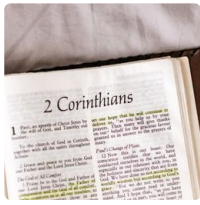


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2 Corinthians 5 - 6



2 Corinthians - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses 2 Corinthians 5-6, focusing on the idea of a new creation and our inheritance in Christ. He explores the concept of justification by faith and the meaning of the word "impute," explaining how this relates to our relationship with God. Gregg also touches on the importance of living a righteous life and separating ourselves from worldly influences.

Transcript

It was necessary, unfortunately, for me to end the last session without finishing up what I wanted to say on the end of 2 Corinthians 5. We got through almost all of it, and it's always less neat, at least in the tape library, when you have a few verses from a previous chapter that have to be taken care of before going into another chapter. The section that we were dealing with at the time that we closed was that which is verses 14-21 of 2 Corinthians 5. I'd like to read it again. I've talked about some of it, and I want to talk about some other parts of it.

It says, For the love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus, that if one died for all, then all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on we regard no one according to the flesh, even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him thus no longer.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new.

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us.

We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him. Now I will not

further the discussion that I was embroiled in at the end of the last session about the Calvinist versus the Arminian understanding of what it means that Christ died for all, and all died.

However, Paul does say in verse 15 that if it is so that Christ died for all, then those who have died in him have also raised in him, because he not only died, but he rose again. And for that reason, those who died with him and have also risen with him should live no longer for themselves, but for him. That he is as it were purchased them, as a man might purchase a slave by his death.

And Paul said that to the same church in 1 Corinthians chapter 6, says, you're not your own, you've been bought with a price. And so by his death, he has purchased us so that we no longer live as people who have their own agendas, as persons with their own ambitions and special interests, but rather as people who are totally absorbed with the interests and the ambitions and the goals of the one who now owns them, who died for them and rose again. So that it is understood that we should live no longer for ourselves, but for him who died for us.

Now, in modern evangelicalism, there's a strong emphasis that Christianity is simply being saved by faith. That you say a sinner's prayer, ask God to forgive you, ask Jesus to come into your heart, and then you're in the door and you can't ever fall out backwards. And so you're in that way.

And the stress on salvation in many sectors, at least, of the evangelical world today, is on how to get saved. On how to get rid of the problem of hell and of condemnation in your life. And a strong emphasis, of course, on the issue of justification.

Justification is by faith. But this emphasis has sometimes been to the exclusion of any accurate biblical emphasis on obedience to God and on living a certain way. In fact, in some circles, if you talk very much about the need for Christians to do good works, for Christians to do right and to obey God, there's a good chance you'll be accused of not understanding the gospel very well.

That you are a legalist or an advocate of a works sort of righteousness. But, if such talk makes a person a legalist and an advocate of works righteousness, then such must Paul have been. And very few people who use the word legalist would apply it to Paul.

Because if Paul was a legalist, then no one isn't. Because Paul was as against legalism as any writer ever was. And yet Paul was no legalist when he said that we should no longer live for ourselves, but for Christ who died.

And living for ourselves or living for Christ are two opposite ways of living. The person who is not a converted person lives for himself. There is no authority, no person whose interests command more loyalty to that party than himself.

Even other parties that he makes sacrifices for, whether it be wife or children or parents or friends or state or whatever, those sacrifices are made not without an interest in self, but rather in order to keep things the way one likes it for himself. To keep friends happy with him, to keep the state from prosecuting him or whatever. A person who lives only for himself may yet behave and be civilized and even do service to other parties, but not without reference to how this is going to affect me.

It's always how will this affect me? What do I have to gain from this? The Christian on the other hand is to be living for something entirely different. For Christ. And really the way to tell whether a person is a Christian in the biblical sense of the word or not is to ask them what they're living for.

Really, what are you living for? If the answer is I'm living for Christ, and if that's an honest answer and evidence supports it, then you have every reason to believe that person is a Christian in the biblical sense of that word. But if a person is living for anything other than Christ, then of course that person is not really a normal Christian. They might be saved in some sense, I don't know, but that's between them and God, but they're not what the Bible describes as Christian.

And therefore we cannot really be true to the Pauline doctrine of Christianity and of salvation without saying everything Paul said about it. He said that it's not only that we died with Christ and rose with Christ and therefore we're justified from our sin, but now we should live for Christ. It is incumbent on us to live for him because of what he did for us.

And verse 16 says, therefore from now on we regard no one according to the flesh. Now that expression, we regard no one according to the flesh, is not a real easy expression to understand because, as I've said before, the idea of according to the flesh is a term that Paul uses in a variety of ways, and the question is how is he using it here? There's some clue perhaps as to the meaning in the next sentence where he says, even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him thus no longer. What does it mean, we have known Christ according to the flesh? Whatever it means, it's connected with knowing no man according to the flesh.

We don't know Christ that way anymore, and we don't know any man that way. But we did once know Christ that way. We've changed our opinion.

Now some have thought that Paul in saying we have known Christ after the flesh might be saying that he had known Christ when he was on earth, that he had known Jesus when he was here in the flesh. And his statement taken by itself, without context and without other known historical information about Paul, might incline us to believe that was his meaning. Peter could certainly say we have known Christ according to the flesh, but now we know him differently than that, because Peter had known Jesus when he was here in the flesh, and still knew him after Jesus left, but in a different way, through the

presence of the Holy Spirit.

This is a very different phenomenon. I have actually heard sermons, impressive sermons, really inspiring sermons, based on that interpretation of this verse. It does not seem likely, though, that that is his meaning, when he says we have known Christ according to the flesh.

If according to the flesh means as a human person when he was here, then how could he use the same expression to say today we don't know anyone that way? We don't know anyone according to the flesh. If knowing Christ according to the flesh means being acquainted with him as a man on earth in a fleshly body, then how could he say we don't know any other people in that way? Because we know lots of people that way. We know a lot of people as human beings in fleshly bodies.

And therefore, knowing according to the flesh must not have that meaning in this sentence. Most translators feel that what Paul means is we no longer assess either Christ or other people the way we once did, which was according to the flesh. And according to the flesh means according to our own worldly prejudices and our own worldly standards.

We don't apply worldly standards of judgment in regard to people. We used to do that when we thought of Christ before we were Christians. We used to look at Christ and say, well, he doesn't seem like all that important.

He doesn't seem like one we need to give much consideration to. Because according to the flesh or according to worldly standards, he was not that important. He was never rich.

He never held political office. He never traveled very much in his lifetime. He was not known outside of his own land very much.

He just doesn't have the marks of an important person. And the way that we judge people according to the flesh, the way we set standards by which we measure a person's importance in the flesh, Christ would not have measured real highly. I mean, maybe we'd think, well, he was a very nice man.

A tragic thing that he got killed like he did. Seems for good always die young. But that's just another case of a guy who was in the wrong place at the wrong time or was just too outspoken.

But that would be a worldly way of assessing Christ. And that's how I guess all people must assess him before they see him otherwise, until they know who he really is and know him for who he is. But apparently what Paul is saying that we do not evaluate people according to worldly standards, just like we, although we once knew Christ that way and evaluated him that way, we don't do that with him anymore.

