our lives can be called upon as a witness for Christ. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

Chapter 2

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

2:11. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Ἄντιοχος (Antiochus), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

2:12. “in the Lord.” The Greek is ἐν κυρίῳ (ἐν κυρίῳ), and can either be “in the Lord” or “by the Lord.” The versions and the commentators are divided. The essence is pretty much the same. If the door was opened “by the Lord,” then the Lord gave Paul an opportunity to spread the Good News. If the door was opened “in connection with” the Lord, there was an opportunity to spread the Good News. The reading “by the Lord” is much easier to understand from the point of view of the English reader, and if the door was originally opened “in connection with” the Lord, no doubt the Lord was working to make that happen, so “by the Lord” would not be far off the mark.

This is a wonderful section because it shows how we humans have to deal with, and control, our emotions. Even though Paul was no doubt very excited about the opportunities he had to spread the Word, he was still very agitated because he could not find Titus. We humans are very complex creatures, and can have a host of different emotions and feelings all at the same time.

The preposition en can make the noun “Lord” definite, so there is no need for the article “the” in the Greek.

2:13. “in my spirit.” This is the use of “spirit” (pneuma) that refers to the mental and emotional life. [For the uses of pneuma, “spirit,” see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]

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

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

A Triumph was only given when certain conditions were met in the war. Although these too changed a little over time, the basics remained the same. The war had to be fought on foreign soil. The war had to be a significant victory for Rome in which at least 5000 enemy soldiers were killed and territory was added to the state. The conquering general had to be of the rank of “dictator,” “consul,” or “praetor.” The victory had to end the war so decisively that the Roman army could come home. If these conditions were met, the Senate of Rome would vote to decide whether the commander would be given a Triumph.

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

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

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

Following the troops was the conquering general. He wore dress traditionally
associated with the statue of Jupiter Capitolinus and the ancient Roman monarchy, which
was the purple and gold toga, a laurel crown, and red boots. He held laurel branches and
perhaps a staff representing civil authority, and rode in a chariot usually drawn by 4
beautiful horses. The chariot had ceremonial status, and would be kept for years, just like
in modern times revered memorial pieces are kept for years. For example, the chariot the
Augustus Caesar rode in was used by Nero some 50 years later. The general was
accompanied by his immediate and extended family. Smaller children might ride in the
chariot with him, while older boys might ride on the horses pulling the chariot. The idea
was to convey that the victory was a victory for Rome itself, and supported the whole
social order of Rome and its families. The general who was honored with a Triumph was
then referred to as vir triumphalis (“a man honored with Triumph”) for the rest of his life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2:15. “on the road to salvation.” The Greek is the present passive participle of σῶζω (σῶ-ζω, #4982) “to rescue; to save; to make whole.” The verb is present tense in this verse because “saved” is not just referring to our everlasting life, but is referring to the broader spectrum of salvation, which includes being rescued from troubles here on earth and being given everlasting life in new bodies when the Lord returns. Our full salvation even likely includes the rewards in the future Kingdom that we receive for our faithful service. The verb is a passive participle because God is the one who actually saves us as we have faith in Him. For more on “saved,” see the commentary on Romans 8:24 and Romans 10:9, “will be saved.” The phrase “on the road to salvation,” or “on the way to salvation” is due to the present participle, which indicates the action is ongoing, and the “road” is taken from the metaphor about the Triumph—the victors and the captives would walk down the road, some to salvation, some to destruction (cp. Ralph Martin, *Word Biblical Commentary: 2 Corinthians*).

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

2:17. “adulterating.” The Greek is καπηλεύω (καπηλεύω, #2585 καπηλεύω) It was used frequently of tavern-keeping [because the owners would water down the wine.] “trade in, peddle, huckster (of retail trade)…Because of the tricks of small tradesmen the word almost comes to mean adulterate (so Vulg., Syr., Goth.).” (BDAG). We felt “adulterate” was the best translation here. The emphasis is not on “peddling,” as if evangelism was wrong. The point is that the street hucksters “watered down” what they sold to make a profit, so the product was adulterated, which is exactly what Paul says to the Corinthians he did not do. We feel that the Vulgate, Syriac, and Gothic translations got that point.

Chapter 3

3:1. “recommend.” The Greek word is συνίστημι (συνίστημι, #4921 συνίστημι). It has a number of different meanings but in this context it means to recommend (cp. note on Rom. 16:1, Col. 1:17).

3:4. “in God through Christ.” Literally, the Greek reads, “we have such confidence through Christ towards God,” but this is difficult to read in English. We would not say, “I
have confidence towards God,” rather, we would place our confidence in God. An alternate translation might read, “we have such confidence as this directed to God through Christ.”

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

All seven times that Moses ascended and descended Mount Sinai are in Exodus. First time: 19:3 up; 19:7 down. Second time: 19:8 up; 19:14 down. Third time: 19:20 up; 19:25 down. Fourth time: 20:21 up; 24:3 down. Between the fourth and fifth time up Moses went part way up with the elders of Israel: 24:9. Fifth time: 24:15 up (he was there 40 days and 40 nights (24:18) and got the Ten Commandments on stone (32:15) during this fifth trip; 32:15 down. Sixth time: 32:31 up; 32:35 he is commanded to go down. Seventh time: 34:4 up; 34:29 down.

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

Exodus 34:29 tells us that Moses’ face was radiant. The Hebrew text says that Moses’ face shined (the Hebrew word is qaran (Strong’s #7160) and means “to shine.”) Moses’ face was reflecting the brilliant light of God, and it was shining so brightly that the Israelites, including Aaron the High Priest, were afraid of him (Exod. 34:30), and he had to cover his face with a veil (Exod. 34:33, 35). What Exodus does not specifically say, but just assumes, and Corinthians tells us explicitly, is that the radiance of Moses’ face eventually went away.

3:11. “passing glory, much more that which remains has permanent glory.” The Greek phrasing here is very interesting. Paul uses two participles (passing away, remaining) and two prepositions (through, in) but no verbs. Literally, it would read, “the one fading away, through glory; the one remaining, in glory.” This effectively paints a picture of the old covenant temporarily passing through glory, fading away, while the new covenant remains in glory. The preposition dia (#1223 διά), meaning “through,” creates a feeling of the law momentarily journeying across the realm of glory, never meaning to permanently reside there—the Law is portrayed not as an end in-of-itself, but as a progression on the journey to bring us to Christ:

Galatians 3:23-25 (ESV)
Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian…

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

3:17. “the Lord is the Spirit.” In the New Testament, Jesus is sometimes called “the Spirit” because of the new spirit-powered body he got after the resurrection. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

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

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

Chapter 4

4:2. “the hidden, shameful things.” The Greek reads “the hidden things of shame,” which is the figure of speech antemereia, “exchange of cases.” The adjective “shameful” is put in the nominative as the object of a genitive, to give it more force. However, that construction is somewhat confusing when translated into English.

