

Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians
Lesson 3

2 Cor. 8:16 But thanks be to God, who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus.
17 For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord. 18 And we have sent along with him the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches; 19 and not only *this*, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work, which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself, and *to show* our readiness, 20 taking precaution that no one should discredit us in our administration of this generous gift; 21 for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. 22 And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things, but now even more diligent, because of his great confidence in you. 23 As for Titus, *he is* my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, *they are* messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ. 24 Therefore openly before the churches show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.

The Gracious Work – Paul is sending Titus and two other men to the Corinthian church to pick up the collection to take it to Jerusalem. Paul is saying to give them the offering, large or small as it may be and thus show your great love and the reason that Paul is so proud of them. The three men are being sent for the purpose of integrity! When the collection is taken to Jerusalem, Paul does not want a single hint of dishonor associated with the administration of the gift.

2 Cor. 9:1 For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints; 2 for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, *namely*, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them. 3 But I have sent the brethren, that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; 4 lest if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to speak of you) should be put to shame by this confidence. 5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, that the same might be ready as a bountiful gift, and not affected by covetousness.

Sending ahead the Macedonians – Paul has been boasting about the collection in Corinth to the Macedonians. This has caused the Macedonians to be excited and they gathered funds out of their poverty. Now Paul has sent their representatives on ahead of him to Corinth so that the Macedonians could see that the offering was from the heart of the people rather than from the demand of Paul's when present in Corinth.

2 Cor. 9: 6 Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. 7 Let each one *do* just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; 9 as it is written, "HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ABIDES FOREVER." 10 Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; 11 you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

God loves a cheerful giver – For those who give from the heart with the right reasons for giving, God always supplies all the needs for the day and the days that come.

¹²For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God. ¹³Because of the proof given by this ministry they will glorify God for *your* obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, ¹⁴while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you. ¹⁵Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

They will glorify God – Hope and faith in God will be renewed in Jerusalem when the gift is delivered. It will not only meet the immediate financial need but provide for the days ahead. It is the surpassing grace of God that meets all needs no matter where you are and no matter what your circumstances. When the desperate needs are met by the Lord, eyes turn to the Lord in glory and gratitude for His supply. Sometimes God allows our circumstance to become so dire that the only one we can turn to is Him. In those moments He makes the provisions in His miraculous ways and we know in our hearts that only God could have enacted such a divine supply.

2 Cor. 10: ¹Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ- I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! ²I ask that when I am present I may not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh. ³For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, ⁴for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. ⁵*We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, ⁶and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

Face to face ... but ... when absent – Paul is letting the Corinthians know that he understands that the tone of his letters is different than the tone of his voice and actions once he was in their presence. Paul does not want to roll over the Corinthians when he is with them. He wants them to be ready to handle that which is wrong when it happens. He does not want them to wait until he gets there to handle sin and disobedience in the congregation.

2 Cor. 10: ⁷You are looking at things as they are outwardly. If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. ⁸For even if I should boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I shall not be put to shame, ⁹for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters. ¹⁰For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive, and his speech contemptible." ¹¹Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons *we are* also in deed when present. ¹²For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding. ¹³But we will not boast beyond *our* measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you. ¹⁴For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ; ¹⁵not boasting beyond

our measure, *that is*, in other men's labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we shall be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you, ¹⁶so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, *and* not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another. ¹⁷But HE WHO BOASTS, LET HIM BOAST IN THE LORD. ¹⁸For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.

Whom the Lord Commends – Paul is addressing the problem that has raised its evil head in Corinth. He has presented the following facts: 1) It was Paul and his disciples that first brought the gospel to the Corinthians, 2) That Paul has never measured himself according to man but according to the will of God, and 3) That Paul does not overstate his true position in the Lord.

With all this in mind, this is Paul's way of warning the Corinthians not to be persuaded by those who are trying to make comparisons and seek approval of anyone but the Lord.

2 Cor. 11: ¹I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me. ²For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.

I betrothed you – Paul was the minister at the engagement proceedings of the Lord and the people in Corinth who make up the bride there in that church in that city.

