

# OpenTheo

## 2nd Corinthians Overview (Part 2)



### **Bible Book Overviews** - Steve Gregg

Paul's message to the Corinthians in 2nd Corinthians emphasizes that ministry is not solely defined by structural or corporate authority, but rather by a real relationship with God and the body of Christ. He explains that the weakness and scars of ministry are evidence of God's power, urging Christians to trust in grace and not to boast in their works. Paul also addresses his own struggles with infirmity and persecution, emphasizing the need for fear of God and perseverance in the face of adversity.

### **Transcript**

2nd Corinthians Overview So coming back to 2nd Corinthians, looking at chapter 4, Paul said, Therefore, since we have this ministry, now, again, it's not clear why he's bringing up these things about his ministry at this point in the letter. It may be that he's simply trying to bolster their confidence that he is someone to be trusted, since there had been some resistance to his ministry in the church. And he began telling the story about how that was to be remedied, and the story will continue in chapter 7. But in between, he's saying a lot of things about his ministry.

In chapter 3, he said he was a minister of the new covenant, not of the old letter of the law, but of the new of the spirit. And it may be that he's making points like that because the criticism against him in Corinth could well have been brought by somebody who is a Judaizer. Now, we don't have really much evidence of Judaizers in Corinth.

There is a little bit. As you get toward the end of 2nd Corinthians, some of his critics are, are they Jews? I am more. Are they Israelites? I am more.

So it sounds like some of his critics were Jewish people. And we know that in 1st Corinthians, among the divisive camps were those that were saying, I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, and I'm of Cephas or Peter. Peter, of course, was the leader in the early days of the church of Jerusalem.

And it may well be that Judaizers tended to say, well, why follow Paul when the church in Jerusalem has Peter, Jesus ordained Peter as sort of the leader of the group. And he's, they might have claimed that he was more observant of the law. They might have been

misrepresenting Peter.

But Judaizers are always trying to put Christians under the law of Moses. And that may be why Paul went off on this discussion in chapter 3 about he's the minister of the new covenant, not written in stone, but written on hearts and so forth. And that the old covenant was passing away and even the glory of it was passing away and was not equal to the glory that is surpassingly, exceedingly growing from glory to glory into the image of Christ through us.

So verse chapter four, therefore, since we have this ministry, that is this ministry of the new covenant, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness or handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. To whom was Paul accountable? There's a lot of talk in some circles about accountability.

Some groups say, you know, everyone has to be have an accountability partner or be accountable to a small group leader, accountable to someone accountable to a pastor. I remember I was once approached by a organization that was taking Christian musicians who had not recorded records and didn't have managers and so forth. And they wanted me to be the management for these like amateur Christian musicians, of which I was one.

And they sent me they sent me an application. And what they were going to do is set up gigs for people who are unknown Christian musicians like myself. And there were others, obviously, they're working with.

And on the application, they said, who is your pastor? Well, I happen to be between churches at the time. I the church I'd previously been in had split into two parts. I hadn't joined either of them because I didn't agree with either.

I was ministering several times a week in churches outside of town traveling. I was leading a Bible school five days a week, teaching three hours a day and in prayers and fellowship and breaking of bread with these people on a daily basis. And I didn't know who to call my pastor.

So I put down the name of a pastor who had been my pastor when I lived in Santa Cruz. Now I was living in Oregon now. And they came back to me and said, well, we don't understand you live in Oregon, but your pastor's in Santa Cruz, California.

We don't understand. And I said, well, at this point, I'm not attending a church in Oregon, but I have he's the last pastor I was under before I came to Oregon. And they said, well, you know what? What kind of accountability structure are you under? I said, well, I run a school, you know, I run a Bible school.

We have a board of directors we meet once a year, you know, and I'm in fellowship all the time. I go to churches. I have two pastors locally.

I eat breakfast with once a week, but I don't have a pastor. And they said, well, you don't have an adequate accountability structure that. And I wrote back and said, well, does that mean that I could go to the biggest church in town and sit in the back row and go there every week? And the pastor wouldn't even know who I am, but I'd have an adequate accountability structure.

I could call him my pastor because I'm in his church. They said, yeah, I don't understand that mindset. Accountability is not a flow chart in the kingdom of God.

Accountability. Frankly, you're accountable to God. Paul said each of us will give account of himself to God.

Well, we also could be accountable to all people. Paul was his accountability was to the conscience of all people. He said, I just speak the truth and leave it to the consciences of everyone in the side of God to decide what they think of me.

Well, what if they don't like it? Well, then they don't like me. They don't receive from me. But I'm, you know, I live before God in a way that's unaccountable to God.

Now, there's nothing wrong with having people you're accountable to, but it certainly doesn't guarantee you're going to behave. The very church that had split that I had left was partially split because one of the elders and they had a strict accountability thing going on there at that church, too. He had been sleeping with two of the women in the church for eight years and no one knew it.

He was an elder. He was part of their accountability structure. But unbeknownst to anybody, he was having two affairs with married women in the church.

He wasn't apparently accountable to God or else he wouldn't do that kind of thing. If somebody is accountable to God, they don't do that kind of thing. If you're accountable to people, you might sneak around and do things that those people won't ever find out you're doing and still be just as wicked and be just as accountable in a way, or at least pretending to be.

Paul didn't have any of this phony organizational accountability in his thinking. Who did he answer to? He was sent out from Antioch. Some years earlier, and he traveled throughout the pagan world, planting churches, not answering back to the church that sent him out three years at a time.

Were they keeping him accountable? Not in any real way. Well, who did? Well, Paul traveled with Timothy and with Luke and with other people that I think he wanted to be accountable in a way, but it wasn't a formal structure. When he carried offerings from

the churches to Jerusalem, he let the churches send with him people from their church to accompany him to make sure the money was getting where it was supposed to get.