“adulterating.” The Greek word is dolō (♯1389 δολόω; pronounced dŏ-lō’-ŏ), and it meant to ensnare, to change something so that it would be false, thus distort, falsify, adulterate. Dolō was used of the innkeepers who would overly water down the wine so they could make more profit, a practice that was well known in Corinth. Corinth had many inns and restaurants because it was one of the largest trading emporiums in the ancient world, host of the Isthmian Games (one of the PanHellenic Games of the Ancient world, along with the Olympic, Pythian, and Nemean Games; the Isthmian Games were held every two years, the year before and the year after the Olympic Games), and a well-known sexual hot spot (a common Latin word for a prostitute was a “Corinthian Girl”). The whole first part of verse 2 fits the behavior of many innkeepers: they were involved in hidden, shameful activities of all sorts, they lived crafty, deceitful lives, and they adulterated the wine they served to make more money for themselves. In comparison to those kinds of people, Paul writes that he does not live like that, and does not adulterate the Word of God, i.e., water it down to where it is not the Word but is something false. [For more on inns and innkeepers, see commentary on 1 Peter 4:9].

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

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

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

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

It is unfortunate that most people are not aware of the “spiritual atmosphere” that surrounds them. They think “this is just the way life is.” A major goal of the Devil is to make the “atmosphere” we are immersed in ungodly, so that people are led into ungodliness, and live in it without being aware of it or have any desire to change it. A good example is a person who watches sit-coms on TV daily and thinks that cutting people down with words and being sarcastic to others is simply the way to communicate. Only when we are aware that the Devil creates the atmosphere that we live in do we become aware of it, not live according to it, and try to change it. [For more on the age we live in, see commentary on Rom. 12:2]. For other names of the Slanderer (Devil) and what they mean, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

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


“on the face of Jesus Christ.” When Moses saw the glory of God, that glory was reflected on his face and was so bright it frightened the people of Israel (see commentary, 2 Cor. 3:7). Now we have the opportunity to see and reflect the glory of God, which is not on the face of Moses, but the face of Jesus Christ. We must look at Jesus to reflect the glory of God.

4:7. “this treasure.” The treasure is the “knowledge” of the glory of God (verse 6).

4:10. “carrying around in our body the putting to death of Jesus.” As Lenski points out, “the putting to death of Jesus” makes Jesus the object of the phrase instead of the subject, but both are grammatically acceptable, and both make sense, it just seems to be more in line with the subject matter being discussed to make the putting to death the subject and Jesus the object of the phrase.

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

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

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


4:14. **“to be with Jesus.”** We have added “to be” in italics to best capture the meaning of the word “with,” and to avoid a misunderstanding about the phrase “raise us with Jesus.” The word “with” is *sun* (#4862 σῦν), and means “in association with,” “in accompaniment with.” We will be raised *to be with* Jesus, to be in his company. The “with” here does not mean a temporal with, as in, “we were raised with Jesus, when he was raised.” The verb is future tense, we “will be” raised, hence, it is speaking of a future rising. As Kistemaker has written, “not that Jesus was raised again, but that Jesus as the firstfruits of all his people guarantees their resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20, 51, 53). Jesus will secure the glorious state of all believers and be with them in God’s presence (11:2; Eph. 5:27; Col. 1:22; Jude 24).”

**Chapter 5**

5:1. **“here on earth.”** The Greek is *epigeios* (#1919 ἐπίγειος), and means existing upon the earth, earthly, terrestrial. It is an expression of locality, not of character, as if “earthly” were contrasted to “godly,” or some such. Our house, our tent, is here on earth.

“our tent.” The Greek is the genitive of apposition. “The house of our tent,” where the house and the tent are the same thing. Our earthly body is called a “tent” because it is so temporary in nature.

5:2. **“continually groan.”** The verb “groan” is in the present active. We groan and groan.

5:5. **“prepared.”** The Greek is *kateregazomai* (#2716 κατεργάζομαι), and one of the meanings is to cause to be well prepared, prepare someone (BDAG). The Christian is well prepared for receiving a new, everlasting body.

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

5:6. **“confident.”** The Greek is *tharrheō* (#2292 θαρρέω), and in this context it refers to “confidence.” It is important to notice that Paul has repeated “confidence” twice in the sentence, which starts in verse six and ends in verse eight. When it comes to what happens when we die, we must have confidence in what God says, because we cannot find out on our own. Paul is especially confident because he rightly points out that God has given us the gift of holy spirit as a guarantee of our wonderful future life. The gift of holy spirit is born inside us (1 Pet. 1:23), and sealed inside (Eph. 1:13), and can be outwardly manifested, proving that we do indeed have it (see commentary on 1 Cor. 12:7ff; 1 Cor. 14:5).

5:7. **“trust.”** The Greek is *pistis* (#4102 πίστις), a noun. In both ancient secular Greek and in the Bible, *pistis* means “trust, confidence, assurance.” We like to use “trust.” When the people of the first century got the letters of Paul, they did not say, “What is pistis?” as if Paul had invented a new word. *Pistis* was in common use in the Greek language, and had been for centuries. It is in the writings of the Greeks, including
Aristotle, Plato, Herodotus, etc. The first definition of *pistis* in the *Liddell and Scott Greek Lexicon* is “trust in others.”

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

A lot of the reason there is confusion about “faith,” is the definition of faith changed in the Middle Ages. The ancient and biblical definition of *pistis* differs from the modern definition of “faith.” If both *pistis* and *fides* mean “trust,” how did “faith” come to be defined in our modern culture as “firm belief in something for which there is no proof” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th edition)? The actual historical process is long and tedious, but the concept is simple. The Church asked people to trust doctrines that were neither logical nor clearly backed up by Scripture. For example, one such doctrine is “transubstantiation,” the doctrine that the “host” (bread) and wine that are used in Roman Catholic Mass become the body and blood of Christ is not logical, nor is it backed up with solid Scriptural exegesis. Priests know this, and so they ask people to “Take it by faith,” meaning, “Believe this even though there is no proof.” That happened with enough doctrines that over time, “belief in something for which there is no proof” became the accepted definition of “faith.” This is especially harmful because people then import that made-up definition of “faith” back into the Bible, although that is not what “faith” means when used in the Bible.

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

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

When it comes to spiritual realities, such as what happens when a person dies, the only truly reliable source is God and His Word. The wise Christian learns to live his life
by trusting God, and not relying only on what he sees in the world around him. [For more
on faith, see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenherr, Don’t Blame God! Chapter 10, “Keep the Faith,”
and for information on the difference between “faith” and the “manifestation of faith,”
see commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:9].

5:8. “For.” When the whole Bible is read as a document, it is clear that when a person
dies, he is dead in every sense of the word, with no conscious awareness, and is awaiting
the resurrection. This is contrary to the teaching of traditional Christianity, which is that
when a person dies, his soul goes to heaven or hell. Through the centuries, Christians
have focused on a few verses of Scripture to support their claim that dead Christians are
alive in heaven, and 2 Corinthians 5:8 is one of those verses. Many Christians read 2
Corinthians 5:8 and think it is saying that when a Christian dies he goes immediately to
heaven to be with the Lord. However, that is not what the verse is saying. The first thing
we must do to understand the verse is to read it carefully. The Apostle Paul said, “We
would rather be away from the body and home with the Lord.”