2 Cor. 11: ³But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of *devotion* to Christ. ⁴For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear *this* beautifully. ⁵For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. ⁶But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made *this* evident to you in all things. ⁷Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? ⁸I robbed other churches, taking wages *from them* to serve you; ⁹and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia, they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so. ¹⁰As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. ¹¹Why? Because I do not love you? God knows *I do!* ¹²But what I am doing, I will continue to do, that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting. ¹³For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds.

False Apostles - An apostle was commissioned by Christ. He was endowed with the gifts of inspiration and knowledge and invested with unbelievable supernatural powers. In Paul's day those who claimed to be apostles without this commission, these gifts, and these signs of the apostleship, were false apostles. They claimed to be what they were not and usurp an authority which did not belong to them. Though their real object was not to advance the kingdom and glory of Christ, and although they were never commissioned for that work, they gave themselves out as Christ's messengers and servants, and even claimed to have a more intimate relationship to Him and to be more devoted to His service, than Paul himself. The prince of darkness puts on

the garb of light and sets the fashion for his followers in the masquerade to deceive the saints. This terrible portrayal reveals the depth of Paul's feelings about the conduct of the Judaizing leaders in Corinth. In Galatians 2:4 he also terms those in Jerusalem "false brethren."

In the next passage Paul will compare the foolishness of these false brethren with what he has been through to share the indisputable saving Gospel of Christ.

2 Cor. 11: ¹⁶Again I say, let no one think me foolish; but if *you do*, receive me even as foolish, that I also may boast a little. ¹⁷That which I am speaking, I am not speaking as the Lord would, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting. ¹⁸Since many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also. ¹⁹For you, being so wise, bear with the foolish gladly. ²⁰For you bear with anyone if he enslaves you, if he devours you, if he takes advantage of you, if he exalts himself, if he hits you in the face. ²¹To *my* shame I *must* say that we have been weak *by comparison*. But in whatever respect anyone *else* is bold (I speak in foolishness), I am just as bold myself. ²²Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. ²³Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. ²⁴Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine *lashes*. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. ²⁶*I have been* on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from *my* countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; ²⁷*I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure upon me *of* concern for all the churches. ²⁹Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? ³⁰If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. ³¹The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. ³²In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, ³³and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands. 2 Cor. 12: ¹Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. ²I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago-- whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows-- such a man was caught up to the third heaven. ³And I know how such a man-- whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows-- ⁴was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak. ⁵On behalf of such a man will I boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to *my* weaknesses. ⁶For if I do wish to boast I shall not be foolish, for I shall be speaking the truth; but I refrain *from this*, so that no one may credit me with more than he sees *in* me or hears from me. ⁷And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me-- to keep me from exalting myself! ⁸Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹And He has said to me, "**My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.**" Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

Boastings in Weakness – The plight of Paul described in the passage above is in no particular order, yet it most definitely records for our benefit the tremendous struggles Paul

endured for the cause of Christ. Had the false apostles in Corinth endured such trials? No! In order for the Corinthian church to understand the difference between the true and the false apostles, the Corinthians needed to know the cost of being a servant of the Lord Jesus. Notice also that Paul is well aware that his boasting is only worldly and to keep Paul from thinking that he is truly someone special in the world, God gave him a thorn in his flesh to keep him humble. His thorn was his blindness and Paul was totally dependant on the helping hands of others to lead him from place to place, providing him with his daily needs and supplies. In the incredible weak place that Paul found himself, the Lord used him in magnificent and awesome ways to leave a legacy and heritage for the cause of Christ. It is there that we find his strength.

NOTE: Who was the man caught up to heaven 14 years before? I was Paul himself. Notice in the verse just before where Paul states, "*2 Cor. 11:33* and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands. *2 Cor. 12:1* Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. *2* I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago- whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows- such a man was caught up to the third heaven." This entire passage is speaking about Paul's visions, revelations, and experiences. Why would this one event not be his own when all the others are clearly his own experiences?

2 Cor. 12: 11 I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody. *12* The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles. *13* For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!