He didn't mind that, but he didn't need that accountability to make him behave. He was accountable before God. He lived with a clean conscience before God by manifesting the truth and commending himself to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

In other words, he had a real relationship with God and with the body of Christ that wasn't defined by structural, corporate, flow chart type authority structures. And you need those when you have people who aren't really godly. If you have a bunch of people who aren't godly, you need a lot of accountability.

I visited Keith Green's ministry in Woodland Hills back in 1979 before he moved to Texas. I stayed there for about a week. I was actually thinking about joining the ministry and he wanted me to.

But he had about 60 something people who had just been saved off the street who had been using drugs two weeks earlier and now they're living in a Christian community. And he had a really tight accountability structure for these people because he only had himself and one other guy was a leader. And so they had this kind of shepherding thing set up there so that there'd be under shepherds and so forth.

And even while I visited there, I had to be accountable to a guy who'd only been saved for two months. But he was at least known by them and he was pointed as my buddy. So, you know, if I wanted to go to McDonald's and get some chicken McNuggets, I had to get his permission.

I frankly had to get his permission, I think, to go to the bathroom even. But they didn't want anyone out of their sight because they didn't have a bunch of people they could trust. These are all brand new Christians out of this off the street.

You can't trust these guys not to, you know, sneak drugs or do other things. And you need that kind of tight account. I didn't join.

I didn't join the ministry there because I don't, I'm not an infant. You know, I don't need someone to babysit me to keep me on the straight and narrow. I follow Jesus on my own.

Thanks. But, but when you've got people who don't, then you need, you have to have tight accountability because they're not being accountable to God as they should be. But Paul was accountable to God and to every man's conscience.

But even if our gospel is veiled, it's veiled from those who are perishing, whose minds the God of this age, which is Satan, has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine to them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord and ourselves your servants for Jesus'

sake. For it is God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The light of the knowledge of the glory of God. What, where's that come from? I think that's from Habakkuk, if I'm not mistaken. I think it's Habakkuk 2.14. Yes.

Habakkuk 2.14 says, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. That's the goal. Someday the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God.

And Paul says, well, God has already shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus. By knowing Jesus, we have come to be acquainted with that light of the glory of God as the whole world someday will. This is how it spreads.

Eventually the whole knowledge of the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. He likens that to God calling light out of darkness, meaning Genesis 1 when God said, let there be light. That's what he's referring to.

God who commanded light to shine out of darkness has also done a parallel work in us by revealing Christ to us, by giving us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in Christ's face. What Paul is doing is saying the creation in Genesis 1 has some parallels in it to our own spiritual experience. And God no doubt ordered things in Genesis 1 partly as a type and a shadow of that because the earth was formless and void and darkness was on the face of the deep at first, which is the way the soul of the unbeliever is before God says, let there be light and shines, gives them the knowledge of the glory of God and the faith of Jesus Christ.

But then the word of God each day produced some new development in the creation, each of which can be seen as paralleling some spiritual development in the Christian life. And at the end, what does he have? He's got a man and woman in the image of God. Let us make man in our own image.

So he made man in his own image, male and female. He created them. God, when he started out with the shapeless, formless, dark earth, began to work and it began by bringing light and then worked more things in it, more things in it, until he had what his goal was, people in his own image.

And that's what he's doing in you. You start out in darkness, formless, void. God brought the light of the knowledge of God.

Further work of the word of God in you and the spirit of God you brought fruitfulness and life and other, you know, factors that we won't go into right now. And at the end, you'll be in the image of Christ. That's what he's working on.

You are a new creation if you're in Christ. Genesis 1 tells us about the old creation. If you're in Christ, you're a new creation.

In fact, Paul says that here in 2 Corinthians 5, 17. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation. So, he's kind of looking at Genesis 1 as having a parallel to the work of God spiritually in us.

God said to the darkness, let there be light. And there was light. Well, he gave light to us too.

And that's just the beginning of the work he's doing in us. We're being changed from glory to glory into that same image. It's an ongoing work.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellence of the power of may be of God and not of us. In other words, God has not chosen strong people to do his best work. Flawed people.

Many of you have seen the movie that's recently come out, The Jesus Revolution. It's got many things in it that aren't accurate actually, but it's about a true story, generally speaking. About the Jesus movement.

And two of the main leaders in it were Chuck Smith and Lonnie Frisbee. And they are depicted in the movie as not one-dimensional characters. They are, you know, they're admirable in many respects and yet they're shown to be human too and have certain things they have to apologize for and things like that.

Which is the way it is. It was a great move of God, but he picked weak vessels. Lonnie in particular.

I knew both Chuck and Lonnie. They're both dead now, but I knew them both. Lonnie was a particularly weak person at certain points in his life.

He was weak from the beginning. He was raised in a very broken way. Very, very much abused as a child and so forth.

Then when he became a Christian, he was like a child almost forever. But the thing is he was weak and many people know about his sins that caused him to eventually die of AIDS. But even though he was a weak man in many respects, he actually did love God and God used him powerfully.

He used him in my life. He used him in the lives of thousands and thousands of people. God sometimes puts his treasure in a vessel of clay, earthen vessel, a weak vessel.

Why would he do that? He says, so that the power, the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. These vessels that God uses should not be overly glorified by our fandom. We have to realize that these are weak people.

The only thing they do different than anyone else is God did something different with them. One of the things that Paul emphasizes again and again in 2 Corinthians is weakness is in a sense strength. Later on in chapter 12, he's going to say I was given a thorn in the flesh and I prayed three times that God would take it away and God said my grace is sufficient for you for my strength is made perfect in your weakness.

Even in chapter one, he said we had the sentence of death in ourselves so that we would not trust ourselves. But God who raises the dead, we are pressed beyond measure above strength. He has already said in chapter two, our sufficiency or chapter three, he said our sufficiency is not of ourselves.