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

To fully understand the verse and realize it is not saying we are at home with the
Lord the moment of our death, it is important to read it in its context. In 5:1, Paul refers
to the human body as a “tent,” because it is temporary. Also in verse one, Paul says that if
our earthly home, our tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God that is everlasting.
We can tell from the context that the new “building” we have is our new body
Paul is not speaking of being a disembodied spirit. He is speaking of getting a new dwelling—his
new body.

When we study the whole Bible on the subject of the dead, we learn that no one
gets a new body until the Rapture or the resurrections. God promises that each Christian
will have a new body (Phil. 3:21), but we do not get it until the Lord comes for us and we
are raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15:42-44). People die as mortals, but are raised as
immortals. They die weak, but get up powerful. This is very clear in 1 Corinthians 15:42-
44 (REV): “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in
incorruption. 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is
raised in power. 44 It is sown a soul body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a soul
body, there is also a spiritual body.” Paul, like the rest of us, wants to have a new spiritual
body, so he wrote: “For in this tent [the body] we groan, longing to put on our heavenly
dwelling” (2 Cor. 5:2).

One of the great keys to properly understanding this whole section of Scripture is
verse 3: “because indeed, after we are clothed, we will not be found naked.” The
understanding of what Paul means by “naked” is important to the understanding this
whole section of Scripture. It is clear we are not “naked” while we are alive. 2
Corinthians 5:1 said we living people have a “house,” a “tent,” but it is not the one we long for, which is our house from heaven. Then verse two said, while we are “in this [house; our body], we continually groan.” Then verse three points out that when we are clothed with our house from heaven, we will not be found naked. But we are not naked now; we are in an earthly house. So if we are not naked now, and we are not naked when we get a house from heaven, when are we naked? We are “naked” when we die, because that is when we do not have a body. Then verse four makes it clear that we should not want to die. Paul says, “not that we want to be unclothed.” As difficult as this life is, we do not want to be “unclothed,” that is “naked,” or dead. Instead, what we want is the last part of verse four, that “what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.” Our mortality is swallowed up by life when the Lord returns, we get everlasting bodies, and we are finally at home with the Lord.

We might well ask, “How can we know that God will raise us from the dead and give us new, everlasting bodies?” The answer is that God guarantees it. Verse five says: “Now the One who prepared us for this very thing is God, who gave us the spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” God prepared us for everlasting life, and even gave us a guarantee that we would obtain it. Verses six and seven then highlight the confidence we have in God, and that we have to live by trusting Him and not by what we see.

Verse eight starts by reiterating the confidence we have in God, and finishes with a kind of restatement of what was already said in verse two: that we deeply desire to be clothed with our habitation from heaven. As we have seen, this will happen when the Lord comes and gets us.

“**we are of good courage.**” This is the second time in this long sentence (that started in verse six), that Paul has said he was confident that he would receive a new, everlasting body and mortality would be swallowed up by life. Paul has the right attitude about the Word of God. We need to be confident in what God says in His Word, and not be doubters. In spite of his confidence in the future, Paul would like the Rapture now, a point he makes clear by saying he preferred to be away from his body and home with the Lord (see commentary on confident; 5:6).

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

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

“**to be away from this home.**” The Greek is ekdēmeō (#1553 ἐκδημέω), and it refers to movement from one geographical area to another: to leave one’s home or place of residence and go to another. It is a very appropriate word for the movement that Christians will see at the Rapture from their old body (or the grave) to the new place of everlasting residence.
“to be at home.” The Greek is ενδημεω (#1736 ἐνδημέω), and it refers to being or staying at home, being among one’s own people, to live in one’s own country. It implies having a fixed place to live, which will certainly be the case when we get our new everlasting bodies. We will “be at home” with the Lord.

5:9. “whether at home or away from home, to be pleasing to him.” At first reading this verse can be confusing. We know we can do things that displease God in this life. But why would the verse say that we make it our aim to be pleasing to Him when we are “away from home,” which the context makes clear is when we are in our new bodies and home with the Lord? The answer is in verse ten, that the reference to being away from “home” (i.e., away from our earthly body) is referring to the time immediately after the Rapture when we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and are judged for what we have done in our body.

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

5:10. “must.” The Greek word is δεῖ (#1163 δεῖ), and refers to what is necessary. “Must” is a good translation. We cannot avoid or decline the Judgment. God created us for His purpose, and each person has a moral obligation to serve the Creator.

“be exposed.” The Greek word is φανερῶ (#5319 φανερῶ), to be made manifest, to be revealed, to be exposed. Furthermore, it is in the passive voice, so it is not something that we do, but something that is done to us. “To be made manifest means not just to appear, but to be laid bare, stripped of every outward façade of respectability, and openly revealed in the full and true reality of one’s character. All our hypocrisies and concealments, all our secret, intimate sins of thought and deed, will be open to the scrutiny of Christ….” (Philip Hughes, The International Commentary on the New Testament; The Second Epistle to the Corinthians. P. 180).

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

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

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

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

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

When it comes to salvation, either a person is saved or is not saved. On the Day of Judgment a person who is not saved will be thrown into the Lake of Fire and burned up (see commentary on Rev. 20:10). In contrast, a person who is saved will get to live forever in the Kingdom. But not everyone who gets to live forever has the same rewards in the Kingdom. Our rewards differ, depending on how we live this life.

The Bible does not teach that people who are saved will be in heaven forever. What it teaches is that Jesus Christ will come down from heaven to the earth, fight and win the Battle of Armageddon, and set up his kingdom on earth, which will fill the whole earth (see Appendix 3: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”; cp. Dan. 2:35, 44; Rev. 19:11-21). Jesus will set up his palace in the newly rebuilt Jerusalem, and for 1,000 years reign over all the earth with a “rod of iron” (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15; 20:4, 5 KJV). Many scholars refer to this 1,000 year kingdom as the “Millennial Kingdom.” After the 1,000 years are over there will be a great war (Rev. 20:7-10). Then there will be the second resurrection (Rev. 20:11-13), and after that the Eternal City will come from heaven to earth, and the saved will live forever in that city (Rev. 21:1-4).

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

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

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

The Bible does not name every job in the future kingdom of Christ. Enough are named to show us that the kingdom will be similar in diversity and needs to earthly kingdoms and nations of today. When we understand that our future life will be in Christ’s kingdom on earth, we get a much clearer picture of how we can be rewarded or punished in the future. We are finally in a position to understand how a person can “receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or worthless.”

If a person is “saved,” he will get to live forever in the Kingdom. But what job will he do? The “job” we do in the Kingdom is a part of our reward. A person who had faith in Christ and got saved, but did not obey Christ or take his Christianity seriously, is still saved, but may have little or no rewards in the Kingdom. In contrast, a person who got saved and lived in obedience to Christ throughout his life will be greatly rewarded.

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

The Bible repeatedly declares that people will eventually get what they deserve.

• **Jeremiah 17:10:** “I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve” (there are many other verses that say this same thing: Job 34:11, Psalms 62:12, Proverbs 24:12, Jeremiah 32:19, Ezekiel 33:20, Matthew 16:27, and Romans 2:6).
• **Matthew 10:41, 42:** “Whoever receives a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man will receive a righteous man’s reward. And whoever gives one of
these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, truly I say to you, he will not ever lose his reward.”

