

Title: **2 CORINTHIANS**
 For the Glory of Christ

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:21

Introduction:

BACKGROUND

Pastor Roger Ellsworth gives an excellent introduction to 2 Corinthians in his very helpful book, **The Guide – The Bible Book by Book.**

“In the conclusion of 1 Corinthians we find Paul anticipating Timothy making a visit to church of Corinth (1 Cor. 16:10). That visit apparently took place and yielded the bad news of considerable opposition to the apostle. Paul responded to this report by visiting Corinth himself. His visit, while not reported in the book Acts, can be inferred from Paul's own statements (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14; 13:1-2). This visit is known as 'the painful visit' because it evidently featured an ugly incident in which one of the congregation insulted Paul while the other members sat idly by.

¹ Date: Danville — Tuesday Evening—March 30, 2003
 New Castle, IN — Sunday Evening — March 28, 2004
Tape # Y-11a
Readings: *Rex Bartley and Larry Criss*

After returning to Ephesus, Paul sorrowfully wrote to the church and sent the 'letter of tears' with Titus. In this letter, which we do not possess, the apostle called the church to discipline the man who had opposed him. Paul was so eager to receive Titus' report on the reception this letter that he left Ephesus and went first Troas (2:12) and then to Macedonia to meet him (7:6,13). He was greatly relieved to learn that most of the Corinthians had repented of their opposition, and the man who so vigorously opposed Paul had been disciplined by the congregation and had repented. While in Macedonia, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians and dispatched Titus and another brother (12:18) to carry it to Corinth.”

KEY VERSE

That which is central in 2nd Corinthians is the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ as our great Substitute. We cannot understand the message of this Book until we understand the message of its key verse (5:21). Indeed, we cannot understand the Bible until we understand the message of 2 Corinthians 5:21. — *“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”*

What profound truth, what stupendous grace, what wondrous mystery those words contain! — *“He,”* God

the Father, “*hath,*” in holy justice and infinite mercy, “*made,*” by divine imputation, “*him,*” the Lord Jesus Christ, his infinite, well-beloved, only begotten, immaculate Son, “*to be sin,*” an awful mass of iniquity, “*for us,*” God’s elect, helpless, condemned, sinful rebels!

Now, as the result of Christ being made sin for us and suffering all the horrid wrath of God as our Substitute to the full satisfaction of divine justice, all for whom he died are made to be the very righteousness of God in him by that same divine imputation!

SUBSTITUTION

2 Corinthians 5:21 declares the great, glorious, and effectual substitutionary work of Christ upon the cross, as “*he bare our sins in his own body upon the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed*” (1 Pet. 2:24). This is the foundation truth of Christianity, the rock upon which our hopes are built. This is the only hope of the sinner, and the only joy of the true believer.

“The heart of the gospel,” wrote C. H. Spurgeon, “is redemption, and the essence of redemption is the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ.”

The great substitutionary work of Christ, the mighty transfer of sin from the sinner to the sinner’s Surety, the punishment of the Surety in the sinner’s place, the

pouring out of the infinite, indescribable wrath of God, which was due to us upon our Substitute — This is the greatest transaction that ever took place upon the earth, the most marvelous sight that men ever beheld, and the most stupendous wonder that heaven ever executed. Jesus Christ was made to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Jesus Christ, the spotless Son of God, was made to be sin; and every sinner who trusts him is made the righteousness of God in him!

PERSONAL LETTER

2nd Corinthians is clearly the most personal and emotional of all his letters. These thirteen chapters are filled with passion. They contain far more personal information about Paul and his labors for the gospel than any of his other Epistles. But it is a great mistake to imagine that Paul wrote this Epistle merely to defend himself or to give us an account of what he did and suffered for Christ. Paul was far too concerned for the glory of God, the souls of men, and the gospel of Christ than that. His defense of himself and his ministry was not a personal defense. Rather it was the defense of Christ and the gospel of his grace that Paul preached.

CHRIST CRUCIFIED

Jesus Christ and him crucified is the message of 2 Corinthians. The theme throughout these thirteen chapters is, as in all his Epistles, the glory of Christ in

redemption and grace. 2nd Corinthians is filled with Christ and the glory of God's free grace in him. Every argument for obedience, every promise of grace, every hope set before us in these chapters, and every motivation by which Paul inspires us to live in this world for the glory of God is built upon the mercy, grace, and love of God in our all-glorious Christ. Let me show you.