We see the deeper importance of Christ that we did not formerly see before we were Christians. And so also when we look at any man, we judge him by deeper issues, not surface issues. We don't say, oh, that's a black man.

I don't like black people. That's a Mexican. Mexicans are lazy people.

I mean, you don't see, you don't, you don't apply stereotypes. Christians should not anyway, to people. We don't know people that way.

We don't evaluate people that way. And therefore we don't value a person today as a Christian. We don't value another person based on whether they are the same race or gender or nationality or have the same interests or the same educational level or work in the same profession as we do.

We evaluate them as to whether they are a believer or not. The old things that used to form the basis of our judgment of people are no longer valid or relevant to the Christian. That's what he means when he says in verse 17, therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. Now he's talking about the way we evaluate people.

Now the reason for doing so, why is he doing that? Why is he talking about it here? Why does that come up in this part of the discussion? No doubt it's come up because he is mindful, as you said earlier in verse 12, that there are people in Corinth, critics of his, who do evaluate people according to outward considerations, including they evaluate Paul that way. That's why he had to boast about himself just a little bit, so that they would have opportunity to glory on their behalf, on Paul's behalf, he says, so that you may have something to answer those who glory in appearance and not in heart. There are apparently those in Corinth who are assessing a man's ministry and his value and his importance and his authority and so forth based on outward considerations.

Perhaps they were saying, well, this guy Paul, he didn't come from Jerusalem. He doesn't have letters of commendation from Peter like we have. In fact, he never was one of the 12.

He calls himself an apostle, but as I recall, he was once a persecutor of the church. He never really walked with Jesus, never knew Jesus. Now those guys in Jerusalem, that's different.

They've got the credentials. They were with Jesus when he was here on earth. And that Paul, he's a late comer and who knows what exactly they were saying.

But there was something about Paul they were criticizing based on their refusal to look at the heart, but looking only at outward circumstances or considerations. And so it is

probably for that reason that Paul says, no, we don't judge people that way. Because if a man's in Christ, he's a new man.

Whatever he was is no longer relevant. Old things are passed away. All things have become new.

He's a new creation. And therefore, whatever outward older issues, I mean, a man, let's put it this way. A man may be a Jew by race or a black man or a Chinese man or a Caucasian by race before he's a Christian.

When he becomes a Christian, he's still a black man. He's still a Chinese man. He's still an American.

He's still one of those things. I mean, racially he hasn't changed, but the significance of that in assessing him has changed completely. Before you're a Christian, you assess people, you judge people on the basis of those kinds of things.

In Christ, as far as we're concerned, all those things have passed away. Those things are no longer relevant. Those are non-issues.

We view a person in the newness of his new identity in Christ and upon spiritual basis that we would never have considered when we were ourselves natural men in the flesh. We don't judge men after the flesh anymore. We look at a person in Christ as a new creation.

Whatever old things about him would have formed the basis of our negative judgments of him in the past no longer are taken into consideration. Those things are passed away as far as we're concerned. Some of them may still exist, but they're passed away in terms of our judgment of that person, of our assessment of that person, or our regard for him.

Now the language Paul uses here in verse 17, it's often quoted. It's a wonderful verse and it's a favorite verse of many Christians. There are some things that I'd like to comment on.

One is that he says, if a man is in Christ, he's a new creation. Now I mentioned earlier when we were in chapter 4 and verse 6 that Paul likened what happened at conversion to the believer with what happened in Genesis chapter 1 when God said, let there be light. It is the God who called light to shine out of darkness who has also shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, Paul says.

So that what God did in calling light out of darkness in Genesis chapter 1 in the famous chapter about the creation, he has done a like work in our hearts, a spiritual work, the counterpart of that. And now Paul says, if a man is in Christ, he is a new creation. So that

Paul might have the same imagery in view that just as God established a creation described in Genesis chapter 1, in every man's heart who is a Christian, he has established a new creation.

And there are parallels between what God does in the heart of the believer and what God did in Genesis chapter 1 in the old creation. That the old creation is a type and a shadow of the new creation, which is you and me, every individual. Everyone who is in Christ is a new creation.

Now I would also say that at least the way I read the scriptures, and there are some who see this differently and I can see their point, but I believe that the Bible teaches there will be a literal new creation when Jesus comes back. That this old order, which Paul says in Romans 8, is groaning and travailing until now because of sin. That order will be set right.

That order will be renovated. It will undergo a deliverance, as Paul put it, a liberty from the bondage of decay. Very analogous to the change that will take place in our bodies in the resurrection.

The whole creation will undergo a freedom from the curse of decay. That is a, it will be a new heaven and new earth, a new creation. And we read of that new heaven and new earth in Isaiah.

We read of the new heaven and new earth in Peter, 2 Peter 3. We read of it in Revelation 21 and 22. Now there is some ambiguity in scripture about this new creation. On the one hand, there are passages that sound like it's talking about a literal new heaven and new earth when Jesus comes back.

On the other, especially in Isaiah chapter 65 and 66, we're talking about new creation. It almost sounds like a spiritual reality applying to a person who is a participant in the new covenant, even now. And depending, I mean, you have to look at those passages yourself to convince yourself one way or another, but there are some who take an either or approach.

Either these passages are talking only about a spiritual phenomenon that is current now in our lives as Christians, or else it's talking about a future physical new heaven and new earth. I am, I guess, just so cowardly as to take a middle ground and say both. That I believe there is a new heaven and new earth to come, but I believe that that new heaven and new earth will be a total and universal renovation of all things according to the resurrection life and dynamic that Jesus launched when he came out of the grave, as it were.

But that dynamic has already invaded the lives of those who are in Christ. So that we are, well, as it says in Hebrews chapter 6, we have tasted of the powers of the age to

come, or of the world to come, is another possible translation of that. There is an age or a world to come when Jesus comes back.

But of the Christian, it says in Hebrews chapter 6, that person, in verse 5, is said to have tasted of the good word of God and of the powers of the world to come, or of the age to come. As a Christian, I have had a taste already. I've had some preview of the age to come that is not yet realized, that will be realized universally when Jesus comes back.

It is realized in part internally. It's been tasted by me as a believer, and by you as a believer. There's a hymn, a very well-known hymn, Blessed Assurance.

The first words are, Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine. Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine. What's that mean? Well, glory divine, obviously, in that hymn, writer's mind, was the future, new heavens, new earth, the glorious eternal state.

But it says, the assurance that I have with Jesus being mine now is a foretaste of that, a foretaste of heaven, as it were, or of the new heaven and the new earth. So that a Christian can be said to be that new creation, or at least be experiencing it, a taste of it at least. The new creation will have an ultimate universal, I believe, and physical, tangible reality, but it is a spiritual phenomenon, the powers of which have already come.

For example, although my body will still decay, I have already become a participant in a life that will not decay. I've become a participant in eternal life. I still have some of the old creation I'm dragging around until the resurrection, but prior to that resurrection, I already have an inheritance which says, well let me read this to you in 1 Peter 1, verses 3 and 4. 1 Peter 1, verse 3 says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.

Now there is this inheritance that is incorruptible, that is undefiled, and that does not fade away, and this inheritance, I believe, is the new earth, the new Jerusalem, our eternal state. It's currently reserved in heaven because it later will come down from heaven to earth, it says in Revelation. But this is the inheritance that we've been born again to, and in a sense, although we live in a world and in a body that is not described this way, incorruptible and undefiled and does not fade away, our body does that, yet we have tasted of that undefiled, imperishable reality inwardly.