- **Matthew 16:27**: For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

- **Luke 12:47-48 (abridged)**: “That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows.”

- **1 Corinthians 3:10–15 (abridged)**: “I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds...the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”

- **2 Corinthians 5:10**: For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

- **Colossians 3:23–25 (abridged)**: Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.

- **1 Thessalonians 4:6**: and that in this matter [of sinning sexually] no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you.

- **2 Timothy 2:11-13 (abridged)**: “For if we died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us. If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he is not able to deny himself.”

- **2 John 1:8**: “Watch yourselves, so that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may receive a full reward.”

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

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

Christians who have been selfish and disobedient to God will experience shame for their selfishness when they stand at the Judgment Seat and face the Christ they ignored or denied throughout life.
• **Luke 9:26**: If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

• **1 John 2:28**: And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

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

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

**Ezekiel 44:10–16 (abridged)**: 10 “The Levites who went far from me...and who wandered from me after their idols must bear the consequences of their sin. 11 They may serve in my sanctuary, having charge of the gates of the temple and serving in it; they may slaughter the burnt offerings and sacrifices for the people and stand before the people and serve them. 12 But because they served them in the presence of their idols and made the house of Israel fall into sin, therefore...they must bear the consequences of their sin. 13 They are not to come near to serve me as priests...they must bear the shame of their detestable practices. 14 Yet I will put them in charge of the duties of the temple and all the work that is to be done in it. 15 “But the priests...who faithfully carried out the duties of my sanctuary...are to come near to minister before me; they are to stand before me to offer sacrifices of fat and blood.... 16 They alone are to enter my sanctuary; they alone are to come near my table to minister before me and perform my service.

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

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

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

**Hebrews 11:24–26:** “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

Moses gave up the good life because he “looked ahead” and saw that he would be rewarded in the Kingdom. Do not be shortsighted. All of us should look ahead to the reward we can have in the future and act in a way that will attain it. (Some other verses that are not mentioned above and that speak of rewards include: Matt. 5:12, 19; 6:1, 5; 18:1-4; 25:14-29; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; and 2 Pet. 1:5-11; see commentary on those verses. For a much more complete explanation of the Millennial Kingdom and rewards in the future, see John Schoenheit; *The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul*).

5:11. “we are persuading others.” The verb “persuade” in this phrase is in the present tense, active voice, and can be understood in one of two ways. It is either conative, “we try to persuade” (Robertson), or durative “we are busy persuading” (Lenski). The question is whether Paul meant to communicate what they were trying to do, or simply relating what they were in fact doing. In truth, Paul was doing both, he was busy persuading, trying to persuade others. In English, the translation “we are persuading” can communicate both these senses and thus was the choice for the REV.

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

5:14. “For the love of Christ urges us on.” This is an important phrase and needs to be properly understood. The Greek word “constrain” is *sunechō* (#4912 συνέχω) and means, among other things, to hold together any whole, lest it fall to pieces or something fall away from it, to hold together with constraint, to compress, to be held by or closely occupied with, any business. What Paul is saying is that the love of Christ keeps him focused on his mission. It is true love that keeps one focused on the goal of bringing others to Christ and helping them grow.
5:15. “in place of everyone.” From the Greek preposition huper (#5228 ὑπέρ). See Romans 5:6 commentary on “in place of the ungodly… for… in our place.”

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

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

5:17. “new creation.” When the natural man of body and soul is born again, he takes on the very divine nature of God (2 Pet. 1:4), which becomes part of him. Thus he is indeed a “new creation.”

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

“things have become new.” Lenski correctly points out that the subject of “become” does not come from “have become new,” which contains its own subject. The subject is imported from the context, i.e., things (or perhaps “we”) have become new. The KJV imports “all things” from Revelation 21:5, but obviously not everything becomes new when someone is born again, just the things inside that believer. The Revised Version and the ASV, which have “they have become new,” misses the point. It is not the old things that become new; it is that there are new things created.

5:18. “all this.” This is the meaning of this word in this context. Cp. Lenski.

5:19. “God was reconciling.” The emphasis of the verb is that God was reconciling, not that God was in Christ (cp. Vincent). God reconciled us to himself “through” (cp. Lenski) Christ.

5:20. “we are ambassadors.” We are “ambassadors” in that we speak for Christ. We represent his kingdom on earth. The Greek verb, presbeuō (#4243 πρεσβεύω) means “we are ambassadors,” and also “we are legates.” Our union with Christ (Rom. 6:3), includes the honor, privilege, and ability to act in his stead.

Presbeuō was used in the Greek language to refer to three different kinds of people: an “elder,” an “ambassador,” and a “legate.” Whenever we come across a Hebrew or Greek word that has more than one meaning, we must decide which of them is the correct or appropriate meaning in the verse. In this case, we can do that by “trying out” the meanings of presbeuō. Reading “elder” in this context does not make good sense, and thus “elder” is not the meaning here. Reading “ambassador” in this context makes sense, because we have the ministry and message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18 and 19). As ambassadors whose citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20), we are in a foreign country here on earth, spreading good will and trying to win support for our king and country. But we are also legates for Christ.
Communication in the Roman Empire was slow. In the Roman world, if a war broke out the Emperor may have not even heard about it for weeks, and then not been able to decide what to do simply because no matter what information he had and how many daily messengers arrived, their “news” was always old. Worse, when the Emperor’s orders actually arrived at the trouble spot—well, the situation was likely totally different or the trouble even over.

One way the Greco-Roman rulers dealt with the problem was through the office of the legate, a person with the authority to represent the ruler, a person delegated and empowered to act as the king himself in any given situation. About presbeutēs Barnett writes: “Such delegates—Jewish or Greco-Roman—came with the authority of the sender, in his place, to secure his interests,” and they were referred to as legates. (Paul Barnett, The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Second Epistle to the Corinthians, p. 310). Kittel’s Theological Dictionary adds, “In the Roman period presbeutēs is the Greek equivalent of [the Latin] legatus...It is commonly used for the imperial legates.” (Geoffery Bromiley, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Vol. 6, p. 681. This ten-volume theological dictionary is often referred to as “Kittel’s Theological Dictionary.” Where the ellipse appears in the quotation, there are a number of references to ancient works to substantiate the point. ) Spicq adds, “...a legate is a noteworthy personage, at the top of the military hierarchy, and presbeuon and presbeutes are technical terms for imperial legates in the Greek Orient.” (Ceslas Spicq, Theological Lexicon of the New Testament, Vol. 3, p. 174, 175.)