I am a nobody – The Judiazers among the Christians were presenting themselves as “most eminent apostles.” In other versions they are “chieftain apostles” or “super apostles.” Even though Paul did not act or behave like these “most eminent apostles,” he was not inferior to them; in fact, he was far superior. Notice here that Paul reveals three special powers that were given to true apostles that these “most eminent apostles” did not possess. True apostles persevered, that is worked for the Lord every day of their life, empowered by the ability to produce 1) signs, 2) wonders, and 3) miracles. Only true apostles had this ability. Paul had these abilities even in his blindness. Furthermore, Paul never imposed on the Corinthians for his needs and he never treated them wrong in any way. Perhaps they should have been part of caring for Paul's needs. Then they would have had an investment in his ministry. As it was, Paul had invested in them but they had not invested in Paul! While Paul considers the Corinthian church his family, the church does not consider themselves part of Paul's family. (This comment is taken from the Classical Bible Commentary)

2 Cor. 12: 14 Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for *their* parents, but parents for *their* children. *15* And I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less? *16* But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself; nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit. *17* *Certainly* I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I? *18* I urged Titus *to go*, and sent the brother with him. Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit *and walk* in the same steps?

Save Up – Paul’s investment in the Corinthians was the rightful thing for him to do. Now he asks them if he or any of his associates ever treated them wrongly or took advantage of them. The answer is a resounding “No!”

2 Cor. 12: ¹⁹All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. *Actually*, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved. ²⁰For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps *there may be* strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; ²¹I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced. 2 Cor. 13: ¹This is the third time I am coming to you. EVERY FACT IS TO BE CONFIRMED BY THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES. ²I have previously said when present the second time, and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again, I will not spare *anyone*, ³since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. ⁴For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we shall live with Him because of the power of God *directed* toward you. ⁵Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you- unless indeed you fail the test? ⁶But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test. ⁷Now we pray to God that you do no wrong; not that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, even though we should appear unapproved. ⁸For we can do nothing against the truth, but *only* for the truth. ⁹For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete. ¹⁰For this reason I am writing these things while absent, in order that when present I may not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me, for building up and not for tearing down.

I am afraid when I come – In Paul’s longwinded way, he is simply saying that he is afraid that when he gets to Corinth for the third time he will not find the sin within the church corrected and he will find out that the church is simply playing church without the true essence of the Lord dwelling in their lives. If that happens to be the case upon his arrival, he will take charge of the church and correct the problems quickly. This is not his responsibility to do. It is the responsibility of the church to make the correction and pass the test. Yet, for the cause of Christ Paul will take charge.

2 Cor. 13: ¹¹Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you. ¹²Greet one another with a holy kiss. ¹³All the saints greet you.

2 Cor. 13: ¹⁴The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Finally – The closing of this letter is uncharacteristic in comparison to all of Paul’s other letters. Usually Paul greets a plethora of people at the church and sends greetings from people who are with him. This is not the case in this letter. Paul brings the letter to a quick conclusion, possibly because of the urgency in which he is writing the letter to counteract the false teachers that he

has heard about in Corinth. But he does give the church at Corinth final marching orders. In definite points Paul instructs them to:

1. Rejoice – *Actually this means the same as farewell, or God's speed, or be glad in the Lord.*
2. Be made complete – *A better translation would be to repair and restore what has been damaged.*
3. Be comforted – *Invoke what is good.*
4. Be like-minded – *Be of the same sentiment, interests, and direction.*
5. Live in peace – *Do what it takes to maintain peace. This is not a pacifist! When Paul uses the term "live" it gives the strength to this phrase that directs the people to do what it takes to live in peace.*

Holy Kiss - In the Jewish synagogues where the sexes were separated, men kissed men, the women, women. This apparently was the Christian custom also. It is still observed in the Coptic and the Russian churches. It was dropped because of charges made against the Christians by the pagans. In England in 1250 Archbishop Walter of York introduced a "pax-board" which was first kissed by the clergy and then passed around.

The Grace of the Lord – Paul concludes the letter with his signature logo so the recipients will know that the letter is his. But in this last sentence we also see Paul's understand of God in three persons. Notice that he mentions:

1. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
2. The love of God (the Father)
3. The fellowship of the Holy Spirit

In other words, Paul wants the church at Corinth to be totally engulfed with God.