It's of God. And so the message that is ringing so many times throughout this book is that weak people, people who are oppressed beyond their own strength, people who are earthen vessels, pots of clay, people who are limping with thorns in their sides. These are the ones that God's powers manifest through.

Just before coming here, some of us visited the grave of Corrie Ten Boom, who is buried about about a quarter mile from my mom's house. We've been there before but we have a guest with us today and we wanted to see the grave. So we went to see Corrie Ten Boom's grave.

Corrie Ten Boom was a great lady. And she used to use illustrations like she'd take this little, she'd be up at a podium like this, she'd take a cloth glove and dangle it like that and say, do you think this glove can pick up this Bible off this podium? And she'd demonstrate that of course it could not in any way do anything. It was a limp, weak glove.

Then she put it on her hand and said, now do you think this glove could pick up that Bible? Now, of course it could and she demonstrated it. But the point here is the glove could not do it, not because the glove is strong, but because of, no one would say, wow, what a strong glove that is. If you see a weight lifter wearing leather gloves as he's holding a bar and he's pushing, people think, how strong those gloves must be lifting all that weight.

Obviously, no one would think that way. It's stupid. It's not the gloves that are strong.

The credit goes to the muscle in the glove. And that's what Paul says. God chooses kind of shabby vessels sometimes, but he puts a treasure in there and he powerfully uses it and his strength is made more manifested in the weakness of the vessels he uses.

He says, and he said that also, by the way, in 1 Corinthians, the idea is there too in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, which I guess could have gone without saying, but it's on the same subject. He says in 1 Corinthians 1, 26, For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise, according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called, that God

has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are mighty, and the base things of the world, and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, so that no flesh should glory in his presence. So the reason God does it so that flesh won't glory in his presence, God wants the glory for what he does, and so he uses instruments that really are, it makes no sense to give them credit for it because they're so weak and flawed.

We're hard pressed on every side, not crushed. We're perplexed, but we're not in despair. We're persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed.

Yeah, we're getting beat up pretty bad, but we're rising to our feet again. We're not, it's not a knockout here. We're still stumbling along and moving on.

We're weak, but we're still moving. Always caring about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. He says the same thing in verse 11.

For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. The life of Jesus manifested in me. How's that happen? Well, as I as I carry about in me the dying of the Lord Jesus, now Paul's basically talking about how he looks like Jesus dying.

All of a sudden he's going to be beat up and stuff. What's visible in his flesh is the weakness, the scars, the wounds, the stumbling, the being knocked down, but not forsaken. It's the suffering that works the glory.

It's the suffering that causes the life of Jesus to be manifested in me. Do I want the life of Jesus manifested in me? Well, I think I do. Well, how much do I? How much of a beating am I willing to take in order that it'll happen? Well, I mentioned Corrie ten Boom.

When she came out of the Nazi prison, everyone who encountered her, I'm sure recognized she had the aroma of Christ about her. She was just you could see Jesus in her like in a few other people. She'd been knocked about really bad in a death camp, a Nazi death camp, and lost her family there.

Richard Wurmbrandt was a really sweet Christian man who had a lot of depth of the life of Jesus shown through him. And he was, of course, tortured for 14 years in communist prisons. Paul went through that kind of stuff, too.

And the life of Jesus manifested in him. How much do you want the life of Jesus to manifest in you? What are you willing to pay for it? Well, Paul says, Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what is written, I believed, therefore I spoke. We also believe and therefore speak, knowing that it is he who raised up Jesus, the Lord Jesus, will also raise us up with Jesus and will present us with you.



For all things are for your sakes that grace having spread through the many may cause thanksgiving to abound to you to the glory of God. And then it gets back to this business about how the sufferings are the thing that bring forth the manifestation of the glory of Christ in us. Therefore, we do not lose heart even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory while we do not look at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. He says, Our light affliction, and it seems very optimistic for him to speak of his affliction as light because he had some pretty serious affliction, but still it was light compared to the weight of glory.

It was but for a moment as opposed to the eternal weight of glory. The affliction and the glory are contrasted. The affliction is light and temporary.

The glory is heavy and permanent. And he says, this is happening for us while we are looking at the things that are not seen, not the things we're seeing. So it's not just getting beaten up that makes you more like Jesus.

A lot of people get beaten. A lot of people went through the same prison camp Corrie Jenn Boom did and came out bitter and nasty and and ruined for life. How come some people come out smelling like a rose and others come out bitter and ruined? Well, it depends.

Are you looking at that which is seen or that which is not seen? Are you focused on God? On his faithfulness, on his promises, on his goodness, or are you looking at the hell around you and saying, there can't be a God if he loves this kind of stuff? As you look at what is not seen, as we look, not at the things we're seeing, but the things we're not seeing, we are being changed from glory to glory. These light afflictions are working for us an eternal weight of glory. That glory is the likeness of Christ.

We know that because in chapter 3 verse 18, he said, as we're looking at the glory of Christ, we're being changed to that same image from glory to glory. Image and glory. Paul sometimes uses those terms interchangeably.

In first Corinthians, he said, man is the image and glory of God. Well, image and glory are kind of interchangeable in a way. In Hebrews chapter 1 verse 3, it says, Christ is the bright shining of his glory in the expressed image of his person.

The glory and the image are the same. We're being changed from glory to glory into that image. As we look at that, it's the glory of Christ that's being manifest in us as we're looking in the right places, as we're suffering affliction.

Now, chapter 5, 4, we know that if our earthly house, this tent is destroyed, we have a

building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation, which is from heaven. Now, he says we have a house eternal in the heavens.

Does that mean we're going to go to heaven and live there eternally? No. The next verse says it's from heaven. It comes from heaven.

It's now in heaven. It's reserved for us in heaven. We are laying up our treasures in heaven, but we're going to enjoy them when Jesus comes back.