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

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

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

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

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

5:21. “sin offering.” The Greek is hamartia (#266 ἁμάρτια). It means “sin,” but it can refer to “a sin offering.” Many Greek lexicons do not mention that hamartia can mean “sin offering,” but that is one of its meanings. For example, A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament by Barclay Neman says hamartia means, “sin” and “sin offering.” Hamartia refers to “sin offering” many times in the Septuagint (cp. Exod. 29:14, 36; 30:10; Lev. 4:3, 8, 21, 24, 25, etc.). F. F. Bruce writes about the phrase hamartian epoiesen (“made him to be a sin offering”) in The New Century Bible Commentary: “…this remarkable expression…can best be understood on the assumption that Paul had in mind the Hebrew idiom in which certain words for sin can mean not only sin, but ‘sin offering.’” We must keep in mind that Corinth was a large Greek city. Both Acts (primarily 18) and the Epistles to the Corinthians indicate that the congregation in Corinth had a large percentage of Gentiles. They, as well as many Jews, used the Septuagint as their Bible, and so would have been very familiar with the use of hamartia as “sin offering.”

Albert Barnes (Barnes’ Notes) explains that Jesus had to be a sin offering, saying he could not become “sin,” nor “a sinner,” nor “guilty.” First, Jesus could not literally become “sin.” Sin is breaking the commandments of God. No person can become “sin.” We are not “sin,” and Jesus did not become “sin” for us. Nor could Jesus have become “a sinner.” Bauer’s Greek lexicon (BDAG) treats hamartia as if it should be translated “sin” but understood as referring to “the guilty one,” i.e., the sinful one. If that were the case, then by the figure of speech metonymy, “sin” would stand for the one who had sin, i.e., the sinner himself. Thayer’s Greek lexicon does a similar thing, and says that “sin” puts the “abstract for the concrete,” using “sin” but meaning “the sinner.” Thus, both Bauer and Thayer see this verse as saying Christ becomes “a sinner” for us, but that cannot be correct. For one thing, the whole Bible testifies to the holiness and sinlessness of Christ. More to the point, however, is that if Jesus did become “a sinner,” then he could not have been our savior, because the death of one sinner does not in any way impute righteousness to another sinner. There is no merit in the death of a sinner. The only reason Christ’s sacrifice is sufficient to provide salvation for all people is that he was not a sinner. Similarly, Christ could not have become “guilty,” as if “sin” were put by
metonymy for the effect of sin, which is guilt. Again, one guilty person cannot atone for
the life of another guilty person. The correct conclusion, and one that Barnes arrives at, is
that Christ is a “sin-offering.” He was sinless, and because of that fact he could give his
life as an offering to God for the sin of others. The New Testament in the Language of the
People by Charles Williams is one version that has “sin offering” in 2 Corinthians 5:21.
That Jesus was a sin offering for us shows us the great love, grace, and mercy of
God. It truly confirms Psalm 103:10: “He [God] does not treat us as our sins deserve or
repay us according to our iniquities.” We all deserve death, in fact, well deserve it. But in
His great love God provided a sacrifice that would justly provide a way for us to have
everlasting life.

Chapter 6

6:1. “in an empty, fruitless, way.” The Greek is kenos (κενός), and it means,
empty, vain, devoid of truth. Metaphorically it can mean destitute of spiritual wealth, of
one who boasts of his faith as a transcendent possession, yet is without the fruits of faith.
Also it is used metaphorically of endeavors, labors, acts, which result in nothing, are
fruitless, or are without effect. Lenski points out that here, eis kenos (literally “unto
empty”) means “in an empty, hollow way.” In this case, Paul entreats the Corinthians that
day they do not receive the grace of God, but then have no real fruit from it. Verse three
makes this clear: the Corinthians could receive the grace of God, but then, instead of
producing good fruit, would by their actions produce offences that would cause others to
blame the ministry. Heinz Cassirer (God’s New Covenant) translates the phrase, “you
must not receive God’s gracious gift in a manner tending to make it profitless.” Although
most translations read “in vain” for eis kenos, that is far too harsh, and often leads to the
mistaken theology that a person can lose his salvation. We Christians never receive God’s
grace “in vain,” as if there was no profit to it. Salvation itself is priceless. However,
Christians can, and sadly often do, receive the grace of God but then do not produce the
fruit of it in their lives.
6:2. Quoted from Isaiah 49:8.
“Look!” The Greek word is idou (ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. It is
the figure of speech asterismos, and the double use of it here in this verse should grab and
hold our attention. NOW is the acceptable time! NOW is the time for salvation! Some
people say, “Well, so and so will get saved when the time is right, on the Lord’s
timetable.” That is fatalism (or Calvinism) and denies free will and the expressed
meaning of the Word of God. God wants everyone to be saved right away so they assure
themselves a place in the Kingdom and also can begin to store up rewards for themselves.
For more on “Look,” see commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).
6:4. “servants of God.” The Greek reads, “servants of God,” which in this context is the
genitive of relation. This is not the genitive of possession, as if God owned the ministers,
but rather of relation, servants (some versions read “ministers”) of the things of God.
6:6. “in holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more
information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]
6:7. “in...through.” This is another instance in which the verses in the English versions are obviously divided awkwardly. The shift from “in” for the first 19 things on the list to the last things on the list, marked by the Greek dia, is very clear.

“through.” The Greek is the preposition dia with the genitive case, and means “through” [see Appendix 11: “Greek Prepositions”]. The minister of the Good News cannot be someone who demonstrates his Christ-like character only when times are good and things are going well. The minister must purify his heart so that whether times are good or bad, he acts like Christ, can help others, and even can grow in character. As the minister lives day after day and year after year, he will pass through good times and bad. The minister of the Gospel works while some of his experiences are good and some are bad; some people are lauding him while some dishonor him; some reports about him are bad while some are good.

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

“the instruments.” R. C. H. Lenski has what we believe is a very good and sound interpretation of this verse. The Greek word that most versions translate as “weapons” or “armor” is hoplon (ὅπλον), which, like most Greek words, has more than one meaning (not all of which appear in the Bible). Hoplon can refer to any tool or implement for preparing a thing, armor (Rom. 13:12), arms or weapons used in warfare (John 18:3), or an instrument (Rom. 6:13). How are we to choose whether this word should be translated as an instrument or aid, or a weapon? The answer is the same way we always make that translation choice: by context. In the context of this verse there is a clear continuous parallelization between one good thing and one evil thing (glory vs. dishonor; evil report vs. good report; deceivers vs. true; unknown vs. well known; dying vs. we live; as punished vs., and yet not killed; grieved vs. always rejoicing; etc.). So if the phrase means, as most versions have, “by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left,” then it is the only time in the list a good thing is not juxtaposed with an evil thing—they are both positive weapons, just held in different hands. So in this case, the context makes it clear the verse is not referring to a weapon that is held in the right hand and the left, but rather “instruments,” or “aids” of righteousness, some of which are “of the right hand” and some of which are “of the left hand.”

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

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

Thus this verse is similar to Romans 5:3 and 4, “…we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

6:8. This is another instance in which the verses in the English versions are obviously divided awkwardly. The shift from dia to hos is very clear.
6:9. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (.userIDou), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).
6:12. “You are not restrained by us.” There was nothing that Paul or his companions were doing that caused the Corinthians to hold back, it was simply that the Corinthians were not giving themselves totally to the relationship.