We are participants in eternal life already, so the new creation and its powers, the powers of the age to come, have been tasted by us already. We are already inwardly, as it were, a new creation. It just waits for our bodies to catch up at the resurrection to what we already enjoy as saved people.

Now he says old things are passed away, everything has become new. I think that when Paul said that he probably had in mind some scriptures in Isaiah, of which there are several, quite a lot of scriptures in Isaiah, about a new thing God would do. Now the language of Isaiah is, I believe, symbolic in many cases, but I believe what it describes is the Christian life or the spiritual reality of the Christian life.

In Isaiah 42, verse 9, God says, behold the former things have come to pass and new things I declare. Before they spring forth, I tell you of them. This is one of many passages in Isaiah about new things.

There's a new song in Isaiah 42, 10. And in Isaiah 43, verse 18 and following it says, do not remember the former things, old things are passed away, Paul says, nor consider the things of old. Behold I do a new thing.

Now it shall spring forth, shall you not know it? And you shall see, using typical imagery, which we find in Isaiah quite a bit, he says, I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The beasts of the field will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, because I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert to give drink to my people, my chosen. This people I have formed for myself, they shall declare my praise.

So the new creation is something God has created for himself, formed for himself. It is, he says, forget the old things. Don't let the things, former things come to mind.

If anyone is in Christ, he is therefore a new creation. In chapter 43, verses 1 through 7, he says, but now thus says the Lord who created you, O Jacob, and he who formed you, O Israel, fear not for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name. Then he goes on to give several promises.

I don't have time to give all of it, but verse 7 says, everyone who is called by my name whom I have created for my glory, I formed him, yes, I have made him. Now notice, everyone who is called by God's name, he's created them for his glory. And they are a new thing that he has created, a new creation.

He says in verse 18, do not remember the former things. And there's quite a bit of passages in Isaiah about the new thing, the new song, the new order. And I believe that when Paul says, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old things have passed away, he is in some respects echoing these passages, saying that new order has come, and anyone who's a Christian is part of it.

And that provides the argument for not regarding people according to the standards of old ways of thinking. We don't regard people after the flesh anymore. That's no longer appropriate or realistic.

Now, Paul says at the end of verse 18, 2 Corinthians 5, 18, that God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. Now who is us? In my upbringing in the Baptist church, all the

things that Paul ever said about himself were pretty much applied to Christians generally. And some things that Paul says about himself do apply to Christians generally.

Others don't, and it's hard to know sometimes which do and which don't. Among the things that I was raised just assuming applies to all Christians would be this, that God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. And also, verse 20, therefore we are ambassadors for Christ.

And in a sense, I believe that is true of all Christians, though in the particular context I believe Paul is talking about himself and his apostolic companions because he says in verse 20, therefore we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were pleading through us, we implore you on Christ's behalf be reconciled to God. So there's we and there's you in this. I mean, there's the ambassadors that are doing the imploring and there's the people who are being implored.

And although I must confess that you in verse 20 is in italics, which means it's not really in the Greek, it is thought to be implied by the translators. It could be that he means we implore people other than the church. Perhaps the whole church is ambassadors and have the ministry of reconciliation.

But Paul specifically is describing his own ministry where he says this is what we're all about. We're here standing in Christ's place imploring people, you, to be reconciled to God. And this is what the reconciliation is all about.

Verse 19 says that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now that God would not impute the sins of the world against them is a marvelous thing because God is definitely the offended party in every criminal act that man has ever done. And yet as the offended party, he has the power to just say, I'm going to forgive you for that.

He couldn't do it without some justification, however, because the judge of the universe must do right. And when criminals are brought before a judge, he can't just say, well, I'm feeling good today. I'm feeling rather nice and generous.

I'm going to let you walk because that isn't nice. That isn't good. That isn't just.

It might be friendly toward the criminal, but it's not justice. And God also not wishing to impute the sins of the world against them, wishing to reconcile them to himself, could not simply do it across the board without any provision being made to make that a just decision. And so we read in verse 19 that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

The reconciliation took place through what God was doing in Christ. But Paul doesn't tell us in verse 19 exactly what that was. In verse 21 he does.

Here's what it was that God made him, Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him. Now, how could God declare anyone righteous? Only if they became righteous. God as a judge can't say things that are untrue.

Only if a person becomes righteous can God say they are righteous. He can't lie about it. And so it was necessary that we should become righteous.

But we don't and have not and probably will not ever become fully righteous in terms of our own accomplishments and behavior and good works. And therefore how can God work this out? Well, he had to make us be not our own righteousness, but the righteousness of God in Christ. To be found in Christ is to participate in the righteousness of God that is in Christ.

Christ has the righteousness of God because he's God and he's righteous. And in Christ we also identify with him and that righteousness. So that the righteousness of God is seen as ours, as us.

When God looks at us in Christ, he sees us as the righteousness of God it would appear. But how could he do that? By some kind of legal fiction? Well, no. Jesus was made sin for us.

The sinless one was made sin for us. So the result would be that we would be made the righteousness of God in him. How does that work? Well, there's a couple of ways to understand this.

One is that the word sin in the second occurrence in verse 21 should be understood to mean a sin offering. Now it is a word that actually means sin. It doesn't mean a sin offering.

But in the Old Testament, there were a couple of Hebrew words which were ordinary words for sin, but in certain usages actually meant a sin offering. It's just a peculiarity of the Hebrew idiom that sometimes the Hebrew word for sin in the Old Testament actually was used to mean a sin offering rather than sin itself. There are many who feel that that is what Paul's doing here with the Greek word for sin.

That he's using it the way the Hebrews use their Hebrew word. That he's saying that Christ was made a sin offering for us. That he who knew no sin was made to be a sin offering for us.

This would simply be saying that Jesus atoned for us with his own death. His blood was shed for us and he paid for our sin in that manner. And this is one interpretation of what Paul means when he says he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us.

That God made Jesus who was sinless to be a sin offering for us so that we'd be counted

as righteous. That is, by the way, a possible interpretation. And it would be, even if it's not the correct interpretation of this verse, there would certainly be nothing unorthodox about it or anything about it that would be doctrinally objectionable.

However, it is also possible that sin means sin. That sin doesn't mean sin offering. That Christ was made to be sin for us.

Now, Jesus was sinless. How could he be sin? Only, of course, by the imputation of sin to him. Now, notice the word imputation was in Paul's discussion in verse 19.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them. Well, what does the word impute mean? Impute means to credit. Or in the case of sin, of course, it's a demerit.

It's to credit a fault to someone, to hold someone responsible for something. If you credit something to my account in a positive sense, it means my account is enriched. But if you don't credit it to my account, it still has to be credited somewhere.

It could be credited to someone else's account instead, in which case they're made rich. If the credit or the imputation is made to me, let's say someone owes me money. Let's say I sell you my car and you're making payments on it, you're making direct deposits to my bank.

Now, you owe it to me to put the money in my account, to credit it to me, because it's mine. But if I meet somebody who happens to be in financial need and I say, well, just go ahead and put that in their bank account instead of in mine, as you make your monthly payments. Don't put that in my account, put that in his account.