He'll bring his rewarders with him. His rewarded servants when they come back, the stewards rule over five cities, rule over ten cities, he'll say to different ones. But the treasure is stored in heaven.

The house is in heaven. It's an eternal house. It's our resurrection body he's talking about, our immortal bodies that we shall have.

We know that because he's contrasting it with this tent we live in now, this physical body. He says if this physical, temporary, fragile building we live in right now, if it's destroyed, well, we got a permanent one. God's got it waiting for us.

It's going to come from heaven to us when Jesus comes and brings it. It's in heaven now. Our hope is in heaven, but our hope is not that we're going to be in heaven.

Our hope is in Christ. He's coming from heaven to here. It's like the New Jerusalem.

Paul refers to it as the Jerusalem which is above or the heavenly Jerusalem. But in Revelation, we see the New Jerusalem is coming down from heaven to the earth, to the new earth. It's our reward is currently in heaven.

That's where Jesus is. He is our reward, our house, our treasures. It's all in heaven right now.

When he comes back, it's coming from heaven. So he says we're desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven. If indeed having been clothed, we shall not be found naked.

For we who are in this tent grown, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up in life. Now what he's saying is we're presently clothed in these bodies, and we're going to be unclothed, but we're looking forward to that not because we want to be unclothed, we're actually looking forward to someday having this more permanent body, better clothing. We are going to be unclothed briefly, disembodied, until Jesus comes back and raises our bodies in glory.

But the point here is it's not this desire to be unclothed that we're longing for, but we are

longing to see Jesus and we are burdened in this body. Now he who has prepared us for this very thing is God who has also given us the spirit as a guarantee. Therefore, we are always confident knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight.

We don't see him, we still have to believe in him because we're absent from him. We are confident, yes, well-pleased, rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Now the doctrine of soul sleep is the doctrine that when you die, you're nowhere until the resurrection.

This is held by many Christians, and it's possibly true, but it doesn't seem to fit Paul's words here. Those who teach it sometimes refer to Paul's words here and they say he didn't say that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. If he did say that, then being dead would mean we'd be with Jesus in heaven.

But he didn't say that. Well, true, he didn't say those exact words, but the words he did use are almost certainly equivalent to that. He said as long as we're in the body, we're absent from the Lord, which implies that when we're no longer in the body, we're not absent from the Lord anymore.

And he says, and we are willing, eager even, pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Now this corresponds with what Paul said in Philippians chapter one, where he's talking about his miserable circumstances in prison and how that he really would like to depart and die, and that he probably won't be able to because the church needs him. So God probably won't let him go this early, he says.

But he says in verse 23 of Philippians one, for I'm hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. So there's two options here.

I can stay in my flesh that is alive in my body, or I can depart and be with Christ. If someone says Paul didn't think that when you die, you go to be with Christ, they're not paying very close attention to what he's saying. Now there is a resurrection of the body.

When I die, I expect to go be with Christ until Jesus comes back. Then he's gonna raise my body, I'll be in that again, a better body this time. And so that's what Paul appears to be saying.

He says, verse nine, therefore, we make it our aim, whether present or absent, meaning in the body or out of the body, present or absent from God, whether we are dead or alive, we want to be pleasing to him. We're not so concerned about whether we're alive or dead. We're concerned about whether we're pleasing him in any state.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may receive the things done in the body according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Now, Paul

believed we're saved by grace, not by works, but he said, we were judged by our works. All of us Christians and non-Christians like will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and will receive the things done in the body, whether good or bad.

Every person in the New Testament that spoke about the judgment said that's what it's about. Jesus said in Matthew chapter 16, the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father and his Holy Angels and will reward everyone according to his works or his deeds. Jesus told this parable, the sheep and the goats.

The sheep were rewarded for their works and the goats were punished for the deeds. Paul here says we're going to receive what was done in our bodies, whether good or bad. Peter said in 1 Peter 1 17, if you call God your Father, who without respect to persons judges every man according to his works, pass the time of your sojourn here in fear.

In Revelation 20, it says the books were open to everyone was judged by the things written in the books of their judged by their deeds. Everyone's judged by their deeds. But why? How can we be saved by grace and judged by our deeds? Quite simple.

If you're saved, your deeds will show it. You know, if you're brought before a court of law and you're accused of a crime, you say, well, but judge, I'm innocent. He's not expected just to believe it because you say so.

Well, where's exhibit A? Where's exhibit B? Where's the evidence here? When you stand before God, every human being says, oh, God, I believe you. I was on your side. I truly was.

Okay, excellent. Let's see. Roll the tape.

You know, let's see exhibit A and B. Let's look at your works. That'll tell whether you were on my side or not. You exhibit that you have saving faith by acting like it.

That's why James said, faith that doesn't have works is dead faith and dead faith can't make you alive. And so, even though we are saved by faith, we are not saved without works happening. When you say by faith, your works will show it.

And therefore, being judged by works is the most faithful way to get to the truth of the matter. He says, knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, verse 11, we persuade men, but we are well known to God. And I also trust we are well known to your consciences.

Now we know the terror of the Lord. The Bible often talks about the fear of God. And a lot of people, when they talk about the fear of God, they want to tone it down a little bit well, fear, that just means reverential awe.

We shall have reverential awe of God, not fear. Well, no doubt reverential awe is part of the meaning of the word fear, but it's not part of the meaning of terror. Paul says, we

know the terror of the Lord, the fear of God.

I quoted Peter a moment ago, 1 Peter 1 17. If you know God's going to judge you according to your works, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear, Peter said. He's running to Christians.

If you call God your father, pass your time in fear here. The fear of God. Jesus said to his disciples, don't fear those who can kill your body.

I'll tell you who to fear. Fear him who after he's killed your body can destroy your soul also in Gehenna. Fear him.