- When Paul speaks of **grace and peace** from God the Father, he tells us that it is “*from the Lord Jesus Christ*” (1:2).
- When he speaks of **the blessedness of God**, “*the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulations,*” he tells us that our mercies and consolations come to us and abound from our Lord Jesus Christ and his sufferings for us (1:3-5) and that as surely as he was raised from the dead our God will deliver us from all our woes by his grace (1:8-10). What blessed titles Paul here gives to our God: — “*the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.*”

THE TENSES

In the 10th verse of chapter 1 Paul speaks of God's gracious deliverance in three tenses. He is telling us how the Lord continually delivered him from death. Though he had the sentence of death in himself and was so troubled that he “*despaired even of life,*” he learned not

to trust in himself, but “*in God which raiseth the dead.*” Then he tells us how the Lord had delivered him, was delivering him, and would deliver him.

(2 Cor 1:10) "Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver *us.*"

In these things we have a magnificent picture of every believer’s experience of grace. Though we once despaired of life, living under the sentence of death in ourselves, the Lord God graciously saved us. But it is a great mistake to think of salvation only as something we experienced in the past. **“Salvation” is a very big word.** It includes all the work of God in bringing his elect from the ruins of fallen humanity into “*the glorious liberty of the sons of God*” in heaven. Salvation includes God’s past works of grace, his present works of grace, and his future works of grace.

- **The Lord our God has saved us.**

There is a very real sense in which it must be said that every believer’s salvation is a completed work in the past. Our God saved his elect in his eternal purpose of grace in Christ, the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world (Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:3-6; Rev. 13:8). Election, predestination, and adoption are works by which God saved us in eternity.

He saved us by the sin-atonement sacrifice of Christ at Calvary, too. When the Son of God cried, “*It is finished!*” redemption’s work was done. Sin was put away. And “*we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son*” (Rom. 5:10).

And, at the appointed time of love, the Lord God saved us in regeneration, by the effectual, irresistible work of his Holy Spirit in omnipotent grace, giving us life and faith in Christ (Eph. 2:1-5).

- **The Lord is saving us now**, ever supplying us with grace, preserving and keeping us, because he has declared that we “*shall never perish*” (John 10:28).
- **There is also a sense in which it must be said that our salvation is future**, “*for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed*” (Rom. 13:11).

All who have been saved are being saved, and shall yet be saved. He who has kept us will keep us unto the end. And, at the last day, he will raise us up into heaven, in the perfection of resurrection glory.

THE PROMISES OF GOD

When Paul declares **his own veracity** as the servant of God, he turns our attention immediately away from himself to the veracity of God our Savior and all the promises of God in him (1:18-22). He declares, “*all the promises of God in Christ are yea, and in him Amen,*

unto the glory of God by us.” Then, he tells us of four great works of grace, by which all the promises of God are verified to us (vv. 21-22). — (1.) He has established us in Christ. — (2.) He has anointed us with his Spirit. — (3.) He has sealed us in his grace. — And (4.) he has “given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”

ALWAYS TRIUMPHANT

In chapter 2, when Paul asserts **the certain and constant acceptance and triumph of gospel preachers** and their message, he says, “*For we are unto God a sweet savor Christ*” (vv. 14-16).

(2 Cor 2:14-16) "Now thanks *be* unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. (15) For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: (16) To the one *we are* the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who *is* sufficient for these things?"

(2 Cor 3:4-5) “And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: (5) Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God;"

When he declares that unbelieving men and women read the Scriptures with **a blindfold** over their eyes, and therefore cannot see the things of God, he asserts that

that “*veil is done away in Christ.*” Once God gives faith in Christ, the blindfold is taken away, and we are able to see and enter into the kingdom of God (3:14, 17, 18).

(2 Cor 3:17-18) “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty. (18) But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

A TRUSTED TREASURE

Paul looked upon the ministry God had given him as a heavenly treasure trusted to his care, to which he was determined to be faithful. In chapter 4 he declares that **the message he preached**, the message we must preach, is “*the glorious gospel of Christ,*” that by which God gives light and grace to chosen sinners (4:3-7).