Suddenly, what is mine becomes that person's, not by them earning it by any sense, but because it's credited onto their account now. They become the beneficiaries of what they have not earned, but what I have earned, or what I own, or whatever. I mean, my benefit is credited to them, so it's now their benefit, not mine.

Now, the same thing works with demerit, or with sin. To reconcile the world to himself, God had to not credit the world's sins to the world. But then who will they be credited to? They'll be credited to Jesus.

It's put on his account, so that the world which had sin and trespasses, it says in verse 19, God didn't credit that to the world. He credited it to Christ, as it were. So when it says Christ became sin for us, it means that the sin of the world was credited to him.

He was treated by God as if he was the sinner, and the world was treated as if it was not the sinner. The guilt of the world's sin was put on Christ's account. But then what happened to his righteousness? That was credited to the world's account, so that he became sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

There's a beautiful illustration of this in Paul's dealings with Philemon and Onesimus in the book of Philemon. I don't know if you've read that yet, recently. But in Philemon, Paul is writing to a convert of his, who is an owner of slaves, and one of those slaves, named Onesimus, has fled and stolen things from his master.

The family lived in Colossae, and the slave fled from Colossae down to Rome, and through some providence ran into Paul, and was led to the Lord by Paul. Now we have a situation where the runaway slave is one of Paul's converts, and his owner from whom he ran away in Colossae is also one of Paul's converts. Two Christians, both of them indebted to Paul, and yet the slave is a criminal vis-à-vis his master.

It is against the law for a slave to run away. In fact, he could be put to death for that in the Roman law. So we have here a case of an owner of a slave and a runaway slave, and they are alienated from one another.

The slave has stolen things, possibly things he was no longer in possession of and could not return, and he had guilt before his master. Reconciliation was necessary. There had to be somebody who had relations with both parties, a mediator, one who could be in good standing with both parties and try to bring reconciliation.

Paul was that person. Paul was in good standing with Onesimus, the slave, and Paul was in good standing with Philemon, the owner. So Paul intervenes, and he in a very great extent resembles Christ's intervention.

There is sort of a picture here, whether intentional or not, it cannot be missed, that we are like runaway slaves when we're sinners. We've run away from our master, and there is a debt owed that we are not capable to pay. We've ripped him off in ways that we can never undo and make full restitution for.

Reconciliation requires that somebody assume our debt and that something happen to make us come into the good graces of God. I'm oversimplifying this for the sake of just making the point from Philemon. There's much more to it than that.

But Paul in writing to Philemon, the owner, said this in Philemon verses 17 and 18. He says, If then you count me as a partner, receive him as your partner as you would me. But if he has wronged you or owes you anything, put that on my account.

Now this is just an absolutely beautiful picture of Christ's intercession for us to God. Two things happen. One, if you count me to be your partner, treat him the way you'd treat me.

Receive him the way you'd receive me. In other words, even though he is no partner to you, but he's an offender. He's a sinner.

He has ripped you off. He has done criminal acts toward you. And you could have

something against him.

Count him as if he was me instead. If I'm a partner, treat him as your partner. Now, but what about the debt? Well, if he owes you anything or is wronged, you put that on my account.

There's this double imputation. The merits of Paul are imputed to Onesimus in the site of Philemon, so that Onesimus is treated by Philemon as if he was Paul himself. Whereas the demerits of Onesimus are credited to Paul, so that Paul assumes the guilt, as it were, or the debt, the imputation of wrong is made to Paul.

Now this is a perfect picture, it seems to me, at least very close to perfect if not perfect, of what Paul is saying about Christ in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 21. There is a double imputation. On the one hand, our debt, our wrong, has been imputed to Christ so that he becomes the debtor, he becomes the sinner.

He is treated or counted as the one who has sinned, even though he never sinned. And on the other hand, his righteousness is accounted to us, so that we become the righteousness of God in him. The idea of one party becoming guilty of another party's sin is a very difficult philosophical concept.

And there are some who reject it altogether, as even a Christian doctrine, I mean even some who would be Christians otherwise, they just have trouble with that. How can one person become really, literally guilty for someone else's guilt? I don't know, but I believe God can do it. And it says God is one who did it, that God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us.

Now I can say this, that in no circumstance that I'm aware of, in earthly dealings in society, is it possible for another person to actually become guilty for another person's actions? Can't be done, but with God nothing should be called impossible. It is God who made him who knew no sin to become sin for us, so that our sin was punished when Jesus was punished, because he was treated as if he was our sin. That is, I think, the probable reason, there is another possible reason besides this, but I think that is the probable reason why when God wished to depict this in the days of Moses, he had Moses make a serpent and put it up on a pole.

And that serpent represented Christ on the cross, we know that because Jesus said so when he was talking to Nicodemus. In John chapter 3 he said, just as Moses raised up a serpent in the wilderness, so also shall the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. It sort of goes against our instincts to allow a snake, generally a symbol of Satan in the scripture, to represent Christ, the snake on the pole.

And I don't know for sure why that is. Many people have asked, and there are a couple of

suggestions I could make that might be relevant, but one of them is certainly this. Perhaps it is this, that when Jesus died, in the reckoning of God, it was our wickedness that died.

And the snake represented Christ as having become our sin, our wickedness, hung on the cross. That's almost an offensive suggestion. It almost sounds blasphemous.

If God wasn't the one himself who did it, it would be blasphemous. But that Jesus became sin so that we could become righteousness is what Paul is saying, at least what he seems to be saying. And that kind of transmission of guilt from one party to another, though only God could do it, and it never really has happened, except in that one case.

The symbol of that occurred many times in the Old Testament law when the priest would lay his hand on the scapegoat or on a sacrificial victim and confess the sins of the people over that animal. That was symbolic of transferring the sins and the guilt to that animal. Now of course the animal couldn't ever really become guilty.

It's just an animal. And it says in Hebrews that the blood of bulls and goats could never really take away sin. But Jesus can.

And those animals that were sacrificed were a symbol and a picture of what Christ would do. The laying of the hand on the animal's head and confession of sin, the transfer of the iniquities to the animal was symbolic merely, but with Christ it's real. And he became the scapegoat.

He became the sacrifice. Our sins were laid on him so that when he died our sins died. And we are left behind only having his righteousness.

Now chapter 6, we then as workers together with him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. Now what does it mean, don't receive the grace of God in vain? Doesn't in vain mean fruitlessly or having, failing in the desired result? In Galatians chapter 6, we have chapter 4, Galatians 4, 11, Paul says, I'm afraid for you lest I have labored for you in vain. And he's concerned that his labor, though it seemed to be effective at one time, might not continue to be and that his labors will prove to be in the final analysis in vain.

In chapter 5 of Galatians, in verse 4, he talks about you who have become estranged from Christ. You who attempt to be justified by law, for you have been fallen from grace. It's possible to be estranged from Christ.

Estranged is a term that is usually used in our language or in our society to speak of a husband and wife who are no longer living together and are probably near divorce or even have been divorced, perhaps. Although the term usually I don't think is used for people who have actually gone through a legal divorce. On the path to divorce, typically, are referred to as estranged from one another.