Fear in God is something Jesus told his disciples to the unbelievers. It's also something Peter told Christians. There's something Paul's telling Christians that we know the terror of the Lord.

Now, so are we supposed to walk around terrified? Well, if you're living in sin, you better. But of course, if you're a Christian, you're not living in sin. That's almost the definition of being a Christian.

Whoever is born of God does not practice sin. First John tells us that several times. If you're practicing sin, you're not born of God.

It's that easy. I mean, that's the evidence. John said in, I think it's the first John maybe three, six.

He said, little children, let no one deceive you. He that practices righteousness is righteous. He that practices sin is of the devil.

So are you righteous? I'm righteous by the blood of Christ. Wonderful. How can you tell? Well, because I practice righteousness.

Whoever practices righteousness is righteous. He's not saying you become righteous by practicing it, but it is certainly the evidence that you are righteous. If you're righteous by faith, then you're born again.

Then you're going to practice righteousness. If you don't practice righteousness, you're not in the righteous category with God. Living obediently to Christ is the Christian life.

That's what discipleship is. Jesus said, if you continue in my words, you're my disciples. Indeed, he said, go make disciples and teach them to observe everything I've commanded you.

That's how you make disciples, teach them to obey what Jesus commanded. People are handing out salvation like tickets to heaven. You say a prayer and you're in.

Well, saying a prayer might be the beginning of you being in, but if you are in, it'll show up in the way you live all the time. Sure, you won't be perfect. Nobody's perfect, but your works will show what your trajectory is.

Your works will show whether you want to be perfect because when you sin, you'll repent, which is evidence that you didn't really want that. You want something else. So works are a perfect test of whether someone has faith in Christ or not.

And that's all the references are about that. So you ought to live in terror of God if you're not afraid of trains, I hope. But if you're tied up to a railroad track and the locomotive's coming, you probably should have terror of trains because you're in a collision course with one.

You don't have to be afraid of God if you're not in a collision course with him. You can be rather impressed by his awesome power, just like you can be impressed by the awesome power of a train as you stand next to it, watch it go by. Wow, that's awesome.

But if you're on the railroad track and it's coming at you, you're not in the right relationship with that train. And that's something to be afraid of, even terrified of. And knowing the terror of the Lord, Paul says, we persuade men.

Now, we do not command ourselves again to you, verse 12, but we give you opportunity to glory on our behalf, that you may have something to answer to those who glory in appearance and not in heart. So he says, I'm giving you all this information about me so that not so that you'll appreciate me, but so that the people you're defending me against, you'll have something to say to them. They're saying all this bad stuff about me that isn't true.

You're trying to stand up for me. I'm trying to give you some ammunition here. Here's what you can say in my defense, if you want to have something to say in my defense.

He says, for we are, if we are beside ourselves or seemingly crazy, it is for God. Or if we are sound, mine is for you. For the love of Christ constrains us because we judge this, that if one died for all, then all died.

How is that so? Well, if he died as a substitute for all, then in him, they all died. They've done the, it's like, if you get a substitute to do your work for you, then you've done the work. I mean, you've fulfilled your responsibility.

A substitute did it for you. If Jesus died in my place, in fact, the place of all of us, then all of us have paid that penalty. We're all died with Christ and resurrected with him.

We're all past that stage of judgment for our sins. It's happened already in Christ. If Christ died for all, then all apparently have died.

And therefore, from now on, we regard no man after the flesh. We did once regard Christ according to flesh. We don't do that anymore, he said.

As we used to judge him by human standards, when Jesus came, the Jews kind of were looking for a Messiah that met their human expectations and he wasn't what they're looking for. But we've learned not to judge men that way. We don't judge Christ that way anymore.

And we don't judge each other that way anymore. Therefore, from now on, we regard no man according to flesh, even though we did regard Christ that way. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation.

All things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. I've seen a lot of people in because of this movie coming out recently, a lot of critics of the Jesus movie said, what this movie didn't tell you is that Lonnie Frisbee was a homosexual.

Well, the movie didn't have any occasion to mention he wasn't practicing any homosexuality at any time during the Jesus moment. He had been molested by a male babysitter from age six to age eight. And he did struggle with temptation.

He never identified as a homosexual. He fell sometimes, but that was before he was a Christian. And after he backslid, unfortunately, he fell some more in other ways.

But the thing is that when he was serving God, he wasn't doing that stuff. That was his past. All things have passed away.

Unfortunately, once all things pass away, you can go back to them. A dog can return to his vault. That's not good.

But you can't say, well, he can't be looked up to as someone God would use because he had practiced these sins in the past. Yeah, that's before he was saved. Paul practiced some sins before he was saved, too.

He said he wasn't even worthy to be an apostle because of the things he did. But God is not looking at it that way. Prodigals, when they come home, are no longer lost or dead.

They're found. Therefore, he says, 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, God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself and not imputing their trespasses to them, but committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Now 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. So we are God's ambassadors pleading to the world and to the church even to be on good terms with God

because he made Christ who was not a sinner, who knew no sin to become sin for us.

Now, the word sin that he uses there in the Old Testament Septuagint is sometimes used for a sin offering and for that reason some scholars think he's saying God made Christ who knew no sin to become a sin offering for us, which would be true enough too. It's a little easier to understand than he became sin for us, but the word does mean sin. It's just a fluke that in the Septuagint sometimes the sin offering is referred to by that word, but it's, I think that Paul is saying that he did become sin for us.

He took the penalty of the world's sin as his own, as his own identity, and suffered for it so that we now become the righteousness of God in him. Now, obviously we're going to have to move beyond a lot of things here. I've been going slowly so you get sort of an idea of what kind of stuff lies in between the storytelling parts of chapter two and chapter seven and following, but we simply can't do that through the whole thing.