(2 Cor 4:3-7) “But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: (4) In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. (5) For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. (6) For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (7) But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”

TROUBLE EVERYWHERE

Beginning with verse 8 (chap. 4), Paul tells us that he had trouble everywhere, all the time. For him heartache and woe were relentless. He was “*always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus*” (4:10). Yet, when he speaks of **his countless afflictions**, he declares them to be but light afflictions and momentary compared to the glory awaiting us in heaven with Christ (4:8-5:9). Blessed is that man or woman who learns to live constantly in the immediate prospect of eternity. It would lighten our load, brighten our days, drive away our gloom, and cheer our hearts to live every day as though we were on the doorstep of heaven.

(2 Cor 4:14-18) "Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present *us* with you. (15) For all things *are* for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. (16) For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day. (17) For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; (18) While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal."

(2 Cor 5:1) "For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

PERSUASIONS

In chapter 5, knowing the terror of the Lord awaiting sinners at the judgment seat of Christ, the apostle seeks to persuade all who read this Epistle to be reconciled to God. **How does the inspired writer persuade sinners to trust Christ?** By declaring to them the finished work of and redemption accomplished by the crucified Son of God (5:14-6:2).

(2 Cor 5:14-21) "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: (15) And *that* he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. (16) Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we *him* no more. (17) Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (18) And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; (19) To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. (20) Now then we are

ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. (21) For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

(2 Cor 6:1-2) “We then, *as* workers together *with him*, beseech *you* also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (2) (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation.)”

UNEQUAL YOKE

Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 have been terribly misapplied by many to teach that believers are to separate themselves from unbelievers in their daily lives and normal earthly connections. But that is not the meaning of this passage.

In 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, Paul is calling for all who trust Christ to come out of Babylon, to make a clean break with all false religion. Here, the apostle Paul promises, by divine inspiration, that **God will receive all who abandon the religion of the world** (all freewill, works religion), trusting Christ alone as Savior and Lord. He promises that all who trust Christ shall be received by God as his own sons and daughters (6:14-7:1).

(2 Cor 6:14-18) “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? (15) And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? (16) And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (17) Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, (18) And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

(2 Cor 7:1) “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

As we relentlessly separate ourselves from the filth of Babylon’s religion, we are continually perfecting (bringing to its end and completion) our separation from the world by our God and our separation unto our God.

CHRISTIAN GIVING

When Paul instructs the saints at Corinth about **giving**, he inspires and motivates generosity in them by reminding them and us of Christ’s great love for us and the unspeakable gift of God in him (8:7-9; 9:15).

(2 Cor 8:7-9) “Therefore, as ye abound in every *thing*, *in* faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and *in* all diligence, and *in* your love to us, *see* that ye abound in this grace also. (8) I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love. (9) For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”

(2 Cor 9:15) “Thanks *be* unto God for his unspeakable gift.”

There is an abundance of instruction in the New Testament about Christian giving. All of 1st Corinthians 9 and 2nd Corinthians 8 and 9 are taken up with this subject. But there are no commands to the people of God anywhere in the New Testament about how much we are to give. Tithing and all systems like it are things altogether foreign to the New Testament. Like all other acts of worship, giving is an act of grace. It must be free and voluntary. But there are some plain, simple guidelines laid down in 1st and 2nd Corinthians for us to follow.

1. Christian giving must be **motivated by love** and gratitude towards Christ (2 Cor. 8:8-9). Love needs no law. It is a law unto itself. It is the most powerful and most generous of all motives.