Paul says that people can be estranged from Christ and fall from grace. And that is probably the idea that Paul is concerned about when he says, do not receive the grace of God in vain. You can receive the grace of God, but it can ultimately turn out to be in vain.

Now, frankly, I don't know how a Calvinist can work with this kind of a text because the Calvinist believes in something called irresistible grace. And that if grace is given to you as an elect person, it'll never be in vain. It could never possibly fail to affect its desired result because God is 100% sovereign over these things.

And he irresistibly draws by his grace. He gives his grace unilaterally, unconditionally, and thus perseverance is guaranteed in it. If Paul had such doctrines, it's hard to know how words like these could ever proceed from his pen.

I mean, if Paul had such doctrines, that's fine. I'd like to have them too. But it's like saying, I don't know anywhere in the Bible that says that Paul had such doctrines as these.

And it is very hard to reconcile Paul's actual words with the assumption that he held such doctrines. If I believed that all people that God has elected will inevitably and irresistibly be drawn by God's grace and God will always get what he wants out of the situation, because he's totally sovereign and nothing ever happens apart from what he really wants to happen, I would never be inclined to ask anyone or to plead with them not to receive the grace of God in vain. Or even to plead with them as Paul does to be reconciled to God.

No need to plead. It's going to happen. All I need to do is preach the gospel and then God's grace will do the rest.

This pleading, this persuading. You know, Paul doesn't sound very fatalistic in his views of salvation at all in these chapters. Because he says in verse 11 of chapter 5, we persuade men.

In chapter 5 verse 20, we plead with people. And now he pleads with them again. What? To be reconciled with God? To not receive the grace of God in vain? Sounds like he's pleading with people to get saved and to stay saved.

And there's no sense wasting all that emotional energy if that's already a given, it seems to me. But anyway. For he says, in an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.

This is a quotation actually from Isaiah 49 verse 8. It's kind of peculiar that Paul would quote it here. Actually, Paul quotes scripture in a peculiar way in this epistle elsewhere too. I mean, earlier in chapter 4, he quoted from the psalm that says, I believed and therefore I spoke.

And he makes sort of a very, very free and loose application of what he was saying. Well, the psalmist spoke what he believed and we speak what we believe. But I mean, it hardly seems like an exegesis of the passage he's quoting or really a direct application of what the psalmist was saying necessarily.

But here also, in quoting Isaiah, and Paul knew this fully. He was not making a mistake here, of course. He was not trying to fool anyone or himself fool.

Hardly anyone in the first century, I would imagine, knew the scriptures of the Old Testament better than Saul of Tarsus. And he was not making some kind of dumb mistake here. It's just peculiar how his thoughts were working.

That the scripture he quotes in Isaiah 49 verse 8 is actually addressed to Christ, to the servant of the Lord. And God says to his servant, to Jesus, in an acceptable time I have heard you, in the day of salvation I have helped you. Almost certainly a reference to the resurrection.

When Jesus was in trouble and needed to be delivered or saved, he was helped by the father, by of course being raised from the dead. But Paul quotes that not to make any of those points from it. Not to talk about this actual subject matter of the verse itself, but only to sort of springboard from a particular phrase in it, which is the phrase, the day of salvation.

Because God says to Jesus, in the day of salvation I have helped you. And Paul takes that phrase, day of salvation, and says, well. And also, by the way, the other phrase in the same quote is acceptable time.

In an acceptable time I have heard you, in a day of salvation I have helped you. Well, Paul takes those two phrases and says, well, now is the accepted time. And today is the day of salvation.

Now, the quotation can be applied that way. It is hardly bringing out the main meaning of that quote that he gives from Isaiah. At one level, what he's saying is, this prophecy in Isaiah is fulfilled now.

I mean, Jesus has in our own day, Paul would be saying, in the days of the apostles, in his own generation, has fulfilled this, that Jesus was helped on Resurrection Sunday. And God helped him, raised him out of the grave and delivered from all his trouble. But that's not the point Paul's making.

Paul's making something more, it seems to me, like an argument for not receiving the grace of God in vain. Because he starts the quotation with the word for. For, he says.

He's just said, I plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain, for. That means because. He said, in an accepted time, I have heard you in a day of salvation, I have

helped you.

So this quotation somehow is being construed as an argument for not receiving the grace of God in vain. And as near as I can tell, what Paul is saying is, there's no. This is the time for responding to God.

This is the time to be saved. This is the day of salvation. This is the opportunity.

Don't put it off. Don't neglect it. Don't receive it and then fall away from it.

This is the crucial time. This is the day of opportunity for salvation. And don't let this day get away from you without taking advantage of it.

That would be apparently Paul's reason for quoting that and for making the statement he does. Though as I say, that's my mind. I mean, maybe no one else has any trouble with this.

That's kind of a peculiar. He could have said that without quoting that verse. And by quoting that verse, you'd expect him to bring out something more central to the meaning of what that verse is saying.

But there's nothing invalid or illegitimate about what he is saying. I mean, the verse is talking about a period of salvation at which time God would raise Jesus from the dead. And Paul seems to be saying that the church age from the time Jesus rose from the dead to on, as long as there's opportunity, that is the day of salvation.

It's that protracted day of salvation. It is the time that God is allowing people to be saved. Verse three says, we give no offense to anything in anything that our ministry may not be blamed.

But in all things, we commend ourselves as ministers of God. In much patience, in tribulations, in needs and distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings by purity, by knowledge, by long suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report, as deceivers and yet true, as unknown and yet well known, as dying and behold, we live, as chastened and yet not killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things. Now this passage obviously is one very long protracted sentence.

And long enough and with as many little details and so forth, specific different words and so forth, as to perhaps put your mind to sleep, maybe even put your feet to sleep while you're reading it, so that you miss essentially the structure of the thing and the message of what he's saying here. This business in verse 3 about not giving offense was a concern that he expressed in 1 Corinthians to the same audience when he was writing to those in

the church who were kind of involved in compromise and eating meat sacrificed to idols in the actual feasts of the idol temples. And he said they shouldn't do that, not because there was anything magically damaging by eating meat sacrificed to idols, but simply by the way that that would stumble brethren and give offense to them.

And he said, don't give any offense to anyone. He argued that they should not give offense because that could prevent people from believing. And he points out here, he himself follows such a policy, he does not give offense.

Now obviously some people were offended at Paul. It is possible, I should say it is not possible, to live your life without some people being offended. If you live unrighteously, you'll offend the righteous.

If you live righteously, you'll offend at some level the unrighteous. But what he means is that he does not give anyone any valid cause for offense. He's not damaging anyone, he's not harming anyone, he's not wronging anyone.

And he is sensitive to other people so as to try to avoid causing unnecessary offense. But he says, so that our ministry not be blamed. He's concerned about the reputation of the ministry because he's concerned about people's reception of the gospel he's preaching.

But he says, but in all things we commend ourselves. Now this idea of commending himself, he just said back in verse 12 of chapter 5, for we do not commend ourselves again to you. That is to say, we are not writing this letter as a letter of commendation about ourselves.

We are not trying to talk ourselves up. We're not trying to toot our own horn. We're not trying to establish our own credibility by saying something about ourselves.

However, there is one way that we do establish our credibility. There is a sense in which we do commend ourselves. We are concerned that you know our credibility.