Essentially, he finishes telling the story in chapter seven, the story about how when he met Titus things went well and therefore it's all good now, and his last statement in chapter seven is, therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything. Yeah, but when he gets to chapter 10 he doesn't seem to have that confidence in them anymore, so this is interesting. Of course, chapters eight and nine, he then, because he has confidence in them, begins to remind them that they had a year earlier before things had gone south in their relationship with him, they had promised that they were going to have some money waiting for him to take to the poor saints in Jerusalem.

Now, he hadn't been pressing that while, of course, their relationship was on the rocks, but now he says, now that things are good, I'm going to get back to that. You said a year ago you'd be ready. I'm going to recommend that you get that ready together because I've just come from Macedonia, he said, and those churches in Macedonia, he says, they are poor.

They have deep poverty and great distress, but out of their deep poverty they gave to this offering more than they could really afford to give as they were able and even beyond what they were able, he says. This is what's in the first few verses of chapter eight, and then he says, now I told them how generous you are because you had made this big promise a year ago, and I'm coming down and maybe some of them will come with me, and it'd be very embarrassing to me to say nothing about you if you were unprepared. That's what he's saying, that's what he argues here in chapter eight, that these people have heard from me about how generous you are, and now they've been generous to a fault, and what if they show up with me and you're not ready and you haven't, you're not so generous, I'd be totally embarrassed and to say nothing how embarrassed you'd be, and so he says, I'm telling you, get it ready, and so he gives quite a few, two chapters actually, two chapters giving them motivation to gather up this offering for the poor in Jerusalem, telling that it glorifies God, it helps the needs of the



saints, it avoids their embarrassment, and things like that.

Basically, he argues in chapter nine that because of the great gift that God has given us, we obviously are giving very little back by comparison when we give generously, and God loves a cheerful giver, he says in verse seven. Interestingly, chapter nine, verse seven, he says, so let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver. There's no suggestion that there's a percentage expected, just give as he purposes in his heart.

There's no tithing mandate in the New Testament, nowhere in the New Testament is there any suggestion that 10 percent should be given to the church or to anything religious. I personally think most Americans are giving too little if they only give 10 percent because we're pretty fat and we're pretty prosperous. I mean, even the poorest of us, I was poor most of my adult life, but I still had more than people in some parts of Africa and Asia and South America have.

I mean, the poorest people in America are really much better off than many, many, many people around the world. So if we can't give 10 percent or more, then we're probably indulging more than we should on ourselves. But there's no law in the New Testament that says you have to give 10 percent or any other percentage.

He said give as everyone has purposed in his heart, give cheerfully, whatever you can give cheerfully. Now, what makes it easy to give something cheerfully? Well, for one thing, you've got to love people more than you love your money. If you love your money more than people, you might give grudgingly.

Well, I guess they did more than me. I was really hoping to get that new thing there with that money. But well, what the heck? I guess I better give it.

You know, but if you love people more than you love money, you're glad to turn your assets into assistance to people who don't have as much as you have. That's just what he's expecting. That's interesting.

He says in verse eight, and God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you always having all sufficiency in all things may have an abundance for every good work. Now, grace as sufficiency, God's able to make all grace abound to you so you have sufficiency. He said several times earlier, our sufficiency is of God.

We're not sufficient of ourselves. And later in chapter 12, he says, Christ said, my grace is sufficient for you. It's interesting how grace, the grace of God is seen as a sufficiency.

What does the word sufficient mean? The Greek word that is translated sufficient is the same word that's translated enough. I didn't know that till I was an adult and had been teaching for many years. I didn't know that the word sufficient is the same word in the Greek as the word enough.

If you find the word enough in the New Testament. So if you have enough, that's sufficient. If you have less than enough, then you don't have sufficiency.

You know, it's not what you have is not sufficient. Now, grace will abound to you so that you'll have sufficiency in every good work. Everything God has for you, you can be sufficient to the task.

Paul said, we're not sufficient of ourselves. Our sufficiency is of God. But grace, God's grace is sufficient to Paul with the thorn in the flesh.

Even though he'll still limp around with the thorn, he'll still find that he's not insufficient for the task that God has made him. Grace enables. Grace is what enables us to please God.

It says in Hebrews chapter 12, therefore, receiving a kingdom which cannot be removed, let us have grace that we may serve God acceptably with godly fear. If we have grace, we can serve God acceptably. Paul said in first Corinthians 15:10, he says, I did more than all the apostles before me, but not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

I did more work than all of them, but it was the grace of God in me doing that. In first Corinthians 3:10, he says, I, as according to the grace of God given to me as a wise master builder, have laid the foundation of the church. But it was according to the grace that was given.

I did it through the grace, the enablement that God gave me. Grace isn't just the forgiveness of sins. It's the enablement to do better.

We're supposed to live our lives in the sufficiency of grace and to the degree that we depend on ourselves and not on God, the grace isn't needed and isn't provided. God gives more grace when the burdens are greater and when the responsibilities are greater. But we should be in the habit of trusting God, even in all things, even for small things that we might not think we need to do grace for.

I can pull this off. Well, how about if you don't? How about if you just trust God and let his grace, like that hand in that glove, be the strength that allows you to do what you're supposed to get done, get the job done. Now, when we get to chapters 10 through 13, I'm not going to go in detail.

There's a lot of all it is. All it is chapters 10 through 13 is pretty much Paul defending his apostleship. And he's he's angry again.

And he's indicating that the church has needs to be reminded again of his qualifications and so forth. Now, this makes people uncomfortable reading because Paul sounds like he's boasting. He even says he's boasting.

He even says, I've made myself sound like a fool by boasting. And when he was in the midst of boasting, he said, I did this. I did this.

I've accomplished this. I speak as a fool. I did this and this and this.

He can't even say these things comfortably himself. If it's uncomfortable for you to read it, it was uncomfortable for him to say it. And he's saying, I mean, check this out in chapter 11.