2. Our gifts must **arise from willing hearts** (2 Cor. 8:12). If that which you give arises from a willing heart, if it is given freely and cheerfully, it is accepted of God. The Lord is not concerned with the amount of your gift, be it great or small; he looks to the motive behind it.
3. We should give to the work of the gospel **in proportion** to our blessings from the Lord (1 Cor. 16:2). We are expected to give generously in accordance with our own ability.
4. **All of God's people** should give (“*everyone*,” 1 Cor. 16:2; — “*every man*,” 2 Cor. 9:7). Men and women, rich and poor, old and young - all who are saved by the grace of God are expected to give for the support of God's church and kingdom.
5. We should be both **liberal and sacrificial** in our giving (2 Cor. 9:5-6). We have not really given anything until we have taken that which we need, want and have use for and given it to the Lord (Mark 12:41-44).
6. Our gifts must be **voluntary** (2 Cor. 9:7).
7. Our gifts must be **purposed**. — “*Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give*” (2 Cor. 9:7).
8. We are to give **as unto the Lord** (Matt. 6:1-5). We give, not to be seen of men, but for the honor of Christ, hoping for nothing in return.
9. **This kind of giving is well-pleasing to God**. — “*God loveth a cheerful giver*” (2 Cor. 9:7; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:16).

OUR WARFARE

In the 10th chapter Paul tells us that **the weapons of our warfare** (prayer, faith, and gospel preaching), by which we bring rebels to the obedience of faith are not carnal, but spiritual (10:3-5).

(2 Cor 10:3-5) “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (4) (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) (5) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;”

God’s church is an army at war in hostile, enemy territory. Our battle is not political, or social, or even moral, but spiritual. We are engaged in a war for the souls of men and the glory of God. In this great army there are five ranks of soldiers the foolish, the weak, the base, the despised, and the things which are not (1Cor. 1:26-29). And the weapon by which the church of God shall march over the gates of hell and prevail is the gospel of Christ.

PAUL’S FEAR

In chapter 11 the apostle Paul shows great concern, lest anyone be “**corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ**,” by those who preach another Jesus, another, spirit, another gospel, and another righteousness (11:2-5,

13-15). He was fearful that the influence of false apostles (men who claimed to speak as God’s messengers, but were really Satan’s messengers) might turn some away from the singular hope of faith — Christ.

(2 Cor 11:2-5) “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ. (3) But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. (4) For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or *if* ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with *him*. (5) For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles.”

(2 Cor 11:13-15) “For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. (14) And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. (15) Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.”

It is very important that we see how Paul describes these messengers of hell, by whom the souls of men are deceived with a false gospel and preaching “*another Jesus*” and “*another spirit*.” They are not described as promoters of licentiousness, immorality and open

blasphemy. They are far more subtle than that. These men are wicked men who, as “*Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light,*” present themselves as “*the ministers of righteousness.*” They promote righteousness, devotion, morality, and religious works. But the righteousness they preach and promote is self-righteousness, righteousness produced by men, not the righteousness of God in Christ.

ABUNDANT REVELATIONS

When Paul describes his temporary translation into heaven, he says very little about that and focuses our attention instead upon the lessons he had learned about the all-sufficient grace of God in Christ (12:2-10).

(2 Cor 12:2-10) “I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. (3) And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) (4) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. (5) Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. (6) For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but *now* I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me *to be*, or *that* he heareth of me. (7) And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger

of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. (8) For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. (9) And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (10) Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

The things he saw and heard in Paradise were things that no tongue could describe. When the experience ended, lest he “*should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations*” given to him, the Lord gave him a “*thorn in the flesh.*” He sent Satan to him as a messenger, constantly beating him in the face, to keep him from glorying in what he had experienced.

PRAYER

Though he did not look upon it as such at the time, Paul tells us that this thorn in the flesh was God’s gift to him (Phil. 1:29). At the time, it was so aggravating, painful, and hard to bear that Paul earnestly prayed for the Lord to take this thorn from him.

We must not miss the lesson here given about prayer. **None of us knows what is best for the glory of God, the good of our own souls, or the accomplishment of God’s purpose of grace in Christ** (v. 8). Because we

do not know what is best, we do not know how to pray for anything as we ought. It is written, “*We know not what we should pray for as we ought*” (Rom. 8:26). Prayer is not for the gratification of our carnal lusts. It is not the means by which we obtain what we want from the Lord. Prayer, true prayer, involves submission to the will of God. It is the cry of the believer’s heart to his heavenly Father to do what is right and best. If I am God’s child, if truly I know him and trust him, I want what he has purposed. I bow to him, surrendering my will to his will, my desires to his purpose, my pleasure to his glory, knowing that his will is best. Therefore, when we pray (in our ignorance) the Holy Spirit cleans up our prayers and presents to the Father the true groanings of our hearts (Rom. 8:26).