We are concerned that you recognize the legitimacy of our ministry. We're not going to try to commend ourselves by writing a letter of commendation for ourselves. But we do in fact, he says, commend ourselves as ministers of God in, not in writing, but in other ways.

What are the other ways? Well he gives a very long list and it's helpful, I think, to see what may not be obvious as you just read the list and your mind goes numb because there's so many words in rapid succession. It is helpful to see that he actually is referring to several categories of things. Initially he points to the sufferings he has endured.

This is in basically verses 4 and 5. The various things he has endured for the gospel's sake are the first thing he mentions as the credentials of his ministry. He doesn't have a letter of commendation but he's got this. What? That he endures with great patience or

endurance tribulations, needs, distresses.

Tribulations simply means afflictions of various kinds, fairly generic. Needs would be specifically lacking things necessary, being poor. Distresses may have reference to the emotional distresses that he's alluded to earlier.

But he talks specifically in verse 5 about stripes, which of course are the blows of a whip or of a rod. Imprisonments, we know what that means, easy enough. Tumults, probably a reference to riots.

There were many riots that were caused often by the Jews among the Gentiles over Paul to try to get him driven out of town. Paul was often in the midst of riots that were aimed at destroying him. In labors, in sleeplessness and fasting.

Now those three things are all kind of self-imposed in a way, unless he intends them in some other sense as involuntary fastings. But in addition to the trials he endures from outward sources, he also subjects himself to not an easy life. He is known to labor hard, to miss sleep, to miss meals even, for the sake of the gospel.

This is one of the ways in which he commends his ministry, by his patient endurance of hardship. But there's more. Verse 6 is another category.

It says, purity, knowledge, long-suffering, kindness, the Holy Spirit, sincerity, and sincere love. What do these have in common? Well they aren't things he suffers. These are basically the innate character of his ministry, his behavior.

He is pure in behavior. He exhibits accurate knowledge of God. Long-suffering means patience, not endurance in this case, but in this case what we think of as patience, not becoming impatient.

Kindness, which is gentleness, by the Holy Spirit, however that is meant, by spirituality, perhaps meaning by spiritual insight and spiritual anointing. And by sincere love, obviously a character trait and a behavioral pattern. So in verse 6 he shifts.

In verses 4 and 5 he says, we commend our ministry in one sense by the things we endure, in another sense by our character, and our demeanor, and our manner. We don't need a letter of commendation. You can see how kind we are, how loving we are, how anointed by the Holy Spirit our ministry is, how pure we are, how patient we are with people.

So the commendation of his ministry is first of all in endurance, second of all it is in character, thirdly in verse 7 he says, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left. These things refer to either his methods or tools or his modus operandi. How does he win the day? How does he conquer cities? How does he establish the ministry? Well not by bribing officials, not by

marshalling a militia to come against the bad guys, not by slander and gossip.

Those aren't his methods. His method is to present the word of truth and to operate in the power of God, no doubt a reference to the miracles and so forth that he operated in, and to conduct warfare armed with God's armor. Now he doesn't say what God's armor really is here.

We know he mentions the armor of God in other places. The most well-known place to us probably is in Ephesians chapter 6 where he talks about taking the helmet of salvation and the breastplate of righteousness and having your loins girded with truth and the shield of faith and the feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace and so forth. That is the best known passage where Paul kind of unpacks the armor the metaphor of armor.

Though there are a number of other places where he mentions armor. In Romans chapter 13, Romans chapter 13 verse 12, Paul says, The night is far spent, the day is at hand, therefore let us cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light. So he doesn't explain in detail what he means by the armor of light in that passage, but it's obviously the same kind of metaphor of having the armor of God.

In also 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, Paul speaks of such armor. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, he says in verse 8, Let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. There's obviously some, there's some parallel there with Ephesians 6. Here he doesn't actually use the word armor, but he speaks of a breastplate and a helmet.

Obviously the same images are in his mind in all these passages. Now, in 2 Corinthians 6, he makes specific reference to his warfare being a spiritual warfare. He doesn't conduct a physical warfare to reach his ends.

And he wears the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, 2 Corinthians 6. What does he mean on the right hand and on the left? Does that mean he surrounds himself all around with armor? Some feel that, and this may be true, this suggestion commends itself to my reasonableness I guess, that the right hand was the hand that bore the sword and the left hand carried the shield. So that the right hand was the offensive hand and the left hand was the defensive hand to block blows from the enemy with the shield. And so he could be saying that both in his offensive and his defensive warfare, it is a spiritual warfare he does.

He does not conduct himself in physical warfare. He is armed not with physical armor, but with the armor of righteousness. And in fact, righteousness itself is the armor.

He remains influential and invulnerable to the attacks of the enemy by keeping his nose clean, by staying righteous before God. But the point here is that verse 7 and the list of

things there all have to do with Paul's methodology. And then in verse 8, it says by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report.

And apparently that means he is commended, his ministry is commended both when he is honored and when he is dishonored. When he is reported well and when he is reported badly. How is this so? Well, he probably means that there are two ways here that his ministry is commended.

One is when good people speak well of him. And the other is when bad people speak evil of him. Both of them commend him.

His ministry is commended by the fact that good people acknowledge him. He has an honor among good people. He has a good report among those who are godly.

But his ministry is equally commended by the fact that bad people don't like him. They dishonor him. They speak evil of him.

Often a man's virtue can be seen just as much in who his enemies are as who his commenders are or those who endorse him are. And Paul seems to be saying that my ministry is commended by the various reactions of the righteous and the unrighteous toward me. Furthermore, he goes on in verse 8 saying, as deceivers yet true, as unknown yet well known, as dying and yet behold we live, as chastened and yet not killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.

This is a series of contrasts which are in a sense paradoxical. We could call these the paradoxes of Paul's ministry. These too are part of the way he commends his ministry.

The ministry has a certain paradoxical element. It seems like if God was not in it, these things would not be true. A person is called a deceiver, yet he's true.

He's a relatively unknown guy and yet he's well known enough to have an impact. He's a man who seems to be dying and yet he does never really die. He's still alive.

He gets beat up a lot, chastened, beaten with rods and so forth, yet he's not killed. He just keeps on going. As sorrowful, that is, he's in the circumstances of a sorrowful man, but he's yet rejoicing.

He's in the circumstances of a poor man and yet he makes many rich. He enriches many. And he might even mean that in the literal material sense because at the time that Paul wrote this letter, he was going among the Macedonian churches collecting money to take to the poor in Jerusalem.

In fact, in chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Corinthians, he devotes the entire two chapters to a discussion of this that he has gone to Macedonia, he's gotten money from the churches

there, he's going to be coming to Corinth, he plans to get money from them too, and he's going to take it to Jerusalem and give it to the poor there. So here's a man who owns nothing, a man who's in the circumstances of a pauper, and yet his ministry is enriching people who are poor, taking money and delivering money for someone else. It's not his money, so he's still poor.

What a weird life this man lives. He's dying, but he doesn't die. He's chastened, but he still lives on.

He's in the circumstances that are a great grief to any man, including him, and yet he's rejoicing. He's a poor man, and yet other people are being made rich by him, or their needs are being supplied by him. And of course, if that were made spiritual, it could even be extended further.

