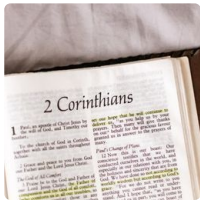


# OpenTheo

## 2 Corinthians 1:1 - 2:17



### 2 Corinthians - Steve Gregg

In this segment, Steve Gregg reflects on Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, emphasizing the idea of finding comfort in times of tribulation. Gregg explains that though God may not give comfort all the time, it is often in moments of great trial that we receive a token of God's presence and grace, encouraging us to share our experiences with others. Additionally, Gregg provides insight into the nature of church leadership during apostolic times, stressing the importance of forgiveness and love towards those who have transgressed.

### Transcript

Let's turn now to the first chapter of 2 Corinthians, and having dispensed with all the introductory material, we'll just begin to work on the verses themselves. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in Achaia, all Achaia, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the only thing really needs to be said about this is that, in case you were not aware, Corinth is in the province that was called Achaia, which was southern Greece.

Now, being mostly Americans here, we probably don't know very much about geography, according to reports Americans are almost always unable to identify on an unlabeled map the individual countries of Europe by name, and Europeans of course laugh at us for that reason. Of course they have a better reason to be able to do it than we do. Most of us never see those countries, but obviously it's a little bit embarrassing, the low level of geographical knowledge we have.

Just in case you happen to be one of those people who would be embarrassed if asked where to find Greece, or what Greece looks like, Greece is a peninsula that of course extends down into the Mediterranean, and in the days of Paul, northern Greece and southern Greece were separate Roman provinces. The northern province was called Macedonia, and the southern province was called Achaia. Many of the churches that Paul wrote to, for instance the Thessalonians and the Philippian church, and some of the churches like the church of Berea, were in the northern part of Greece, Macedonia.

But the southern Grecian churches were largely the church of Corinth, as far as we know. Paul did preach in Athens also, and there was a church in Centria, but it's hard to know if that was different than the church in Corinth. Centria was a port city very close to Corinth, and it's not clear whether that was, it was probably a separate congregation.

But we don't know to what extent the gospel had been preached throughout that southern region of the peninsula of Greece. But Paul addresses the letter not only to the Corinthians, but also to all the saints who were in all Achaia. Now it's interesting that he would do that, since the letter is really personal, and is about, it makes many allusions to things that happened in the church in Corinth itself, which suggests that all the saints in Achaia were acquainted with the matters that he's addressing here.

In fact, it's possible that all the saints in Achaia were in some sense connected to the church in Corinth. There may not have been another major city that had a major congregation in Achaia. We don't know of any anyway.

And so he addresses it to all the saints throughout Achaia. In other words, not just those who live in the city of Corinth, although those who were in Achaia and not in the city of Corinth were maybe somehow connected to the church in Corinth. It may have been a hub of a variety of congregations in the area.

As usual, he mentions who's with him. This time it's Timothy. In 1 Corinthians, he didn't mention Timothy being with him.

He mentioned Sosthenes, who was a synagogue ruler in Corinth, but had traveled with Paul apparently to Ephesus when he wrote 1 Corinthians. Now Timothy is with him, and we don't read of Sosthenes, so we don't know if Sosthenes has gone back to Corinth at this time or whether he's somewhere else. In any case, Paul begins chapter 1, verse 3, saying, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Now Paul is going to go on in a few verses from this to tell why he is experiencing so much comfort. It is because he has been in great tribulation. This tribulation has been from multiple causes.

Some of it has been caused by the people in the church themselves and the uprisings in the church of Corinth, and he's been under stress about that. Additional to that, he's been in Asia, which is of course Ephesus, and the surrounding region, and he has come into circumstances there that were life-threatening, which he only barely escaped, which he's going to talk about a few verses from now. So he's had some real trials, and he's received comfort.

One is that God has delivered him out of the life-threatening situation he faced in Asia, and the other is that he's been comforted by Titus bringing good news about what has happened in Corinth, something that was of great concern to Paul until recently. Therefore, Paul is rejoicing in the comfort and the consolation he's had. He attributes this comfort not to these situations, but to God himself.

It is God who has worked out the situation in Corinth and has brought the comfort to Paul through Titus' report of it. It's also God who delivered Paul from the life-threatening circumstances that he mentions a little later in verses 8-11, which he has recently gone through as well. So he's thanking God and blessing God, particularly in this case not for salvation in general as he frequently does in the beginning of his epistles.

He'll often thank God or magnify God in the beginning of his epistles for some of the salvific things that God has done in Christ and in dying for our sins and redeeming us and things like that. But here it's something more personal, it's something more specific. Things he's just been through.

He's just received comfort from the Lord from some great trials and great tribulations he's been in. He says God is the one who comforts us in all our tribulation. Now, that's an interesting statement.

He comforts us in all our tribulation. It doesn't say he relieves us of all our tribulation or that he extricates us from all of our trouble. It is in our tribulation that he comforts us.

Now, Paul has received actual comfort in this case by the end of his troubles coming, at least briefly. The end of the troubles in Corinth have been announced to him. The end of his troubles in Asia is already something he can look back on with gratitude.

But he's not referring to the fact that God comforts him by bringing the end of it, but by comforting him in tribulation. And this is something that Christians need to get a hold of. That when we're sick or when we have a trial in finances or in a relationship or something else that makes our life fairly miserable, Christians often put their faith in God delivering them out of it.

Their faith is that God will deliver them out of this thing. That it will end. That he'll heal them.

That he'll provide them finances. That he'll resolve the problem. And you know what? Very many times he does.

But sometimes he does not. But Christians don't have to focus all of their faith in God on his deliverance from the trials. Faith in God gives comfort in the trials, in the tribulation.

So much so that the trial can be prolonged without deliverance if necessary, if God sees fit that you are in heaviness through manifold trials for a season. But you are comforted

in them, so it's so much the better because you have the comfort of God in it. And also, you know, this suggests that God only comforts us when we are in tribulation.

There's not, in some measure, if there's not any tribulation, there's not any occasion to be comforted. And Paul has known the nearness of God in trials. The nearness of God and the comfort of God in trials.

Now that comfort of God didn't keep him from having his heart wrenched because of course he later refers to his own psychological experience of the trials when he talks about he was in great agony and tears and so forth when he wrote, he says that in chapter 2 verse 4, out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote to you with many tears. And he's referring to the very time period during which he was being comforted by God. But the comfort of God is somewhat seasonal, as it were.

When you're going through affliction, God sometimes lets you feel the brunt of it for a while, emotionally, and then he'll give seasons of comfort so that you can be sustained. It's like when Jesus was praying in the garden, you know, he was sweating great drops of blood. There wasn't much comfort for him at that moment.

But then God sent an angel who ministered to him and no doubt comforted him. It's not that God gives comfort every moment in the same degree. Sometimes it's to our advantage and to the purpose of God being fulfilled that he allows us to be in pain.

Not so much to be abandoned by God, but to not have much consolation so that we can benefit from the absence of consolation. We can actually benefit from the trial itself, from the pain. But in the trial, he does not leave us alone.

And there's always some comfort from God. If you turn to God in trial and you pray, you always receive some strength. You always receive grace to help in time of need.

But the comfort of God is a very seasonal thing. It's a very pleasant thing, in a sense. It's pleasant enough that a person who's known it would rather have a life that has trials and comfort from God than a life without trials or without any comfort from God.

The comfort comes with the trials. It comes as part of the package of suffering. And Paul is rejoicing in it.

He's known a great deal of it. He'll catalog some of the kinds of trials he's had later on in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 where he lists the most complete list of his own trials he's been through anywhere in scripture. But he's not alluding or he's not making a direct reference to any particular trials at this point.