In verse 16 through 21, I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool that I may boast a little what I speak. I speak not according to the Lord, but according to foolishness.

God's not inspired me to write this, by the way, that gives the impression that he's not claiming inspiration for this particular section. But I don't speak this according to I speak foolishly in this confidence of boasting, seeing that many boast according to the flesh. I also will boast for you will, for you put up with fools gladly since you yourselves are wise.

This is a sarcastic remark. Here's quite a few sarcastic remarks in this section for you put up with one. If one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face to our shame, I say that we were too weak for that.

But in whatever anyone is bold, I speak foolishly. I am bold also. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool.

I am more in labors, more abundant in stripes above measure in prisons, more frequently in depths often deaths often. From the Jews, five times I received 40 stripes minus one, three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned three times I was shipwrecked.

Now, by the way, the Book of Acts ends with a story of Paul being shipwrecked. That hadn't happened yet when he when this was written. That was a fourth time.

He had already had three shipwrecks when he wrote this. And that one in Acts came later in his life. So he had four times of shipwrecked, but he didn't know that'd be the right number when he wrote this.

In journeys often, oh, he says, I've been night and day. I've been in the deep. In journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils of this in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren.

So if I'm with my countrymen, the Jews, I'm in danger. If I go among the Gentiles, which

is not among the Jews, I'm in danger. If I'm in the city, I'm in danger.

If I go to the wilderness, I'm in danger. If I go to the sea, I'm in danger. I can't go anywhere.

No place is safe. I'm in danger wherever I go. Besides the other things, what come upon me daily, my deep concerns for all the churches.

So I don't only have these outward trials. I've got this burden I'm carrying all the time for the troubles the churches are going through, like the Corinthians, who is weak and I'm not weak, who is made to stumble and I do not burn with indignation. If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I'm not lying. In Damascus, the governor under Aretas, the king, was guarded the city of the Damascenes with a garrison desiring to apprehend me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped from his hands. Why is he mentioned that here? He's talking about the things that are his weakness, the things that are an embarrassment.

He's boasting his weaknesses, saying, you know, what kind of guy has to escape from a city in a laundry basket lowered through a window? I had to do that. You know, that's embarrassing. You know, I would have rather just walk out in a dignified way like a man.

Instead, I'm sneaking out in undercover darkness out a window in a basket. He's saying, this is the kind of stuff I put up with. And he continues in chapter 12.

I'm not going to read the whole thing, but this part has to be read. It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

I know a man in Christ who 14 years ago, whether in the body I do not know or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows. Such a one was caught up into the third heaven, and I know such a man, whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know, God knows, how he was caught up into paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such a one I will boast, yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities.

So he's actually being sarcastic there. I won't boast about myself. I'll boast about this anonymous character.

Virtually every scholar, there are some exceptions, but most scholars believe that Paul's talking about himself. But he's talking about these revelations, being caught up in the third heaven, these remarkable, unique spiritual experiences. He says, listen, I've been boasting out too much already.

I can't really bring myself to boast about my spirituality. I'll talk about this guy. I know.

Wink, wink, you know. I don't know if he was in the body or out of the body, he says. He's caught up in the paradise, in the third heaven.

He heard things are inexpressible, things you can't even repeat. Now, the reason I believe he's talking about himself is because he introduces it by saying, it's doubtless not profitable for me to boast, as he has been doing in the previous chapter, but I'll come to visions and revelations of the Lord. Well, why would telling of some other man's visions and revelations, or not his own, fit into this context? He's talking about his qualifications.

He's trying to demonstrate that he is someone they can defend without shame. How would this be relevant if he's got some third party, no one knows his name. Oh, there's this guy I knew, he had this really great experience.

Now, back to me, you know. No, he's obviously talking about himself, his own visions. And we know he is because he says in verse seven, and lest I should be exalted to a measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me.

So, you know, he's talking about these revelations, and they're so great, he could be puffed up. That's why he doesn't want to say it's him that did it, although it clearly is him. Now, all kinds of things have gotten out of this, but the point he's making is, I'm now talking not about how many things I've suffered, but how many advantages I've had, special favors from God, special revelations I've gotten.

And this one was actually catching up in third heaven itself, and I can't even tell you what I heard there. I don't even know if they're in the body or not. You know, this is interesting, because it means that Paul did believe in a certain anthropological view that a man can be in his body or not in his body.

Just as he said, we are present in the body when we're in this flesh, and we'll be absent from the body when we're not. We, I am somebody other than my body. I am somebody who lives in this body while I'm alive, and will be absent from this body when I'm dead.

I'm a person who could be in my body or out of the body. Paul didn't say he was out of the body. It was part of one of the possibilities.

He didn't know which way it was. It could have been. Paul had this view of mankind that man is something other than his body, something that lives in his body, and leaves at death, comes back at resurrection.

Maybe in some circumstances could leave the body in revelations that are received. Who knows? But there are some people who don't believe that Paul thought that. There are some people who believe that when the body is dead, there's nothing left until it's raised

again.

Now there's something that can be in the body or out of the body. And then he talks about because of the abundance of these revelations, so that I should not be exalted above measure. A thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

Concerning this thing, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, most gladly, I will rather boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities and in reproaches and in needs and persecutions and distresses for Christ's sake. For when I'm weak, then I'm strong. So Paul had something called the thorn in the flesh.

Now, there are people who believe that Paul would never be sick because he is too much of a man of God for that, and that anyone with the faith of an apostle would never allow himself to be sick. These are the people who think that we're not ever supposed to be sick, and if you have enough faith, you'll never have to be sick. So the suggestion that Paul had a sickness is simply unacceptable to them.

So their argument is this thorn in the flesh is not a sickness, but a person, a person who is bugging him, traveling around pestering him wherever he went. If so, we don't read of such a person in the book of Acts, though we do read of some Jews as a group going from one city to the next to give him trouble, but we don't see them going to all the cities. He wasn't around them all the time.