And as having nothing, yet possessing all things. Now, what does it mean, as having nothing, yet possessing all things? I don't know. But I think it may be related to the same thought that Jesus said to his disciples, that whoever has left lands or houses or wife or children or whatever, for my sake, shall receive a hundredfold more in this life and in the next life, eternal life.

That there is a compensation to those who have forsaken all, who possess nothing. And one of those compensations is that they possess a great deal. By forsaking their families and their vocations and so forth, they have become ministers of God who have homes open to them all over the place.

They have family all over the world. They're welcomed into many homes, onto many lands. You know, we, not anywhere near as much as Paul or the apostles certainly, but I've known a little bit of this in my own life because I made a decision years ago not to pursue houses and lands and those kinds of things.

But I feel welcome in many parts of the world. I mean, I've been around the world and around the country many times. I've been around the country and wherever I go, there's someone saying, come stay at our house.

Have dinner with us. Use my car or whatever. I mean, there's just, you know, when you possess nothing, it's not so much you put pressure on people by your poverty for them to deliver something.

I mean, that can be true too. I mean, poverty can be manipulated. A person could choose to be poor so that people are forced to help them or almost forced to do so.

But that's not what's happening and that's not what happened with the apostles. People gladly would have the apostles in their home. People would feel honored to have them in their home.

Some would, you know. And therefore, even though the apostles owned nothing, they had a house everywhere they went. Any town they went to, there was a place to stay.

There was someone to feed them. It's as if they owned the place. As if they owned everything everywhere.

They didn't own anything for themselves, yet they didn't lack anything. It's as if they possessed all things. Now, what Paul is saying, I think, is that although he does not commend his ministry by recourse to letters of commendation, there are many ways in which he does commend his ministry.

There are many things he could point to and say, now look, check this out. Now you decide about my ministry. First of all is what he suffered.

Secondly is his character. Thirdly was his methods. And finally, by the reactions of the world to him.

The reactions of people to him could tell you a lot about whether his ministry is authentic or not. And then last of all, by the paradoxes of his ministry. That a man who would seem like he should be grieving is rejoicing.

Seems like he's poor, but he's making other people, he's giving money to other people who are poor. He seems like he owns nothing, but he never lacks anything. This, of course, calls attention to the supernatural nature of his ministry.

That God sustains him against all reason in a way that seems impossible, or at least strange. It goes against human wisdom. Paul's success is of divine origin, in other words.

In verse 11 he says, O Corinthians, we have spoken openly to you. Our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections.

Now in return for the same, I speak as to children, you also be open. Now remember I said when I was giving the introduction of 2 Corinthians, one of the things that makes me uncomfortable with 2 Corinthians is Paul says things in strange ways. Usually we can figure out what he means, but in this epistle more than most he says, he uses phrases and expressions that are just not, they don't sound natural to our ears.

We can maybe work it out, oh I guess he meant this, but the question is why did he say it that way instead of saying it in a way that would sound more obvious. And the answer probably is that Paul used idioms more in this letter that are unfamiliar to us because it was so personal and he wasn't writing for a broad audience. Those are probably the answers, but this is a passage like that.

When he says, especially in verse 12, you are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections. What does that mean? Well, if you get a real modern translation

or a commentary, you'll find that it is generally understood that what Paul means is that I'm not holding back anything from you, you're holding back from me. You're restricting, you're holding back your love for me, I'm not holding back my love for you.

Based upon the fact that he says in verse 11, we have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open to you. And then he exhorts in verse 13, now in return for the same, you be open to us. In other words, open your heart to us.

And he says it very specifically in chapter 7, verse 2, open your hearts to us. Actually, your hearts is not in the Greek, but open to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, etc., etc.

So, here we have the, what does it mean to be open and to be restricted? Be open, don't be restricted. We are open toward you, we're not restricted toward you. You're restricted toward us, but be open toward us.

There's this dichotomy between open and restricted, but it's not at all explained what it means. One way of deducing what it means would be perhaps to see what he says in that connection in chapter 7, verse 2, just leaping forward for a moment, where he says open to us, or open your hearts to us. And then he makes an argument for doing so.

He says we have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have defrauded no one. Now, we have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have defrauded no one is an argument for being open to us. Therefore, be open to us might mean something like trust us, or at least, you know, speak openly with us.

I think trust us is maybe an idea that he has in mind. I mean, if I said trust me, I haven't hurt anyone, I haven't defrauded anyone, you haven't caught me stealing anything, you can trust me. And maybe that is how we're to understand his words, open.

And that would mean in verses 11 through 13, he'd be saying, we've trusted you, we've laid ourselves bare, we've worn our thoughts and our emotions on our sleeve, we've made ourselves vulnerable to you, but you're not really open to us. You're not really trusting us. You're suspicious of us, you're holding back your full trust of us.

But we're asking you to respond to us the way we have been to you. Trust us. We haven't hurt anyone.

And that is apparently his meaning, at least to my mind it seems. I just pointed out that chapter 7 verse 2 uses the very same wording that chapter 6 verses 11 through 13 uses. And it has been observed by commentators that the verses that fall in between there, namely chapter 6 verse 14 through chapter 7 verse 1, are the same.

And almost seem like a parenthesis. No more than that. It seems like an interpolation from another letter.

I don't believe it is, but there are some who have suggested that it is so different, such a break in the thought at verse 14, and such a return to the original thought at chapter 7 verse 2 about being open and so forth, that somehow chapter 6 verse 14 through chapter 7 verse 1 are a segment from some other source that was dropped into this letter somewhere along its passing down. You know, I mean, Paul didn't put it there, it is argued. But someone who preserved the letter stuck that in there.

It was interpolated. Whether Paul wrote it or whether it was interpolated from somewhere else has been debated. Some believe that the language of the section in question, that is chapter 6 verse 14 through chapter 7 verse 1, that the language of it actually resembles very closely the thought of many known documents from the Essene community, you know, from the Dead Sea Scrolls and so forth.

But it is very unlikely, A, that Paul would have had any contact or affinity to the Essene community, and B, that a piece of writing from the Essene community would somehow be inserted into Paul's letters from the Essene community, were not Christian and were not custodians of Paul's letters or any other Christian documents, that the similarities certainly must be coincidental. It has been thought, because of the tone of the section I'm referring to, that it might well belong to that lost letter, that sorrowful letter that Paul alluded to, that he sent between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. The same letter that some people have tried to say that chapters 10 through 13 might have been a portion of that letter.

On this view, Paul's missing letter got greatly fragmented and people lost track of it except in forms of scraps and stuck it into 2 Corinthians in various haphazard ways. That doesn't seem real likely to me, to tell you the truth. I mean, maybe chapters 10 through 13, since that's a solid block, but the likelihood that a little section of five verses would be stuck in at this point in 2 Corinthians by some mistake seems really bizarre, because there's nothing about the place it's inserted that would give any reason for someone to artificially insert it there.

That's the very reason I think it's authentic and was there originally, that Paul can do whatever he wants. An editor would do something more reasonable. You'd expect an editor, if he's editing it, to have a plan by which he's editing.

Paul, however, is more or less rambling, and he might well digress. It's not unlike Paul to digress. He's done it several times already in this letter.

So I'm assuming that what he says next is originally part of the letter and originally inserted here, but it is a lengthy parenthesis, I would say. Why he brings it up is not 100% clear, but we can guess a little bit. Let me read the section we're talking about here.