He just says all our tribulations. God comforts us in all our tribulations that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. Now, we receive comfort from God, not only that we can enjoy

comfort from God, but that we'd have something to minister to others.

When we talk about suffering, we can make a long list of things that suffering is good for, a long list of benefits that God intends to do through suffering. A lot of times the emphasis is on the benefit to ourselves. Well, it makes me more patient.

It makes me trust in God more. It makes me more prayerful. It makes me stronger.

The suffering is chasing a me to turn me away from sin and to make me more holy and to make me better. All that is true, but there's another side of it too that often gets omitted. That is that suffering may not just make me better.

It may make me better at helping others who are in suffering. A person who's never been through suffering and never received any consolation in it is somewhat at a loss to know how to comfort somebody else who is going through suffering. But when you have, in a time of great depth of trial, received a word from the Lord, a scripture, a thought that relieved you, you've received some kind of token of God's presence and His grace in your life during sufferings, this is an encouragement to others.

You can share with others when they're in the suffering. There are many things that I've learned in times of suffering that are verses of scripture that I may have read at other times when I wasn't suffering, but they came to me with renewed force and renewed new meaning in times of suffering. Those scriptures became forever tools of ministering to people in suffering.

They became medicines to give to people who are suffering because they were given to me in times of suffering. I'm sure that many of you, having known the comfort of God in your own times of trials, have alluded to those things when counseling others. The lessons God taught you in those times, the verses that were meaningful to you in that time, even the very fact that you can say to someone who's suffering, I have been through that too and God brought me through it and God encouraged me and God strengthened me through it.

That encourages them who have not yet been brought through it or been strengthened. The very testimony of your suffering and the comfort you've received can comfort others as well. So Paul says, the comfort we receive from God is not just so we'll be more comfortable.

It's not just for our benefit, it's for the benefit of others as well so that we can comfort others who are in trouble with the same comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now he's just saying the same thing in different ways, just bringing Christ into it more clearly.

It was the God of all comfort. Now he's pointing out that our sufferings really are an

extension of Christ's sufferings. And as such, Christ takes an interest in them and brings us comfort in them.

It is a consolation that abounds through Christ to us because we are suffering for Christ. These are actually the sufferings of Christ. Paul knew this very well because his own conversion was on the occasion where he was persecuting Christians and Jesus spoke to him from heaven and said, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And his very first exposure to Jesus was one where Jesus made clear to him that the sufferings of Christians are the sufferings of Jesus himself, that he suffers with them.

There's an Old Testament verse that says of the Jews in Israel, actually in the wilderness when they were traveling from Egypt, and it speaks of God's sympathy with them. It says in all their affliction, he was afflicted. And Jesus said in Matthew 25, in as much as you do it to one of the least of these, my brethren, you do it to me.

So Jesus himself suffers in his church when the church is suffering. And there's a thought that Paul brings up in Colossians that is a peculiar thought, actually, as a matter of fact, where Paul is talking about his sufferings as being a continuation or fulfilling of Christ's sufferings. It's in Colossians 1.24. He says, I now rejoice in my sufferings for you and fill up in my flesh or in my body what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the sake of his body which is the church.

What in the world is the idea that Paul is coming from here? That his sufferings he rejoices because in his sufferings he is in his body filling up what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ for the sake of the church? Paul's underlying assumption seems to be that Jesus has not finished suffering yet. In fact, even to this day, 2,000 years after Paul's time, Jesus hasn't finished suffering. Christ still suffers in his people.

The suffering of Christ on the cross was just the beginning for him. We think, well, Jesus suffered and then he rose from the dead and now he's glorified and it's nice he could get over that and got it behind him. But it's not behind him.

He's still suffering in his people. Now, Paul apparently feels there's some sum total of suffering that from the time of Christ until the time of the end, there's some total quantity of suffering that Jesus must suffer through his people, through the suffering of his people. And he figures, well, my suffering is taking away some, I mean, is filling up some of that empty cup.

There's a total cup that has to be filled with suffering that Christ is going to endure before it's all over. And he suffers in me and he suffers in others in the church. He says, I rejoice because my suffering is on behalf of the church.

If I suffer more, that's less that someone else is going to have to endure. And it adds to the total fullness and brings closer to an end the total suffering of Christ. He is filling up

in his own sufferings in his body something of the afflictions of Christ for the sake of the church.

That is, the church benefits from Paul's suffering because if there's a certain amount of suffering that has to be done by Christ and Paul has taken a bunch of it on himself, then the more Paul takes, the less someone else is going to have to take. Now, that may not be Paul's exact thought, but the statement is a strange one in Colossians 1:24. Almost everyone finds it strange when they read it for the first time.

And I think that that comes from that kind of a mentality. And he has something like that here too, because he says in verse 6 of 2 Corinthians 1, Now, if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is the effective, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings, which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.

And our hope for you is steadfast because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation. Now, he says in some way or another, his sufferings are benefiting them and his consolation is benefiting them. It may be in the sense that I suggested, you know, looking at a statement in Colossians 1:24, that in a sense, the more he suffers, the more they don't have to.

But he seems to have another meaning here. He seems to mean that by his model of suffering and receiving consolation, it gives them an example in their suffering and consolation. His suffering is going to benefit them and his being consoled is going to benefit them.

In that, as they see how God sustains and comforts Paul in his sufferings, when they find themselves in similar sufferings, his example will encourage them and they will anticipate receiving, being partakers of the consolation as well, as he says in verse 7. Now, he tells a little bit of the things he has suffered recently. And he is not specific, but he says that he was in some life-threatening situation in Asia. Now, remember, Asia in Paul's days was not what we think of as Asia.

We think of this huge continent called Asia. Asia to Paul in the Roman Empire was the province, a Roman province that they called Asia. It was essentially the same as the landmass that today is Turkey.

It is the same region to which the seven letters in Revelation were written to the seven churches of Asia. This Asia, as I say, was not anywhere near as big or coextensive to what we call Asia, but it was the Roman province of Asia. And that chief city in that province was Ephesus.

And we know that Paul, when he left Corinth, according to Acts, actually, and 1 Corinthians 16, Paul went to Ephesus. And it was apparently while he was in Ephesus,

where he spent over two years, that certain things happened to him which are not recorded in Acts, and which he doesn't record specifically here, but he gives allusion to. He says, for we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.

Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us, in whom we trust that he will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many. Now, he speaks of his trouble which he endured in Asia. He says, I don't want you to be ignorant of this.

However, he doesn't tell them what it was, so apparently he leaves them in ignorance something of the detail, but he doesn't want them to be ignorant at least of the fact that he faced something very grievous in Ephesus. Those commentators have speculated what that might be. They're sort of divided over whether he's referring to maybe a physical problem he had like sickness, that in his flesh he was afflicted by some great sickness that almost killed him, that God delivered him from it, healing him.

That's a possibility. Or whether it was persecution and threats on his life. We know there were many of those in Paul's ministry, and it may be that he's referring to something like that.

He does indicate, though, that what he went through in Asia was extraordinarily difficult, so much that he even despaired that he would survive it. Either he was sick to the point that he thought he was not going to recover, or else he was in such a danger from persecution that it seemed like he wouldn't get away this time. He'd gotten away many times before, out a window in a basket or whatever.

I mean, many times his life was in danger and he escaped. This time, though, he kind of figured maybe he was not going to get away, so that he had to put his trust in God who raises the dead. Now notice the language he uses here in verse 8 of his trial in Asia.

He says, We were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Now that sounds like a bad situation to be in. You're burdened beyond your strength.

Well, how in the world, then, could you survive it if it's beyond your strength? You're at the end of your rope and beyond that. I thought God would never give us a trial that's so great that we couldn't bear it. But he will give us trials that are too great for us to bear in our own strength.