“bowels.” The Greek is splagchnon (#4698 σπλάγχνον) and it means “bowels.” We believe that God is showing us a great truth by using the word “bowels,” just as He uses “heart” in many verses and even “kidneys” in some verses (Ps. 7:9; 16:7; 26:2; 73:21; Prov. 23:16; Jer. 11:20; 12:2; 17:10; 20:12; Rev. 2:23 [see commentary on Revelation 2:23 for more on “kidneys”]).

For centuries scientists and theologians thought that the ancients only equated “bowels” with a person’s emotional life because they were ignorant and superstitious. Recently, however, scientists are discovering that the bowels have a very large number of nerve cells, and actually can “think” on their own. In fact, there are as many nerve cells between the neck and navel as there are in the head. Of course, the nerves in the head are configured differently, and function differently, than the nerves in our gut, but we are now learning that the Bible is right in mentioning our heart, kidneys, belly, and bowels, and these are a very important part of a person’s emotional life.

Almost everyone is aware of times he or she has been afraid or upset but felt it in their bowels or stomach. If we are anxious our stomach often becomes “tied up in knots.” If we hear really bad news or are very afraid, we often become physically sick, lose our appetite, or even have diarrhea. In fact, involuntarily defecating is a common reaction to a sudden scare.
The fact that the bowels play a huge part in our emotional life is well represented in the Greek text. Unfortunately, the emphasis that God, by using the word “bowels,” places on the emotion in the verse is lost in most English versions of the Bible because “bowels” have been replaced by “heart,” “affection,” or similar words. While the translators mean well by trying to translate the Greek in a way that communicates to the modern reader, the great truth that the bowels are a huge part of a person’s emotional life is lost. We Christians need to be aware that God wrote the Bible in such a way that it would educate us about ourselves, His creation, and we lose that education when we take a clear word like “bowel” and translate it “heart.”

Also, when translators use “heart” instead of the proper translation “bowels,” we lose another great truth in Scripture: that biblically the heart is less associated with a person’s emotional life and is more associated with our mental life. Biblically, the heart refers more to a mental function while our bowels, kidneys, and belly refer more to our emotional life. Verses that involve our bowels include:

- 2 Corinthians 6:12 (NASB) “you are restrained in your own affections [bowels].”
- 2 Corinthians 7:15 (NASB) “his affection [bowels] abounds all the more toward you….”
- Philippians 1:8 (NASB) “I long for you all with the affection [bowels] of Christ Jesus,”
- Philippians 2:1 (NASB) “If therefore there is any…affection [bowels] and compassion,”
- Colossians 3:12 (NASB) “put on a heart of compassion [literally: “put on bowels”]”
- Philemon 1:7 (NASB) “the hearts[bowels] of the saints have been refreshed”
- Philemon 1:12 (NASB) “And I have sent him…my very heart [bowels]”
- Philemon 1:20 (NASB) “refresh my heart [bowels] in Christ.”
- 1 John 3:17 (NASB) “But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart [bowels] against him, how does the love of God abide in him?”

6:13. “(I speak as to my children.)” Figure of Speech, *Interjectio*, or Interjection (cp. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*).


Chapter 7
7:1. “spirit.” This is not referring to the “gift of holy spirit,” but is a use of “spirit” as “soul.” There are things that are specifically in the category of “flesh,” that defiles us, such as sexual sin or other sins directly involving the body. In contrast to the flesh, however, is the soul, which as a kind of “spirit,” is sometimes referred to as spirit. In this context, “soul” type things that we need to cleanse are our thoughts and attitudes.

7:9. “I am rejoicing.” The Greek is chairo (#5463 χαίρω), rejoice, as it is in the present active. Paul was in the act of rejoicing (cp. Lenski’s translation).


Chapter 8

8:2. “generosity.” The Greek word for “generosity” (#572 ἄπλοτης) can also mean “sincere concern, simple goodness” (BDAG).

8:8. “as a command.” The Greek phrase kata epitage (κατὰ ἐπιταγὴ) is a technical phrase that means “by the command of; by order of.” In this case, the command would have been given by Paul to the people of Corinth. See commentary on 1 Timothy 1:1.

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

8:13. “as a matter of equality.” This phrase comes from a Greek idiom, literally, “out of equality.” See BDAG’s entry on the word for “equality,” isotes (#2471 ἰσότης): “state of matters being held in proper balance… as a matter of equality.”

8:15. Quoted from Exodus 16:18.

Chapter 9

9:3. “I am sending.” This is what is known as the epistolary aorist (Kistemaker, p. 310). The Greek is in the past, “I sent,” but at the time Paul was writing he had not yet literally sent the brothers. They would actually be coming with the letter. To avoid confusion we have translated according to the present tense meaning, as do many versions (ESV; NIV; NRSV; NET).


9:5. “generous gift.” The Greek word for “generous gift” is the same word for “blessing” in the verse, eulogia (#2129 εὐλογία). We agree with BDAG that the sense of “blessing” here is that of a generous gift. The idea of “gift” comes out as “bounty” in the KJV. Because “bounty” seems an archaic translation, and the English word “bounty” has acquired other meanings that could cause confusion here, most modern versions read “gift” (cp. ESV; NIV; NASB; HCSB; NRSV; NAB; NET).


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

9:11. “through us.” The meaning of this phrase is not specified, and can be broadly applied. It seems the most natural meaning is that Paul is writing as if he and his companions are middle men, who bring the gift that the Corinthians give to those in need, which then produces great thanksgiving to God. However, the phrase can also refer to the fact that it was “through” Paul that the Corinthians were encouraged to give in the first place, so the whole process of the gift, from the encouragement to give it to the actual delivery of it, was “through” Paul and his companions.

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

Chapter 10

10:1 “Now I myself, Paul, entreat you by the meekness and clemency of Christ…” The verses that open 2 Corinthians 10 must be understood in light of the fact that false apostles had entered the Church and were spreading lies and false doctrine. This can be easily seen by reading chapters 10-12. These false apostles were accusing Paul of being two-faced, being bold in his letters when he was away from Corinth, but being timid when he was personally present in Corinth. Furthermore, they accused Paul of living by the standards of the world. Paul begs the Corinthians to listen to him, and hopes that he will not have to be bold with them as he will have to be with the pretenders. Paul uses the analogy of a war in this section of scripture, and asserts that he fights with spiritual weapons, and with them demolishes arguments, lies, and false doctrines, and will take captive the lies (thoughts) that are circulating in the Church. Furthermore, he will bring these disobedient people to justice, but he will only be able to do that when the Corinthians themselves are ready to stand firmly on the truth.

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

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

10:2. “Yes, I implore you…” For the de meaning “yes,” see Lenski.

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

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

“thought.” Greek is noema (#3632 νόημα), “A mental perception, thought; 2. specifically, (an evil) purpose” (Thayer).

10:6. “as soon as your obedience is complete.” Paul states that he is ready to bring to justice the people who are disobedient, but he must wait until the obedience of the Corinthians is complete. The point of bringing the disobedient ones, the ones spreading lies and false teaching, to justice is to have a healthy church. But if the Church itself is not ready to discipline those who are bringing lies and false doctrine, what is the point? The Church at Corinth “put up” with false teaching too easily (11:4), so Paul writes that he is ready, but will only be able to act when the Corinthians are ready. It is never easy, fun, or “nice” to confront lies and false doctrine, and there are many who are even critical of that, elevating the importance of “self expression” and “personal beliefs” above the truth, but we must make no mistake; there is a truth, and it comes from God to the Church. We must be willing to fight for it and defend it or we might as well not “play church” at all.