This is 2 Corinthians 6.14 through 7.1. Do not be unequally yoked together with

unbelievers, for what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial or Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said, I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Therefore, come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." It's a marvelous passage, and it's obviously a call to holiness and separation from association or somehow admixture with evil, very possibly idolatry is what is in view, since he says, what has the temple of God to do with idols? Well, we do know from 1 Corinthians that idolatry was at least a threat to the purity of the Corinthian church, because there were some eating meat sacrifice to idols, some even going into the temple of the idols to eat the meat. Paul talks about that in 1 Corinthians chapters 8 through 10, and Paul suggested that if you do that, you may well fall. He said, if you think you stand, take heed lest you fall.

That if you go into the temples of the idols, you may be tempted beyond what you think, and you may fall into idolatry. And that was not just guessing, that was a very real danger that Paul knew about and warned about. And so maybe we could deduce that some of the Corinthians have actually gotten into idolatry.

But it would be strange, if that is true, that he would just interject this brief thing about it, and he doesn't really name idolatry outright. That business of what has the temple of God to do with idols, I mean, that's just one of several, five different contrasts. What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? What communion has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? There's no reason to say that Paul's principal concern in this diatribe is about idolatry in the church, although idols are mentioned, but he mentions believers and unbelievers together.

He mentions light and darkness, lawlessness and righteousness. It's not just a focus on idolatry, and if there was idolatry in the church, it seems like that would be a severe enough thing for Paul to actually speak outright and plain about it, and not just make an allusion to it. Paul seems to be speaking of a principle here, of not mixing unlike things, not mixing what do not belong together.

When he says, do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, I think the way most evangelicals apply this these days is with reference to marriage. You know, that a Christian should not marry a non-Christian, and this is true. In fact, Paul said that in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, that a Christian widow could marry anyone she wants to, but only

in the Lord.

Only, in other words, another Christian. It is not right for Christians to marry non-Christians. Paul said that in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 and verse 39, but I don't think that's what he's talking directly about here.

If there were Christians marrying non-Christians, he doesn't say it plainly here, and usually when he wants to correct a specific thing in the church of Corinth, he says, it is reported that, or how is it that, and he'll say, you know, some of you are going to court against each other, or there's a man living with his father's wife, or some say there's no resurrection, or some are going away drunk from the communion table. I mean, Paul doesn't just allude vaguely to things that need correction. He directly says, this is the problem I'm addressing, and here's what I'm saying about it.

Here he doesn't identify what the problem is. He doesn't specify that there's a problem, for example, with idolatry in the church. He doesn't specify that there's a problem with Christians marrying non-Christians in the church, and therefore there might not have been.

It might be that he wasn't thinking specifically about those cases, but more generically, that Christians need to separate themselves more from worldly influence and not link up with it to the degree that apparently the Corinthian church was, perhaps by giving heed to these opponents of Paul. Perhaps Paul's critics are the ones who are the unbelievers he has in mind, and you shouldn't be working with these people. You shouldn't be welcoming their ministry in the church.

You shouldn't have this belial in the temple of God, because you are the temple of God, the church is. He may be directing his remarks still against what he's been directing his remarks against earlier, and that is those who are criticizing him, and that the Christians who are on Paul's side shouldn't be fellowshipping with, or mixing with, or intermingling with those who are of the opposite spirit, those who are trying to undermine Paul and his message. And that may be his whole reason for bringing it up, but if it is, it doesn't rule out the fact that the principle is a principle, and can justly be applied to many situations, including, for example, marriage.

But not only marriage, I would say business partnerships, or service clubs, or lobbying interests, and so forth. I mean, there's a lot of ways that Christians often link up with non-Christians to accomplish something. Married couples, of course, is an obvious form of link, or a business partnership.

But what about Christians that join up in an organization with non-Christians to fight some social evil, whether it be abortion, or pornography, or some other thing like that, homosexuality, getting involved in a political organization, and striving together. This idea of being yoked together has a specific meaning. A yoke was a wooden bar placed

over the necks of two oxen, or two animals, to get them to pull together.

And pulling together would be to pull a plow, or a cart, or something in order to make them work, labor, to serve together. They're serving their owner, and he is steering them with a yoke. But if you have a believer under the yoke of his master, remember Jesus said, take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, in Matthew chapter 11, I forget what verse, 30 or something like that.

Well, we have the yoke of Jesus on us, but what if we put an unbeliever under the yoke too? Well, he's not to be steered by Jesus. It's like putting an ox and an ass under the yoke. The ox is a willing worker, the ass is stubborn, and doesn't want to work.

Actually, Paul's statement about being unequally yoked together, I believe, is drawn deliberately from that very image of an ox and an ass under the same yoke. An ox being a clean animal, an ass being an unclean animal. In Deuteronomy chapter 22, and verse 10, Deuteronomy 22, 10, God said, you shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.

This is forbidden in the law. Now, no doubt that was a spiritual thing, more than agricultural. But you see, what God was saying, you don't mix the clean and the unclean together.

The donkey's unclean, the ox is clean in Jewish law. You don't put them together and link them. God wants separation between the clean and the unclean.

There'd also be a very practical and logistical reason not to put a donkey and an ox under the yoke together. But when Paul says, don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers, he's apparently alluding to that law, saying, listen, you're a clean animal. They're an unclean animal.

Don't be under the same yoke. Don't try to serve God bound to an unbeliever. Now, an ox would serve his master better alone than being yoked with a donkey, because the donkey, because it is yoked with the ox, can slow it down or pull it in another direction.

And a Christian can serve God better alone than yoked in some binding agreement, some binding association, with some binding agenda with some other people who don't have the same Christian convictions, whether it's a wife, a business partner, or associate in some other endeavor. What fellowship is there between believers and unbelievers? And so Paul cites a variety of scriptures. He actually has two quotes in verses 16, 17, and 18 are not really quotes at all.

They are combinations. They are amalgams of lines out of various scriptures in the Old Testament from Leviticus and Exodus and Ezekiel and Isaiah and Hosea. And he quotes God as saying, I will dwell among them and walk among them and be their God and they shall be my people.

Well, God wants us to be a company of his people doing things as his people, not as a mixed group. We are his temple. He dwells in us.

And therefore, God wants there to be separation from the holy and the unholy. He says, come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean and I will receive you.

I will be a father to you and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty. So God is calling us to a unique separation to himself. And if we do not separate ourselves from that which defiles and that is unclean, then we will be defiled.

We will fall short of that great calling. Therefore, Paul says in chapter seven, verse one, therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. That's a good verse for preaching.

I don't have much time. I don't have any time to preach it right now. All I can say is that holiness is perfected by the fear of God.

If you fear God, you will pursue holiness. By the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil, it says in the Proverbs or in the Psalm, I forget which. But that requires that we cleanse ourselves from those things that defile, that offend God.

And that would include filth of flesh and of spirit. Flesh would probably be bodily behavior and spirit would be attitudes and mind behavior. We'll say more about this verse, I imagine, when we come back.

We've run out of time and we will take up chapter seven next time. So we'll leave unsaid some of the things that I might otherwise say now, simply because the clock is a tyrant and we are out of time for this passage.