He doesn't intend for us to live victoriously in our own strength. He intends for us to put



our trust in him so that we don't trust in ourselves. He says in verse 9, We have the sentence of death in ourselves so that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.

God brings us to a point where we cannot do anything to save ourselves. There are points in our life where we're approaching disaster, where there's still options open to us. A disaster is coming on, but we can make preparations.

We can spend a little money here. We can make the right connections there. We can bolster our health against a time where we know we'll be facing exposure to disease or something.

There are things that we can do when we are approaching some kind of a danger, but at a certain point you exhaust all of your options. Everything you can do has been tried and the danger is still there as great as ever and there's nothing for it but to trust God that I guess I'm going to die and he'll raise me from the dead. I guess that's all that's left.

I was hoping that God might use finances or clever arguments or some other thing that I could bring up to save me, but I can't do that now. What God has me in is something I cannot get myself out of by any means. No friends or relatives or talents of my own seem to be able to avail.

I'm thrown back on God and I can do nothing now but just trust in God who raises the dead. In other words, I think I'm going to die, but I guess my one consolation is I trust that God will raise me from the dead after I die. Not now, but I mean in the resurrection.

He's not talking about instantaneously. He just figured he was done for and whatever he had available in terms of support from other people or his own resources was gone and he was pressed beyond measure, above strength. He didn't have the strength for it.

He was beyond his strength level. He was out of his depth. Now Paul doesn't say, where are you now God? Why have you forsaken me? Paul acts as if this is all just part of the way God deals with people, at least with him.

God had him there and God delivered him out of it, but not before he thought it was all over. He does say that God delivered us, verse 10, from so great a death. Now so great a death, we still don't know what it was, but it was something that was really apparently scary and finally God delivered him out of it, but not before he took him out beyond his depth.

Don't think that God is obligated to get you out of your trials before they get hairy. I mean the time comes where God wants you out of your depths so that like Paul you simply can't trust in yourself anymore. If you've always got a cushion, if you've always got money in the bank, you've always got someone you can call, if you've always got bars on the windows and a gun under your bed and so forth and you can take care of

every crisis that comes up, well you might stay safe, it could happen.

You might live a long life and you might take care of everything, but you'll never learn to trust God that way. At least not the way he'd like you to. And for that reason in his dealings with you he may strip you of all resources and all options and you just say, well how could God do this? If God loves me, why has he taken me to such extremity that I simply can't do a thing? And the reason is that's what he wants you to do.

It's not a thing. He wants you to trust in him and see him deliver, which he did. He delivered Paul and he says he does deliver us and we trust that he will still deliver us.

So Paul sees God's deliverance or salvation in terms of temporal salvation out of circumstances as past, present and future. It's just God's typical way of doing things. He did it before, he does it now and he'll still do it in the future.

Although Paul doesn't indicate whether he's still in a mortal danger at the time that he wrote and he probably was not, but he just anticipates in general. Future trials, I expect God to deliver me from those as well. He says you also helping together in prayer for us.

That is to say God helped us, but you had a role in this too. You were praying for me. It's because you were praying, you were helping together with God to get us out of this mess.

And so your prayers were answered, he's saying. I want you to know that. Now he says I don't want you to be ignorant.

He doesn't tell them specifically what his trouble was. And so it's not clear what he doesn't want them to be ignorant of. It seems like if he wanted them to know the specifics of his problem, he would have laid it out.

Maybe what he wants them to know is that while they were praying for him, not knowing what was going on, he was in fact in trouble and delivered by God and he wants them to know their prayers were answered and that their prayer was not in vain. They may have been praying in some vague way, not knowing anything about Paul's circumstance, but he says it was because of your prayers that God delivered me from things you didn't even know I was in. And it says you also helping together in prayer for us that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gifts granted to us through many.

Now this verse in a sort of a vague sort of way tells us one of the answers to the question that people often ask. Why pray? I mean, God could act without us asking. Could he not? Why does he wait for us to ask? My children asked me that recently during devotions and of course adults ask it all the time too.

If God could just do the right thing without being asked, why does he wait to be asked? Why does he not do it if he's not asked? Why is there a thing called prayer? And it's not

my purpose to go into lengthy answer to that question because I think there are several very good parts to the answer to that question, but Paul hints at one of them here and that is he says God used the prayers of the Corinthians so that thanks might be given by many persons on behalf of what occurred in answer to their prayers. And he says what he implies here is that many people in Corinth prayed for him. And that was, God had them do that so that when the answer was given, the many who prayed could give thanks to God for it.

In other words, they'd see a direct connection between the deliverance and something they had specifically asked for. I mentioned this I think not too long ago in another class on something else, that if God would just give us everything automatically, we might force ourselves to give thanks to God every once in a while just as a matter of routine, but we might even forget to do that and we might even when we do it not have any profound sense of God's direct activity in these things. I mean if I just thank God every night, thank you God I have a car, thank you I have a house, thank you I have my health, thank you I have, you know, I'm not starving, we have food in the cupboard, thank you for all these things, but there's been no particular miracle.

I mean I routinely have these things and they happen all the time and they're always there. I can in the abstract say well God has provided and I thank God that I have these things. But on the other hand, if I'm thrown out of my home and I don't have any money, I don't have food, and I pray and say God provide something and in a tremendous way, you know, the deliverance comes and I have a home and I have provision and so forth, then there's no way that anyone could miss the fact that God did that because it came in response to prayer and therefore God gets more vigorous and sincere thanks for what he did.

And so Paul's indicating that God used the prayers of the Corinthians as part of the way in which he delivered Paul so that the Corinthians, the ones who prayed, might have something specifically to thank God for, namely answered prayer. Answered prayer probably gives God more spontaneous thanks and worship than almost anything else he does. Christians routinely thank God.

Our songs, our hymns that we sing, our prayers often have sort of, what should I say, obligatory thanks. You know, God we thank you that we live in a good country. Thank you that we have clothing and food.

It's almost sort of obligatory that we include a little bit of thanks whenever we pray. But spontaneous, sincere, heartfelt thanks most often comes up from God when we realize that something we've asked God for has been dramatically granted. And so one of the reasons God has established as a principle of dealing that he answers prayer, and in many cases he does nothing until we pray, is because it redounds to thanks for him when he does things because we asked in a way that it doesn't when he simply does

things that we didn't ask for.

So there is a connection there between praying and thanksgiving, namely that if we pray for a thing and God grants it, we're more likely to give him thanks for it than if he simply granted it and we'd never thought to pray about it, never even had a felt need of it. Now one thing I'd point out about verse 11 is that he refers to the deliverance from this death-threatening situation, this life-threatening situation, as a gift from God. Verse 11, says that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.

He's referring to the gift of God delivering him out of that situation because of their prayers. So here the word the gift actually refers to a temporal deliverance. What I'd point out is that the word gift here is the word charisma, a word that Paul frequently and normally uses of gifts of the Holy Spirit.

And when we think of a gift of the Holy Spirit, we usually think of some spiritual endowment, an ability to prophesy or to work miracles or to speak in tongues or do something like that. Something spiritual, something that's an ability. We don't usually think of a charisma or a gift of the Spirit as something so mundane as God getting us out of trouble, as God delivering us or healing us.

If his problem was sickness it was a healing that he got. Now, let's just think for a moment, and I'm just going to speculate a little bit here. Suppose we thought for a moment that the problem that Paul was talking about was in fact a sickness.

It may well have been. We know that Paul had sickness that he referred to in other epistles. In fact, it's even later in this epistle he refers to as thorn in the flesh, which might have been a sickness.