10:7. “look.” The word for “look” in this verse is blepete, from blepo (#991 βλέπω). It can be understood in two different ways, either as a command (“look!”) or an indicative statement of fact (“you are looking”). This difference comes out in the varying translations: E.g., “Look at what is before your eyes” (ESV—command); compared with, “You are looking only on the surface of things” (NIV—statement of fact). The difference amounts to this: is Paul at this point in the letter chastising the Corinthians for looking at people according to the flesh? Or is he telling them to look at the evidence that is before their eyes? According to the context of the letter, we understand the word to fit better as a
command. Paul is here asking the Corinthians to consider the clear evidence of Paul and his companions’ lives compared to that of the “super-apostles.”

10:9. “I do not want to.” The word “want” comes out of the sense of the purpose clause (hina + the subjunctive mood). It is Paul’s intended purpose not to appear as though he were frightening; therefore, since it is his purpose, it is what he “wants.”


“is of no account.” From exoutheneo (#1848 ἐξουθενέω), See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:20.


Chapter 11

11:2. “virgin.” The Christian Church is being compared to a virgin bride by the figure of speech hypocatastasis. The Church is not literally a virgin bride, but the things expected of a virgin bride such as spiritual chastity, purity, and devotion, all apply to the Church. [See Appendix 13: “The Bride of Christ”.

11:3. “Serpent.” This is a reference to the Slanderer (the Devil). Since the Slanderer is not a literal serpent, his being called that is the figure of speech hypocatastasis (a comparison by implication; see entry on “dragon” in Rev. 20:2). Calling the Slanderer a “serpent” compares him with a serpent, and imports the characteristics of a serpent onto him. This verse should have put to rest once and for all that the “serpent” in Genesis 3:1 was not some kind of snake, but rather a reference to the Slanderer himself. The Bible never tells us the personal name for the Devil, the one he had before he rebelled against God. We know the names of important angels such as Michael or Gabriel, but all we have for the Devil are appellatives and descriptions that let us know about his nature and his power [For a list of the names of the Slanderer, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”]. The fact that God never gives the Slanderer’s proper name in the Bible put Him in a bind when it came to Genesis. How would He introduce his arch-enemy in the Genesis record? He did it by calling him, “the serpent.” Then, God gave enough, and clear enough references in the rest of the Word to let us know who “the serpent” is. Sadly, most Christians do not read the Bible carefully enough, or understand the figures of speech it uses such as hypocatastasis, to recognize who the serpent of Genesis actually was.

11:6. “unskilled in public speaking.” The Greeks took great pride in public speaking, and had schools, and even contests, for public oratory. Some used that against Paul, as if one had to be a “trained speaker” to be logical and know and present the Word of God. Paul was trained as a Rabbi, so he certainly was trained, just not in the Greek form of oratory.

11:12. “as our equals.” Cp. NIV; NRSV. Literally, the Greek reads “just as we are.”

11:14. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark
1:13. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.]

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

11:21. “to my shame.” This is a Greek idiom that is missed by the KJV translators. Literally it reads, “I speak according to shame,” which comes out in the KJV as “I speak as concerning reproach.” However, this in unclear to the English reader, and does not communicate Paul’s meaning. By saying “I speak according to shame,” Paul refers to his own hypothetical shame, and speaks of it with sarcasm. The translation, “to my shame… we were too weak for that” captures the sarcastic sense of the verse very well.

11:24. “…received from the Jews forty lashes minus one.” This was a tradition of the Israelites that originated from the Mosaic Law. Deuteronomy 25:2-3 says, “…the judge shall make him [the criminal] lie down and have him flogged in his presence with the number of lashes his crime deserves, but he must not give him more than forty lashes. If he is flogged more than that, your brother will be degraded in your eyes.” To ensure that Israelites adhered to the Mosaic Law, the tradition was established to give thirty-nine lashes to prevent breaking the Law if there was a miscount. The one giving the lashes was subject to punishment if the stripes exceeded forty. These lashes were originally administered with a rod, but later the rod was exchanged for a leather strap consisting of three leather thongs. (Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible; Baker Book House, Vol. III, p. 2642; James Hastings, A Dictionary of the Bible; Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. I, p. 526).

11:25. “adrift at sea.” This is from the Greek phrase en to buutho, “in the sea-depth;” the word for “sea-depth” is buuthos (#1037 βυθός), and to be “in the buuthos” is an idiom for “adrift at sea” (BDAG).

Chapter 12

12:4. “taken.” The Greek word is harpazo (#726 ἁρπάζω), and it means to seize, to carry off or carry away by force, and it can often have the connotation of carrying someone or something away speedily by force. Orthodox theology misunderstands this verse and teaches that “Paradise” is heaven, but it is not, “Paradise” is on earth in the future. Because orthodox theologians teach Paradise is in heaven, most English Bibles translate harpazo as “caught up” into Paradise. But “Paradise” is not “up.” They are both future. Paul was not caught “up” to them by a revelation vision, he was “taken,” “forcibly taken,” or “forcibly taken quickly” to them. Paul was “taken” to Paradise, the future
earth, in a vision. Visions of the future, or of the presence of God, occur with some regularity in the Bible (see commentary on Stephen’s vision, Acts 7:55).

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

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

The Hebrew word eden (#5731 עֵדֶן) means “delight” or “luxury,” and the “Garden of Eden” (Gen. 2:8, 15) is the “Garden of delight.” (It is unhelpful that the translators of the English Bibles decided to transliterate the Hebrew word eden as “Eden,” instead of translating it into “Delight.”) The result of that decision is that very few Christians see that God so loved people that He created a “garden of delight” for us. When most Christians read about the “Garden of Eden,” they never think to ask what the phrase means, they only ask where it is on the face of the earth).

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

The Garden of Eden, Paradise, was a place on earth, and paradeisos occurs about 25 times in the Septuagint, sometimes referring to the Garden of Eden, sometimes referring to another garden, but always to a garden on earth. Thus it was natural for the thief on the cross (see commentary on Luke 23:43), and Paul’s audience, to think of Paradise as a place on earth. (There are some non-canonical books that refer to paradise as a place for the dead, but the biblical canon is consistent that it is a place on earth).

When Jesus comes from heaven and conquers the earth (Rev. 19:11ff), and sets up his kingdom on earth, then the earth will once again be an “Eden,” a “Paradise.” The Old Testament prophecies made it clear that on the future earth there would be no war, no sickness, no hunger, no injustice, and even the animals would become peaceful [For more details, see commentary on Matthew 5:5, “the meek will inherit the earth”].

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

12:7. “to beat up on me.” This translation is at once very literal, and yet communicates idiomatically in English. The Greek verb is kolaphizō (#2852 κολαφίζω), which indicates a beating with the fists, a violent and harsh treatment. Paul was physically beaten, as well as emotionally badgered.