Our Lord Jesus taught us ever to surrender our will to the Father’s will. When the will of God appears to contradict that which might appear to be most pleasing to our flesh, we ought always to follow our Masters example, saying, “**Not my will, thy will be done.**” (See John 12:27-28.)

(John 12:27-28) "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. (28) Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, *saying*, I have both glorified *it*, and will glorify *it* again."

In this passage Paul tells us plainly that though the Lord graciously refused give him what he asked for,

he graciously granted him what he really wanted and needed.

John Gill wrote, “The Lord always hears and answers his people sooner or later, in one form or another, though not always in the way and manner they desire; but yet in such a way as is most for his glory and their good. The apostle had not his request granted, that Satan might immediately depart from him, only he is assured of a sufficiency of grace to support him under the exercise, so long as it should last.”

ALL-SUFFICIENT GRACE

The Lord graciously assured Paul of his all-sufficient grace. — “*He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness*” (v. 9). Here God’s elect are assured of his grace in Christ and the absolute sufficiency of it always and in all things. One of the names of our great God is **El-Shaddai**, which means **God All-sufficient!** The grace of God in Christ and that alone is our sufficiency. Nothing but the grace of God in Christ is sufficient grace; and that is sufficient for all his elect all the time and in all circumstance.

Look at verse nine again. In the second part of the verse our Savior declares that **his strength is made perfect in our weakness.** Obviously, our weakness contributes nothing to the perfection of Christ’s strength. He is the omnipotent God. **The meaning of this**

statement is that the strength of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ appears to be or is manifestly perfect through the weakness of those sinners who are saved by his grace. Paul writes in another place, “*When we were yet without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly.*”

Read the last sentence of verse nine one more time. — “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” It is only when we are brought to acknowledge our weakness, infirmity, frailty, nothingness, and insufficiency that the power of Christ and his all sufficient grace rests upon us. The moment we flex our muscles, straighten our backs, lift our chins and say, “I can do this,” we are in trouble.

PLEASURE IN INFIRMITY

In 2nd Corinthians 12:10 we read, “*Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*” Here, writing by inspiration, Paul obeys the admonition given in Joel 3:10, where it is written, “*Let the weak say, I am strong*”. He that is weak and sees himself to be so is strong in Christ, and has the blessed experience of renewed strength from him day by day. May God give us grace, always, in all things, to know our weakness, that we may have his strength.

SELF-EXAMINATION

When he calls for us to examine ourselves (13:5), the one thing to be determined is whether or not we are in the faith, whether or not we trust Christ.

(2 Cor 13:5-6) “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? (6) But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates.”

We are not to examine one another. And we are not to subject ourselves to the examination of others. If you examine others, you will become hardened in self-righteousness, harsh and judgmental, arrogantly making yourself the standard by which you judge others. If you subject yourself to the examinations of others, you will have nothing but the words and opinions of men as the basis of your faith. Your assurance, if you get any, will be nothing but a temporary, self-righteous confidence, varying with the opinions of the preacher to whom you are listening.

The point of examination is this one thing — “*Whether ye be in the faith.*” It does not matter when, where, or how you came to be in the faith, or even who was preaching when you believed. It only matters that “*ye be in the faith.*” For most of God's people, conversion is not a climatic experience, but a gradual process. Some, like Saul of Tarsus, have great, climatic

experiences. But most are brought to Christ one faltering step at a time. And even those who have Damascus road experiences must be gently led into the knowledge of Christ by one like Ananias (Acts 9:6-18). Are you, or are you not, now in the faith? That is the only issue of examination. If you are in the faith, you are saved. If you are not, you are lost.

"Prove your own selves." — The only way to know *"whether ye be in the faith"* is to bring your faith to the Word of God, crying with David, *"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try (prove) me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me (see if I am in the way of the wicked), and lead me in the way everlasting"* (Psa. 139:23-24).

If God will *"say unto my soul, I am thy salvation"* (Psa. 35:3), I want no other proof. Does the Lord God give such a word to believing sinners by which we may be assured of his grace? Indeed, he does (1 John 5:1-13).

(1 John 5:1-3) “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.”

(1 John 5:10-13) “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God

hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”