There are other theories about what it was, but certainly the vast majority of commentators would believe that his thorn in the flesh was a physical malady, a physical sickness of some kind. Paul himself calls it an infirmity. Now, if Paul in Asia had experienced some kind of a physical problem of sickness that almost threatened him, maybe he had a high fever that almost killed him, that went on and on and kept going higher and higher and there was no medicines that could help, prayer wasn't relieving it, it was just getting worse and worse, he thought, well, I guess I'm just going to die this time.

But then he was healed. If that is the case, then he here refers to his healing as a gift, a charisma from God. Now, of course, we don't know that it was a sickness.

It might have been deliverance from evil men or from some other thing, but it was a physical deliverance. It was a physical relief from a very uncomfortable situation, to say the least. Now, I bring that out to you in order to possibly raise some questions about

something Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians to the same people in chapter 12, because there we have probably the most famous list of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, at least most famous among Charismatics.

There are other lists of the gifts of the Spirit that Baptists would talk more about, but Charismatics would talk more about 1 Corinthians list, because it has things like tongues and healings and miracles and things like that in it. And in that list of gifts of the Spirit, I'd like to point something out to you. I'm sure you've all seen the list and maybe could even quote it.

But Paul says in verse 8, To one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another interpretation of tongues. What I want to call your attention to is that Paul mentions gifts of healings and to another the working of miracles. What I find interesting about this is that the gift of healing, people have often talked, especially in Charismatic circles, about the gift of healing.

Someone has a gift of healing. But it's hard to say, and it always has been hard for me to know, what is the difference between the gift of healing and the gift of miracles? Now we know that the gift of miracles is the ability to work miracles, although we're not told that the gift of healing is the gift of imparting healing. I was fairly unthinking about this for many years and just passed along whenever I taught in this passage pretty much what I'd gotten from my Charismatic teaching that I'd received from others.

That is that the gift of healing would be the ability to, someone who's gifted to pray for the sick and restore their health, whereas the gift of miracles would take in other kinds of miraculous things, not including healing, but maybe things like when Moses parted the Red Sea or Joshua stopped the sun for a day going through the air. Those things are not healings, but they're miraculous. Or Jesus cursing the fig tree or stilling the storm or walking on the water.

Those are miracles that are not of a healing sort. And so I just figured, well, Paul mentions gifts of healings and he mentions working miracles, and these are similar gifts. One is the working of healings, the other is the working of miracles.

But as years went by, and I studied this again and again, I was more and more uncomfortable with my assumptions on it. Because, for one thing, I never understood why he said gifts of healings, plural, rather than the gift of healing. Why is it plural? And then you've got the fact that there's a difference in the structure when he talks about healings when he talks about miracles.

The one about miracles is the gift of working miracles. But when he talks about healing

he doesn't say the gift of working or imparting healing. At least the way he worded the gifts of healings, it leaves open the possibility that the gifts of healings he refers to are actual healings, individual healings, each one being regarded a special gift from God.

Now that would agree with his use in 2 Corinthians of the word charisma in the verse we're looking at that launched me back over to this cross-reference. In 2 Corinthians chapter 1 in verse 11 he refers to his deliverance or possibly his healing. We don't know whether it was a healing of sickness or deliverance from some other kind of danger.

In any case, it was a physical benefit that he received from God and he calls it a charisma he got from God. That's the same word used in 1 Corinthians 12 of gifts. The gifts of healings, charismata.

Charisma plural of charisma, of healings. I won't say that I know this to be true in this case, but I suspect that gifts of healings may not refer at all to a person having a gift of healing other people. But Paul is simply referring to the fact that some people in the church receive miraculous healings.

That's a gift from God. There are different kinds of gifts. Not everyone gets miraculous healings.

Some people die. Paul even thought he might die and have to be resurrected from the dead when he had this life-threatening thing. He thought trophimus might die or a pathos might die in certain cases when they were near death.

There's no assurance in Paul's mind that every person who got sick would be healed, but he knew that some did. He administered some healings quite a bit himself too. But it may be that what Paul is saying is one person in the church has the gift of prophecy.

Another person, the gift God gives him is simply God heals him of his sickness and that's God's gift to him. There are gifts of healings. There are various people in the church who've received healings and those are their gifts.

Now again, that would be using the word gift differently than we usually think of it. If I receive a healing, that's not the same thing as receiving an ability to do something. Nonetheless, Paul uses the word gift both ways and he uses it of his own deliverance from a life-threatening situation later.

Another thing that puzzled me about this list of gifts is that miracles in 1 Corinthians 12.10 is a word that throughout the scriptures includes healings, miraculous healings. One could look at a number of places in Acts or in the Gospels where it refers to miracles and when it explains what miracles are being described, a lot of times the miracles in question are healings and exorcisms. Healings and casting out demons are the miracles.

It's the same word for miracles used in those places. I won't turn you to them, but Acts

19, verse 11 and 12 would be an example. Another example would be Acts 8, verses 6 through 7, as well as verse 13.

Also in Mark, speaking of Jesus' mystery, in Mark 9, verses 38 and 39, you'll find that the word miracles, the same one that Paul uses here, is actually a word referring in those cases to miraculous healings. So it made me wonder, why would one have a gift of working miracles and a separate person, and by miracles includes healings, another person has a gift of working healings? Well, that's not what Paul says. One person has a gift of working miracles, another maybe receives a healing, and that's their gift.

There are in this list a number of things where Paul doubles up the gifts as companion sort of gifts. For example, tongues and interpretation of tongues are mentioned together. Prophecy and discerning of spirits, which I believe is the gift of discerning prophecy or judging prophecy are mentioned together.

It's possible that working miracles and healings that are received are doubled up too. I guess what I'm saying is, Paul might in fact not speak at all of a separate gift of healing in the sense that somebody has the gift of performing healings. But in speaking of gifts of healings, he may be using the term the same way he uses it here in 2 Corinthians, of receiving a physical benefit from God, and that is a gift from God that you've received this benefit.

In Paul's case, it was either a healing from a life-threatening sickness or else it was a deliverance from some other kind of life-threatening situation. Now, 2 Corinthians 1.12, For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you. For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read and understand.

I don't have any secret meanings behind what I'm saying. He says, Now I trust you will understand even to the end, as also you have understood us in part, that we are your boast, as you also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus. Now, Paul says, Our boasting is that we have conducted ourselves in sincerity.

We've been honest. We've been faithful people. Now, it's not clear whether he says this in order to preface what he talks about in verse 15 and following, or whether he says it as a tag on the end of what he said in verses 8 through 11.

If it is a tag intended on the end of verses 8 through 11, then he would say this. He's saying this, essentially, that even though we faced a death-defying, a life-defying, a death-defying situation, whatever, we were in a life-threatening situation, and it was a very bad situation, yet we did have one confidence. We weren't sure we'd get out of it alive, but we were sure our conscience was clear in the matter.

Now, I tell you, when you are suffering, whether you're facing death or simply facing gossip or slander from somebody, whatever it may be, it goes a great way in comforting you to know that you're innocent, that this isn't happening to you because you did something stupid and bad, and now God's taken it out on you, or that your sin is finding you out. It's a very grievous thing to be in suffering and know that you could have avoided it, but you did a bad thing, and that's why this is happening to you. I mean, it just makes the suffering all the more grievous at a spiritual level.

But if you are suffering, and you know you're suffering for righteousness' sake, and you know that you've done nothing to deserve this, and this is nothing but sharing in the sufferings of Christ, there's a comfort in that. There's a boasting in that. There's an encouragement.

It's knowing I may not be successful, but I'm faithful. And I may not be popular, but I'm doing what God wants me to do, and that's comforting. And he may be saying it in that connection.