12:8. “Three times I pleaded with the Lord.” This is a perfect demonstration of how we Christians are to handle trouble—take it to the Lord. Far too many times when we Christians are in difficult situations we complain or mope about it and forget to take our problems to the Lord. Of course, when we take our problems to the Lord, we would like to think he would just solve them for us, but what happened with Paul as recorded here in Corinthians is very typical of what happens to us: Jesus Christ reminds us that his grace is sufficient for us and that his power is actually brought to its goal (completed, perfected) through our weakness.

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

Paul’s pleading with the Lord and the Lord answering him is an example of the “fellowship” (intimate joint participation) that we are to have with Jesus Christ [For more information on our fellowship with Jesus, see commentary on 1 John 1:3]. The Greek verb translated “pleaded” is parakaleō (#3870 παρακαλέω; pronounced par-ə-kə-lē’ō), and it literally means “to call to one’s side.” Of course, there are dozens of reasons a person might call someone to come near, and so it is natural that parakaleō has dozens of different meanings, including: to speak to, to exhort, to encourage, to comfort, to console, to entreat, to ask for something, to beg, and to teach. The wide semantic range of parakaleō explains the large number of different translations in the English versions (ASV, KJV “besought;” BBE “made request to;” HCSB, NIV “pleaded;” NASB95 “implored;” NET “asked;” RSV “appealed to”). Each of these translations correctly represents an aspect of parakaleō that is applicable in this context, and the translators had to make the difficult choice of which aspect of parakaleō was most emphasized, and pick an English word that represented that; a very hard choice indeed.

In this case, Paul had a problem, so he pleaded with the Lord about it, and this is written so we can follow Paul’s example, even as he said: “Be imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). We are to talk to Jesus about our problems and pray to him for help. [For more on prayer to Jesus Christ, see Appendix 15: “Can We Pray to Jesus?”].

The “Lord” in the verse is Jesus, not God, as can be seen from the context.

Abridged, verses 8 and 9 read: “Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this...And he said to me, ‘My...power reaches its fulfillment in weakness.’ Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ will rest on me.”

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

12:9. “reaches its fulfillment.” The Greek verb is teleō (#5055 τελέω), and it means to bring something to its end, or finish; to complete something. In many cases, when something is finished, it is “perfected,” but it is not correct to say in English that Christ’s power is “made perfect” in our weakness, because Christ’s power is “perfect” no matter what state we are in. Our weakness does not make his power perfect, it is perfect on its own. Rather, when we are weak and Christ works in us, his power reaches its end, or fulfillment, in us. Through our weakness Christ’s power reaches its goal, and is shown to be Christ’s power, not our power.

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

12:11. “moral obligation.” This is from the Greek word ophelō (#3784 ὀφείλω). It is stronger than what the Corinthians “ought” to have done; the word refers to an obligation or debt (BDAG). For clarity in English we have switched the framing from “I” to “you,” like the NJB and NLT. The meaning is the same; it is easier to read “you have a moral obligation to me,” than “I have a moral obligation owed by you.”

12:14. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

12:15. “souls.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is used of the individual himself. Thus, while the verse could read something such as, “I will most gladly spend and be spent for you.” (HCSB; cp. KJV), by saying “souls” we can see that Paul is not just saying in general terms that he is willing to sacrifice himself for others, but is specifically concerned about their mental and emotional state as well. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”].

12:16. “took you in by deceit.” Paul is employing the figure of speech eironeia, which we would call “irony” or “sarcasm.” Bullinger defines this figure as “The expression of thought in a form that naturally conveys its opposite” (Figures of Speech, p. 807). By writing, “we took you in by deceit,” Paul shows the ridiculousness of such a statement and thus powerfully communicates the opposite.

12:19. “defending ourselves.” There is beautiful courtroom imagery in this verse that can be missed in English. Paul is here asking the Corinthians if they presume he has been attempting to clear himself of charges before them. He has not. Rather, in Paul’s mind, it is before God that he stands or falls, and God is his only Judge. The Greek word for “defending ourselves”—apologeomai (#626 ἀπολογέομαι)—refers to a public defense in a trial, and, by metaphor and extension, to defending one’s self in an everyday life situation. Paul is saying that it is not before the court of the Corinthians that he pleads his case, but before the court of God who sits as Judge he is speaking in Christ.


“arrogance.” For this word, the KJV “swelling” is very literal, although unclear as to what the “swelling” indicates. It is from phusiōsis (#5450 φυσιώσεις), which refers to “swelled-headedness” (BDAG), or “an inflated, puffed up, exaggerated view of one’s
own importance” (Luow-Nida)—in other words, *arrogance*. Paul is referring to the phenomenon that often happens in arguments, when love for the other person and what is right gives way to a blinding force of care for one’s own pride and position.

**Chapter 13**


13:3. **“among you.”** In this case, it is best to translate the *en* (#1722 ἐν) as “among” you, rather than “in” you. The difference is this: “among you” refers to Christ’s power in the fellowship community of the Corinthians, while “in you” would speak of his power for each individual Corinthian believer. The translation “among you” is best because the context of verses 1-2 is speaking of the Corinthians as a group, and the “you” is plural, also referring to the group.

13:4. **“we also are weak in him.”** The words “in him” mean “in union with him” (see commentary on Romans 6:3). We are used to thinking of being “in Christ” and thus having been crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20), having died with Christ (Rom. 6:8), having been buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12), and being raised with Christ (Eph. 2:6). However, we are also “weak” in Christ. Christians are not spiritual bullies, asserting ourselves and getting our way because we are so spiritually powerful. We are spiritually powerful, but our power is used the same way Christ and Paul used their spiritual power. Christ said to learn about him, for “I am meek and humble in heart” (Matt. 11:29). Christ became a sacrifice whose life was poured out for others, and that must be true of us too.

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

13:9. **“fully equipped.”** The Greek is the rare noun, *katartisis* (#2676 κατάρτισις), and it only occurs here in the New Testament (although the verb occurs in verse 11). According to Louw Nida, it means to make someone completely adequate or sufficient for something, to furnish completely, to cause to be fully qualified. It can refer to the completion or perfection or equipping of the person (“soul” in the classics), or the character. The word means more than just having a mature or complete character, although that is certainly included. Also, closing the letter by saying that Paul was praying for their character seemed unkind. Rather, he is praying that they be fully equipped in every way. Some versions read “restoration,” although that too seems harsh for the ending of an epistle. The fact is that if the believers are fully equipped, they would be in the will of God and need no “restoration.”

13:11. **“rejoice.”** The Greek word *chairō* (#5463 χαίρω), literally meaning “rejoice,” was also used as the standard greeting; it means both “hello” and “goodbye.” In this verse the versions differ on whether Paul employs the term as a salutation (“farewell”; cp. NIV, NRSV, KJV, ASV) or as a command to “rejoice” (cp. ESV, NASB, HCSB, NET, NAB).

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

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

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

13:14. “fellowship of the holy spirit.” This refers to the holy spirit that is the gift of God. [For more information on the uses of “holy spirit”, see Appendix 6: “Usages of ‘Spirit’”.]