This is something that's pestering him, apparently, long term. He's begging Christ to take it away, and he calls it an infirmity twice. In verse 9, he said, I will rather boast in my infirmities.

And in verse 10, therefore I take pleasure in infirmities. This Greek word for infirmities is the principal Greek word for sickness in the New Testament. It's this very same word, interestingly enough, that is used in Matthew 8, 17, where it says Christ took our infirmities and carried our pain.

A verse that the word of faith people say means we don't have to carry it because Christ took him. But Paul had an infirmity here, and Christ took infirmities, but he still, Paul still had one. And Galatians tells us that he had an infirmity, which he makes very clear was a sickness.

In Galatians chapter 4, verse 3, excuse me, verse 13, Paul said, you know that because of physical infirmity, I preached the gospel to you at the first and my trial, which was in my flesh, you did not despise nor reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even

as Christ Jesus. What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. Well, what good is that unless you need a pair? Paul probably had bad eyes.

That's what most scholars believe. There's several hints of it in his letters about how big he scrawls his letters he mentions and so forth. But we know he had an infirmity, a thorn in his flesh.

Here he says it was because of physical infirmity that he came to Galatia and ministered among them. They were sympathetic toward him so much they would have donated their eyes if they could have done so. Well, that's a strange thing to ask for unless you're starting an eye bank or something.

You know, you really need, you know, if I've got some other kind of problem, let's just say I've got a stomach ache, I'd give you my eyes if I could. That's a strange offer to make unless I need a good pair of eyes. Of course, no one can give you their eyes, but if they could, that's what they would do.

The strong suggestion here is that Paul in fact did have need for a better pair of eyes and that may very well be the thorn in the flesh. Now those who say no, it was a persecutor, they point out that back in Deuteronomy and in another place in the Old Testament, God speaks of the Canaanites. If you don't drive them out of the land, there will be thorns in your side and briars in your flesh or something or briars in your eyes or something like that.

But thorn in your side is not the same expression as thorn in the flesh, although it could be the same idea. But Paul's not quoting the line. He could have said, I've got a thorn in my side, which would be a parallel to what the Canaanites would be if Israelites don't drive them all out.

But he didn't use the same phrase and he spoke of it as an infirmity, so I don't think we have any reason to doubt that he was in fact sick. We know that his friend Timothy, who traveled with him to his death, had a sickness, frequent infirmities of his stomach, Paul said, and told him to take a little wine for it. Trophimus, his friend, was sick and Paul left him sick and maledictus because he couldn't get him well.

He didn't say the man didn't have enough faith, he just said he was sick, I had to leave him there sick. So I mean this idea that Paul couldn't have had a sickness is a mistake. And in verse 11 he says, I have become a fool in boasting.

So this whole section is boasting. We read from chapter 11 verse 16 to this point in chapter 12, that's all boasting. He says, you have compelled me, I shouldn't have had to say these things about me, you should have said them about me.

It's like a man I knew, when I hadn't seen him before we got together and he started

telling me all that he'd been doing and all the great things that he'd been doing. And then he said, well enough about me, let's talk about you, what do you think about me? That's what Paul says, I shouldn't have to boast about me, you should be boasting about me, you know, you tell me how you think about me, why should I have to do it? He said, you've compelled me, I ought to have been commended by you, for in nothing I was behind, nothing I was, in nothing I was behind the most eminent apostles. Now in the Greek, the word is super apostles.

A couple of times here Paul speaks of the super apostles. Now some people think he might be speaking of Peter, James and John, and sarcastically referring to them as super apostles, if some people were say, comparing Paul unfavorably against them, and saying you're not like Peter, James, John, you're not like that, well, they're the super apostles I guess, but I'm not behind them. But most scholars think that when he says super apostles, that there were some actual false apostles in Corinth who spoke of themselves as super apostles.

And Paul does say a little later on that they were false apostles, he's talking about, he's not talking about Peter, James and John, but he says I'm not behind those people in any respect. Truly, verse 12, the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance and signs and wonders and mighty deeds. So essentially he said I proved I was an apostle by the signs and wonders and so forth, those are signs of an apostle, which obviously means that not every Christian was doing them, or else everyone would have a sign of an apostle.

Now he's trying to defend his apostleship, not his being a Christian, and he said these are the signs of my apostleship that were demonstrated among you. In verse 13, for what is it in which you were inferior to other churches, except that I myself was not a burden to you, forgive me this wrong, there's sarcasm again. Unlike these other ministers, I'm not charging you money, I refuse to take money, I wasn't a burden to you, that's the only way I was, you were different than I was other churches.

I did allow some of them to contribute to my church, I didn't do that with you. Forgive me, forgive me for wronging you in this way. And then he talks about I'm coming again, I'm not going to, I'm not going to read any further just because we're out of time and frankly, it's pretty much the same kind of thing.

He's telling you he's coming, they'd better be ready, he doesn't have to come with strictness, he spared them once, he didn't come once, when he was going to, in order to spare them, this time he says if I come, I will not spare. And I'll have to take matters in my hands pretty roughly here. I don't know what he means, but he's not going to be gentle with the false teachers.

But again, how this last four chapters fits in with the rest of the book is a mystery. And in fact, it just has to remain a mystery. We have no way of knowing why he changed his



tone so much after being so congratulatory and happy and I have so much confidence in you and you've shown yourself to be on my side in every way that I had ever hoped.

And then suddenly he's, you know, how dare you people question my apostleship? You know, like there's been a change of mood there. And yeah, I've always found since I was young, those chapters at the end are the most unpleasant ones to read. But he said, I'm not speaking this according to the Lord, I'm speaking like a fool.

So don't blame God for it. And don't even blame him. He's apologetic for it.