I would suspect, however, that he's giving us verses 12 through 14 not so much as a follow-up to the thought of verses 8 through 11, but rather as a preface to what follows. There is a tremendous disjunction in subject matter there. I mean, in verses 8 through 11, he's talking about how he suffered and how God delivered him.

And in verse 15 and following, he's talking about how his plans had changed, and perhaps there were some who were saying, Paul's not reliable. He said he was going to come back. He came through here on his way to Macedonia, and he said he'd be back on his way out of Macedonia, but he didn't come back.

Why didn't he come back? He's not a reliable guy? Is he trying to deceive us? And that's what actually comes up in Paul's addresses in verse 15 and following. So it's possible that verse 12, he's introducing that. He says, my boasting is this.

I'm honest. I'm sincere. I'm not operating in duplicity.

I'm not saying one thing and really in my heart covering up a secret conviction to do something different than what I said. Our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience. Our conscience is clear about this matter.

We conduct ourselves in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God and more abundantly toward you. Now in verse 15, he says, and in this confidence, what confidence? What we just talked about. The confidence that he has a clear conscience.

A person cannot have any real confidence unless they have a clear conscience, but a clear conscience goes a great deal toward giving you total confidence in all circumstances because you know you're clear before God and there's nothing that, he's



on your side. He says, and in this very confidence, I intended to come to you before that you might have a second benefit or a double benefit to pass by way of you to Macedonia to come again from Macedonia to you and be helped by you on my way to Judea. As I pointed out in our introduction, this represents a change in the plans that he expressed himself having in 1 Corinthians where he thought he would only visit them as he came out of Macedonia, but for some reason, probably because of a problem in the church, he changed his plans and he went into Corinth on his way to Macedonia rather than waiting to come to them after going to Macedonia.

And apparently, as I say, things didn't go real well there at that time and he left with things unresolved and had to send a fiery letter back to them to solve the problems because his presence apparently didn't clear things up. Now, you might think, well, how could it not clear things up? How could Paul's presence be inadequate to the task of clearing up problems in a church, especially in a church that later would show itself to be so loyal to him? Why didn't it work out? I don't understand how it is. I believe it's a spiritual thing.

I believe it's spiritual warfare, but I've certainly seen it myself. I remember a time when I started a community briefly in Albany and some of the people who joined it were a group of Christian young people from Massachusetts. They'd come up from a church in Massachusetts to go to a school that I ran in Santa Cruz, a discipleship school for the summer.

And after the school was over, I went up to Albany, Oregon, to start sort of a Christian community house, ministry house. And these seven students who had come from Massachusetts to the school decided they would go with me up to Oregon and help me start this ministry house. And I said, well, you know, they were all from one church.

I said, I will let you come up with me, but I think you'd better call your pastor first because, I mean, he released you, as it were, to come to the school. And while I don't think the pastor owns you or can tell you what you can or can't do, I would feel awkward if he felt that I captured you, you know, and kept you from coming home. So I mean, if you want to go with me to Oregon, you need to phone the pastor, talk to him about it, see if he feels comfortable about it, because if he doesn't, then I don't.

And every one of them said, yeah, the pastor said it's okay. So they went up to Oregon with me. We started a house and eventually things kind of fell apart for various reasons.

Some of it was finances. Some of it was conflicts within the house between different people. But eventually things got so bad that I couldn't fix them.

And so I just disbanded the house. I just saw them go home. And so these people went back to Massachusetts and other people who had come from California, other places, went back to where they came from.

Well, about a year later, I was traveling cross-country, doing ministry in some places, and I went to this very church in Massachusetts where they'd been. Now, I was unaware of any negative things that had happened. But when I got there, they said, the pastor wants to talk to you.

And I said, okay. I was staying at someone's house and they just hadn't come over and you guys come over too. So I mean, all these students who had been at my school came over with their pastor.

I was in Worcester, Massachusetts by this time and having this conversation. And the pastor did nothing but accuse me of doing some really sinister thing. And I couldn't get it out of him what it was he thought I'd done.

And I didn't have a clue what I'd done. I mean, I was trying to pick up between the lines of his comments what it was he was accusing me of, because it wasn't specific. I said, well, I said, George, could you possibly tell me what it is you're saying I did? And he said, don't act so innocent.

You know what you did. And he always did it that way. He'd never even tell me what the accusation was.

And I still don't know to this day. I had to kind of piece it together. My assumption is that he felt that I had tried to steal his sheep, you know, because they'd gone to Oregon with me.

But I mean, and things he said that might have indicated a hint that way, I answered. I said, well, I told them to call you before they came. I wasn't going to accept them unless you released them.

And I sent them back home when we broke up. I wasn't interested in stealing anyone's sheep. But I wasn't even clear that was his accusation.

All I know is that after a very heated diatribe that he made against me and against which I could not say anything. I couldn't even get information out of him as to what the complaint was. I mean, the meeting ended very unsatisfactorily.

Now, I need to tell you that I'd preached in his church on several different trips to Massachusetts before. So, I mean, he and I had been somewhat friendly. And that's one reason these young people came out to my school.

They'd heard me speak in their church. And so I had had a positive relationship with them. But that ended.

I mean, I just haven't been back to that church since. That pastor's now in Haiti running a mission down there. But we never ended up being reconciled.

Although I was interested in it, I never figured out what the problem was, though I asked very plainly. And I thought, man, this is weird. I mean, this is just plain demonic.

It's just like there's confusion being shown here and suspicions. And no matter what I said, the in trying to defend my conduct, I was just proving that I was guilty by being defensive or something. And anyway, I can sort of relate to what might have happened with Paul.

I haven't been in a situation like that. Not that I'm anything like Paul, but I know churches are churches and politics are politics and demons are demons. And there was something really bad going on in Corinth.

And Paul apparently went there to try to fix it. And he just found himself unable to do it. I could just imagine, you know, his accusers and so forth.

And I mean, Paul just kind of left there saying, you know, I can't do anything here. I can't get across to you guys. And that's why he apparently left and wrote a letter back instead, so that cooler heads might prevail reading a letter than in his controversial presence among them.

But this is what he's referring to. He left them. After visiting them on his way to Macedonia, he went to Macedonia and he didn't return as he had indicated that he would.

And now apparently some of them are accusing him of not keeping his word and just saying, well, this just proves that Paul's not a trustworthy character. He says he's coming back. And now he didn't come back.

He went somewhere else, went to Troas instead of coming to us again. So Paul is concerned about his reputation as one who keeps his word here, which, as I say, may be the reason that he started out in verse 12 saying, are boasting of this, the testimony of our conscience and our simplicity and our sincerity and so forth. But he says in verse 17, therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? In other words, was I not? Didn't I really take take it seriously? Was this something I said it, but I didn't mean it? Apparently, people were accusing him of that that was the case, that he just makes promises lightly and doesn't plan to keep them.

He says, are the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh? That with me there should be yes, yes and no, no. Now, I said in our introduction, this little section about yes, yes and no, no, I've always found to be an awkward set of sentences, not only this one, but the ones that follow. And I said at that time, I'm pretty sure I know what he's talking about, but I'm just not sure why he said it in such a peculiar way.

Apparently, when he says that with me there should be yes, yes and no, no, he means that I would be saying yes, yes, but all the while meaning no, no, that I'm affirming

something, but I don't really plan it. I don't really am not sincere about it. That's a strange way to say it, but that appears to flow with his thought when he's saying that, you know, do I make promises lightly? Do I say yes, yes, but really in my heart, I mean, no, no, I'm not really planning that at all.

That I just make light promises that have no sincerity behind them. He says, but as God is faithful, our word to you was not yes and no. Now, when he says as God is faithful, he's actually taking an oath.

He's swearing by the faithfulness of God. He's saying, if my faithfulness is in question in your eyes, I can't do much about that. I mean, if a man is a liar and the only testimony you have that he's not a liar is himself, I swear I'm not a liar.

I'm not a liar, but if you think I'm a liar, then you don't believe that I'm telling the truth when I say I'm not a liar. So you've got to appeal to a higher source. That's what oaths were for.

Remember that Jesus said not to swear oaths, but when we covered that in our treatment of the Sermon on the Mount, I mentioned that I don't think that Jesus was so much forbidding the use of oaths as giving permission to depart from them. They were commonly used in Israel. It was all right to use them, nothing wrong with them.

And probably there was nothing morally wrong with it. Now, the problem was that taking an oath shouldn't be necessary. A person should be so honest that people just believe him already without taking an oath, and that a man considers himself bound to his word.

Jesus said, let your yes be yes and your no be no. Sounds similar to Paul's language here, although it's hard to connect the thought. But the point here being that Jesus' teaching is not that there's something wrong about taking oaths, but there's something wrong with the whole situation if oaths are necessary.

Why should someone need to take oaths to keep them honest? Why shouldn't they just be honest? Just say yes and mean yes. And Paul's language here might deliberately echo Jesus' words there in the Sermon on the Mount. Let your yes be yes and your no be no.

And Paul's saying, listen, my yes is yes. My yes yes isn't really no no. My yes yes really is yes yes.

My no no is a no no. But since you don't believe me, I'll go ahead and invoke God's faithfulness as my witness. That's swearing by God, really, as God is faithful.

Okay? What he means by that is that I'm telling you the truth as truly as God is faithful. Now, that's a strong statement to make. It's clear that Paul and Jesus did not believe that it was wrong to take oaths of this kind, notwithstanding what Jesus said on it.

So we have to understand Jesus' teaching in the same light that Jesus and Paul understood it. And obviously it was not to say it would be wrong to take an oath in every case. It would be wrong to take an oath and lie, but then it would be wrong to lie even if you didn't take an oath.

That's what Jesus is saying. You know, the law said you should not forswear yourself. In other words, you shall not lie under oath.

But actually, you just don't lie at all, under oath or otherwise. Just forget about the oaths. Just don't lie.

But there are times when taking an oath, apparently, like in a court of law or something like that, or at a wedding altar, is certainly not dishonest or wrong to do, unless you're going to lie under oath. And Paul and Jesus both didn't seem to be uncomfortable when put under oath. Jesus was put under oath in court.

Paul invoked oaths not infrequently when he was trying to prove to his listeners his sincerity or his readers. He says, as God is faithful, our word to you was not yes and no. I wasn't double-minded.

I wasn't saying yes one minute and no the next minute and just flippantly, lightly. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who is preached among you by us, by me, Silvanus and Timothy, was not yes and no, but in him was yes. Now, that wording is very awkward, but we can say this much.

There's a correspondence in the structure between verse 18 and 19. Paul says, our word was not yes and no. And in verse 19, Christ's was not yes and no.

Now, if was not yes and no means was not deceptive, if that's just Paul's way of saying was not deceptive but was truthful, then he's saying our words were not deceptive and Christ is not deceptive. Now, why he would choose to say it this way was not yes and no. Paul had his reasons, and maybe in that day there was something about that idiom that was extremely familiar to his readers.

It's always seemed awkward to me, but his meaning is not too hard to grasp. He's saying, just as God is faithful, so our words are faithful. And certainly you know that Jesus is faithful, whom we preach to you.

Someone could paraphrase this whole paragraph as if Paul said, do you think my statements are untrustworthy? Yet certainly you have not found Jesus, whom we preached to be untrustworthy. Have not all God's promises been fulfilled in him? He goes on to say in verse 20, for all the promises of God in him are yes, and in him are amen, which means steadfast and so be it, to the glory of God through us. So peculiarly worded, but really his thought is quite simple.

You think I'm light in my promises. You think I say yes, but really I'm not really thinking yes. I'm I mean yes when I say yes, and I mean no when I mean no.

And I don't lie, just like Jesus doesn't lie. Jesus doesn't say yes and mean no. Jesus is faithful, and my words to you are faithful.

And you have found Jesus to be faithful. If you don't know about me, you certainly know the Lord. Has he been unfaithful? And you learned about him from me.

Why can't you trust my words then? All the promises of God in Jesus, he says, are yes, and in him are amen. And that apparently means are confirmed or are shown faithful. They all come true in Jesus.

Now that's an interesting thing too, because there are many promises of God in the Old Testament that there are perhaps some Christians who say that those promises haven't been fulfilled yet. I know of one school of theology at least that believes that there are many promises God made to Israel that have not yet been fulfilled. The way they read the Old Testament, they think there are promises, for example, that the temple will be rebuilt and the animal sacrifices will be reinstated and that the nation of Israel be in their land in the last days and possess it forever.

And there's all kinds of things like that about the future destiny of Israel, that the Messiah will sit literally on David's throne and rule among them and all the nations will flow into them. Now, if you've read the Old Testament, and I know you have here at the school, you know that there are verses of scripture that say things like that, but depending on how they're interpreted, one can say that they are not fulfilled or they are fulfilled. Those who believe they are unfulfilled usually are looking for a particular kind of literal fulfillment that they say hasn't happened and therefore needs to happen in the future.

And therefore there are many unfulfilled promises of God at this time as we stand here. The other view is that those promises have been fulfilled, that they have been fulfilled spiritually, and that's the sense in which they were intended to be fulfilled from the beginning. It's not as if God has changed his mind.

It's that he spoke in language that was to be understood spiritually and he has fulfilled it in the very manner that he intended to. Now, that would suggest that all the promises of God have already been fulfilled and there are others that remain unfulfilled. And that would seem to be confirmed by Paul saying all the promises of God in Christ are yes, and in him are amen.

To the glory of God the Father through us, that is the promises of God are fulfilled to the glory of God through us, through what God has done to us Christians in Christ. We have experienced all the benefits promised by God in Christ. And there are not some other

class of people or some other class of promises that have not been fulfilled in Christ because he used the term all the promises of God, which I take to be inclusive here.

Verse 21, now he who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the spirit in our hearts as a deposit or as a down payment, as it were. Moreover, I call God as a witness against my soul. That's another, he's invoking an oath.

I call God as my witness by God. Swear by God that to spare you, I came no more to Corinth. Not that we have dominion over your faith, but our fellow workers for your joy, for by faith you stand.

Now, after this little sort of a side paragraph about yes, yes and no, no, and all that stuff, he gets back to the subject of why he didn't come back to them. Now, they thought he was just being flaky. He said he planned to come back and then never showed.

And they thought he was being flaky, maybe dishonest, or maybe at least just taking his promises more lightly than he should and not keeping them. Now he says there's really more to it than that. It certainly is not that I say yes and me no.

That is far from the case. He goes off on a diatribe about that for a little bit. But he says now there's at least two reasons he gives why he didn't come back when it was expected.

One of them may very well be what befell him in Asia, which he refers to in verses 8 through 11. He almost lost his life there. It wasn't as if he was at liberty to come back and visit them.

Whatever was wrong with him, he simply was not able to travel. He was preoccupied with other things that were unexpected. But he says there's another thing that kept him from coming back.

And he says, I call God as my witness against this. Verse 23, that to spare you, I did not come again to Corinth. When they thought he was coming back, he didn't.

But it was partly to spare them. He was too concerned. The last time he visited them, which was not too far earlier, it had been a disaster.

It had been humiliating. It had been the worst. It was a situation that if he came back, he's going to have to come with great severity.

And Paul was capable of great severity. We don't have very many examples of it in the Scripture, but we have enough to know that he could be. When he was preaching to Sergius Paulus on the island of Cyprus, and Bar-Jesus, or Elymus as he was called, was resisting him, Paul looked at that man and says, you wicked child of the devil.

You always resist the truth of God. You're going to be blind for a while. And he struck him blind.

Paul knew how to be severe if he had to be. Even sometimes without doing miracles to oblique someone, he would speak rather harshly. He spoke to the high priest and said, you whited wall.

God will smite you because you sit in judgment to judge me according to the law, but against the law, you have me stricken. I mean, Paul could speak harshly. He could make people feel really bad.

He could even miraculously discipline people. In 1 Corinthians chapter four, when Paul was talking about problems in the church, which existed there, they were probably maybe different problems or maybe the same ones that were much less fully developed in that church. But in 1 Corinthians four, he says in verse 21, what do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod or in love and a spirit of gentleness? Paul knew that if they didn't get it straightened out in response to his letter, he's going to have to come in there and clean house.

He's going to have to come in with the rod, probably not a literal rod. He's going to have to come in a disciplinary mode. He's going to be throwing people out the windows of the church.

You know, I mean, is that what you want? He says, that's why I didn't come back because that's what I would have had to do. It was to spare you that I didn't come back to Corinth when you expected me to come back. Now, he doesn't actually tell us that the problems that he had in Ephesus that almost took his life.

He doesn't tell us that that is one of the reasons he didn't come back to Corinth. He doesn't connect that story with this particular rationale, but it well may be that things happening to him in Ephesus were part of the reason. But the principal reason that he says he didn't come back for is because if he had come back, he would have had to be hard on him.

And he sent a letter instead so that he wouldn't have to come back and be hard on him. To spare you, I didn't come. Verse 24 is a wonderful and important verse and full of important messages for us today.

He says, Not that we have dominion over your faith, but our fellow workers for your joy, for by faith you stand. Now, this is one of the most powerful verses. It's not the only or most powerful verse, but it is certainly in the top rung of tremendous verses that tell us something about how far we have fallen since the apostolic days in our understanding of the nature of the church and of church leadership.

Because in our society, we think of the church as an institution like almost any other kind



of institution. It has elected leaders. Those leaders have an authority that's sort of political in nature.

People do what they say. And you get kicked out of the church if you don't do what the guy says. Now, we know that Paul at times told people to kick someone out of the church.

But it wasn't generally speaking just because they didn't do something he wanted them to do. I mean, he had a guy kicked out of the church because he was living in incest. And it may be, as we've suggested, that he had someone kicked out of the church who was just undermining Paul's authority altogether.

And Paul was not an egotist. It's not like he couldn't take a little bit of criticism. He could take some criticism, but if someone was going to totally undermine his ministry, that undermines his gospel.

That undermines the whole validity of the Corinthian church that Paul had planted. And it leaves the church to be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine that these false teachers might teach. And so Paul had to defend himself in a case like that.

But he doesn't see himself as having dominion over them. They stand before God by faith. Paul was not a dominating kind of person.

In fact, later in 2 Corinthians, a couple different times, he mentions the authority that I have from God, which God has given me, not for your destruction, but for your good. But Paul twice will mention his authority that God has given. Here's one.

In 2 Corinthians 13.10 is the second time he says it. I could probably find from a cross reference where the first time was. 10.8. Let's see here.

In 10.8, he says, for even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed. And also then in 2 Corinthians 13.10, he says, therefore, I write these things being absent, lest being present, I should use sharpness according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction. So twice he says that God has given him authority.

But that authority is not for destructive purposes. It is for building up. Edification means building up.

That authority is not there for Paul to build himself up or to exalt himself, but to build up the church. Jesus made it very clear. It is not to be in the church the way it is among the rulers, the Gentiles, who exercise authority over the Gentiles.

But the servant of Christ must be a servant of all. And he is the one who is the chief. And

so the person who is in authority is not the one who gives the orders.

The person in authority communicates God's standards, but he's not there to have people kowtow to him and some innate authority he has to every wish he wants is their command. Paul, for example, gave some strong instructions to Apollos that Apollos didn't follow. And Paul didn't find fault with him for it.

In 1 Corinthians 16, 12, it says, Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time. However, he will come when he has a Paul in many respects. I mean, he certainly doesn't hold the status of the church, certainly not in the church of Corinth or in the Gentile churches, because Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles who established these churches.

Apollos would come in later and do some teaching there. But he was certainly a man of lesser stature than the apostle Paul. And here's Paul strongly urging that man to go to Corinth, but Paul says he was quite unwilling to go.

So he didn't. Now, Paul doesn't say, Can you believe the brass of that guy? I, the apostle Paul, strongly urging him, tell him to go, and he just doesn't want to go. So he doesn't.

What a rebel. You know that Apollos, he's a loose cannon. He's out of control.

He just doesn't obey apostolic authority. Paul doesn't say anything like that. He says, Well, he'll come when he wants to.

He'll come when he has an opportune time. And he doesn't criticize Apollos for that. He assumes that Apollos is not answerable to him.

Apollos can do whatever God wants him to do. Paul might be disappointed with some of the choices Apollos makes, but that's between him and God. It's not for Paul just because Apollos didn't submit to him to excommunicate Apollos.

And yet there are many church leaders who take that very approach, that if somebody isn't doing exactly everything the church leaders want them to do, then that person is a force for disunity, is a rebel, is a lone ranger, is someone who's going to undermine the leaders of the church and needs to be dealt with as someone to be kicked out. I know, because I was kicked out of a church for that reason in California once. It was into shepherding.

And of course, the people I'm referring to mostly are the shepherding movement. But unfortunately, although the shepherding movement is mercifully no longer a major movement, its spirit still exists in many leaders. And many leaders think that if everyone doesn't do it their way, that somehow that person is a rebel against God and should come under church discipline.

Paul didn't see it that way. It's true, Paul would at times take charge where the church was out of control and where someone had to discipline. But he didn't do so out of a personal vendetta of this person doesn't do what I say he should do.

But I mean, it was a person who was living in sin or a person who was opposing Paul's gospel, teaching heresy, or a person who was simply undermining Paul's authority as an apostle altogether. These are things that Paul could not leave unaddressed. But when it came down to forcing the church to do every little thing that Paul wanted, he says, that's not my business.

I don't have dominion over your faith. We're fellow workers for your joy. That's what a leader is.

A leader is not someone who has dominion over the church. A leader is somebody who is a worker, a servant, a laborer to promote the joy of the congregation. He's working to make them happy, not vice versa.

He says, for by faith you stand. Now, this is a very important thing. Many Christians do not know how to stand by faith.

They believe that they need their pastor, they need some other religious person, some other mentor or something, and that without that person, they couldn't stand. Paul says, don't have that attitude. I'm not your leader.

I'm not your authority. You have a relationship with God by faith alone, and you stand before him alone. You know, what would you do if the person who led you to the Lord backslid? I know someone that that happened to.

I know a guy, a good brother, a good strong brother, he was led to the Lord by another good strong brother, but that good strong brother backslid, became a heroin addict, and hung himself. What would you do if the person that led you to the Lord did that? I don't know who led you to him. Maybe it was a pastor.

Maybe it was your parents. Maybe it was some Christian hero of yours or mentor, but what if that person decided not to be a Christian anymore? Would that affect you? It shouldn't. I mean, it should affect you emotionally.

You should grieve, like you'd grieve about anyone, especially someone you admired falling, but it should not affect your stability. If the person that leads you to the Lord is a backslider, that shouldn't, that in no way serves as an excuse for you to stumble. Now, if you do stumble, that person is going to have to bear some responsibility before God, because anyone who causes one of these little ones who believes to fall, it's better for him to have a millstone around his neck and thrown in the sea than that happen.

But that doesn't mean that the person who stumbled had a right to stumble. By faith,

you stand. Paul doesn't stand in your place.

Your pastor doesn't stand for you. You are not stable because your pastor is stable, or because your church is stable, or because you have a church or a pastor. You are stable because you have God, and by your own personal relationship of faith with him, you have stability, and you have your duty and your walk with God.

There are Christian leaders there who are to be helpers in your joy, but they're not to have dominion over you. So when they begin to think that they do have dominion over you, that's the time to find another place to stand, and not under them, because they have made the church into a political institution, rather than what Paul thought it was. Now in chapter 2, he says, But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow.

For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad, but the one who is made sorrowful by me? So this is a continuation of the thought, he said, I didn't come to you because I want to spare you, and I want to spare me too. I mean, if I came, the sorrow I was feeling would make it impossible for me to come calmly. I would have to come, I'd have to clean house, I'd be grieved, my sorrow would be obvious, you would be made sorrowful, I'd have to rebuke you publicly, I'd have to do all kinds of harsh things that make everyone unhappy, and you know, I have very little consolation in my life, in all my trials, except for my converts.

My converts are my crown and my joy. And you Corinthians are my, you're the ones that make me glad. And I certainly didn't want to come down with such a gloom and anger and doom that, you know, make you all get depressed, because I'm looking to you to make me happy in a way.

I mean, you're my only source of joy, so I don't want to be a source of grief to you any more than I have to be. And that's why I didn't come, because I knew I would have to do something like that. He goes on, and I wrote this very thing to you.

Now here he refers to, since he didn't come, he wrote a letter instead. Lest when I came I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all. That is to say, I'm joyful because you're joyful.

Your joy is my joy. If you're not joyful, then I'm not going to have any joy. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote to you with many tears.

Again, this is that letter that we don't have any more in all likelihood, unless he's referring to 1 Corinthians, but that, it seems to a large extent that he's not. He's talking about Corinthians C. Not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you. So his letter was a strong letter, and in a sense it did cause them to be grieved, but it wasn't just to hurt their feelings that he wrote it.

He didn't do that. He did that because he wanted them to see the strong emotion he had for them, and he was strongly wrenched about the situation, about their well-being, and about the status of their friendship with him. But if anyone has caused grief, and he does have one particular person in mind, it comes out, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent.

Not to be too severe. I don't know if he means by that, I don't want to be, I don't want to make his crime bigger than it really is by saying he's grieved you all. He may see himself as only grieved one man, and I'm saying there's a sense which has hurt the whole church, but I don't want to say that in such a way as to make heap more guilt on him for that.

As a matter of fact, he said, this punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man. So that on the contrary, you ought to rather forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore, I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.

For to this end, I also wrote that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us, for we're not ignorant of his devices.

Now we talked about these verses a little bit in the introduction. It's just clear that the church had responded to Paul's letter of rebuke, and they had inflicted a punishment on this man. We can, we don't, it doesn't say what the punishment was, it was a very severe punishment.

We can assume, I think, without much fear of being wrong, that it was probably excommunication, that he was thrown out of the church and regarded, you know, an apostate. And yet, he was a man who really wanted to be right with God. He just gotten off on a bad note and got caught up in sin and so forth, and now he's repentant.

It speaks of how much sorrow he has. Paul's concerned to be swallowed up in too much sorrow, and therefore, to avoid him being just totally discouraged and throwing in the towel altogether of being a Christian, says, okay, now he's learned his lesson, now take him back in the church. And if you forgive him, as far as I'm concerned, that's me forgiving him.

I extend my forgiveness to him, and I want you to forgive him in my place. And if I forgive anything, I'm doing it in the presence of Christ. Now, that's not known entirely what he means by, if I forgive him in the presence of Christ.

Remember, Jesus said to the apostles in John chapter 20, whoever sins you absolve, they are absolved, and whoever sins you retain, they are retained. I don't know if that's a

special apostolic privilege, and Paul was exercising that, or if it's something that all Christians can do. Stephen was not an apostle, but when he was being stoned, he said, do not lay this sin to their charge.

And we presume, I don't know if we can be sure, but that God honored that, and said, okay, I won't lay that sin to their charge, on your request, Stephen. Now, we can't go around and just say, God, forgive the whole world, and have it stick, because for one thing, we're not the offended party of all the sins of the world. God is, and it's up to God to forgive.

But in addition to God being the offended party, in many cases of sin, there are human offended parties too. And it may well be that Paul is suggesting that the man not only needs to repent before God, but he needs my forgiveness too, and I'm granting it in the presence of Christ. That is, as Christ is witnessing, I'm offering forgiveness to this man, so that Christ will also recognize him as forgiven by me.

I don't know all the dynamics of that, but it's very possible that it is our place, and we do have the authority to forgive people of sins against us. We can't forgive people of sins they've done against someone else, but we can forgive people of things they've done against us, and possibly, if we do so as Christ's agents, as members of his body, as a kingdom of priests, God accepts that. Paul says, I forgive this man in the presence of Christ.

Almost sounds like he's saying that, you know, so now that I've done so, Christ won't hold anything against him either, because the sin was against me, and I forgive him. And in the presence of Christ, he is then forgiven. God honors that.

He says, I do that lest Satan should take advantage of us, for we're not ignorant of his devices. The idea being that if the guy gets too embittered, gets too discouraged, he may turn into a tremendous enemy of the church. Satan can take advantage of this kind of division.

Satan can take advantage of somebody who's got a broken spirit and won't be restored. Where there's lack of forgiveness among brethren, there's tremendous opportunity for the devil to move and to get in. Where there's a rift, where there's a wedge, the devil exploits such things tremendously, and we know his tendencies that way.

Verse 12 says, Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother. But taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia. Now thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of his knowledge in every place.

For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among

those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death to death, to the other the aroma of life to life. And who is sufficient for such things? For we're not as many peddling the word of God, but as of sincerity, but as of God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

Now we live our lives as accountable before God. Paul didn't need the accountability of some pastor making sure he was staying honest. He did what he did and said what he said in the sight of God.

And that kept him honest. Now this business about Titus not coming to him, he only gives, you know, it's one of those many little snippets here in this section where he tells a little bit of what happened in the past and filling in the gaps. Paul had gone to Troas, hoping for Titus to join him after apparently, after he sent Titus back with the letter to the Corinthians.

And he was on edge, he was on pins and needles waiting for news to find out how the church had received it and Titus never showed. And so he couldn't wait anymore, so he decided to intercept Titus along the land route in Macedonia. And he went to Macedonia and finally ran into Titus there.

Now this reference to diffusing the knowledge of God like a fragrance, this section in verse 14 through 16 is based on the imagery of a returning Roman general with his captives in tow. When he says God leads us in triumph in Christ, this either means that we are the captives, God has conquered us and our lives as servants and captives of his bear testimony of the knowledge of him to all the world. We are his slaves going out and preaching the gospel and our lives and the way we're treated and so forth and what we put up for Christ and our obedience diffuses the knowledge of God to all people.

And it's like a fragrance to some people knowing about God is good news, to others it's not. Those who reject him, it just condemns them. It's a message of death that leads to death because the message of the gospel is there is death for those who reject Christ.

But to those who receive it, it's a message of life which leads to their conversion and to their eternal life. Now this business of aroma also is taken from this same imagery because when the generals carried their troops and their captives back, they'd have an incense parade and the captives would smell the incense and they'd know that this was part of, this is just a prelude to their own doom. Paul uses the same imagery in Colossians 2 and verse 15.

But here he doesn't seem to be talking about we are triumphing so much as Christ has triumphed over us and we by obeying him and diffusing the knowledge of him are the mark of his triumph for us and over the world. Perhaps we'll say more about that next time but we've run out of time to say anything on it at this point.