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Table of Contents

No table of contents entries found.

Preface

An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of The Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians

In his former epistle the apostle had signified his intentions of *coming to Corinth, as he passed through Macedonia* (16:5), but, being providentially hindered for some time, he writes this second epistle to them about a year after the former; and there seem to be these two urgent occasions:— 1. The case of the incestuous person, who lay under censure, required that with all speed he should be restored and received again into communion. This therefore he gives directions about (ch. 2), and afterwards (ch. 7) he declares the satisfaction he had upon the intelligence he received of their good behaviour in that affair. 2. There was a contribution now making for the poor saints at Jerusalem, in which he exhorts the Corinthians to join (ch. 8, 9).

There are divers other things very observable in this epistle; for example, I. The account the apostle gives of his labours and success in preaching the gospel in several places, ch. 2. II. The comparison he makes between the Old and New Testament dispensation, ch. 3. III. The manifold sufferings that he and his fellow-labourers met with, and the motives and encouragements for their diligence and patience, ch. 4, 5. IV. The caution he gives the Corinthians against mingling with unbelievers, ch. 6. V. The way and manner in which he justifies himself and his apostleship from the opprobrious insinuations and accusations of false teachers, who endeavoured to ruin his reputation at Corinth, ch. 10–12, and throughout the whole epistle.

Chapter 1

After the introduction (v. 1, 2) the apostle begins with the narrative of his troubles and God's goodness, which he had met with in Asia, by way of thanksgiving to God (v. 3-6), and for the edification of the Corinthians (v. 7-11). Then he attests his and his fellow-labourers' integrity (v. 12-14), and afterwards vindicates himself from the imputation of levity and inconstancy (v. 15-24).

Verses 1-2

This is the introduction to this epistle, in which we have,

I. The inscription; and therein, 1. The person from whom it was sent, namely, Paul, who calls himself *an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God*. The apostleship itself was ordained by Jesus Christ, according to the will of God; and Paul was called to it by Jesus Christ, according to the will of God. He joins Timothy with himself in writing this epistle; not because he needed his assistance, but that out of the mouth of two witnesses the word might be established; and this dignifying Timothy with the title of *brother* (either in the common faith, or in the work of the ministry) shows the humility of this great apostle, and his desire to recommend Timothy (though he was then a young man) to the esteem of the Corinthians, and give him a reputation among the churches. 2. The persons to whom this epistle was sent, namely, *the church of God at Corinth*: and not only to them, but also *to all the saints in all Achaia*, that is, to all the Christians who lived in the region round about. Note, In Christ Jesus no distinction is made between the inhabitants of city and country; all Achaia stands upon a level in his account.

II. The salutation or apostolical benediction, which is the same as in his former epistle; and therein the apostle desires the two great and comprehensive blessings, grace and peace, for those Corinthians. These two benefits are fitly joined together, because there is no good and lasting peace without true grace; and both of them come *from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ*, who is the procurer and dispenser of those benefits to fallen man, and is prayed to as God.

Verses 3-6

After the foregoing preface, the apostle begins with the narrative of God's goodness to him and his fellow-labourers in their manifold tribulations, which he speaks of by way of thanksgiving to God, and to advance the divine glory (v. 3-6); and it is fit that in all things, and in the first place, God be glorified. Observe,

I. The object of the apostle's thanksgiving, to whom he offers up blessing and praise, namely, the blessed God, who only is to be praised, whom he describes by several glorious and amiable titles. 1. *The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: ho Theos kai pateur tou Kyriou heymoun Ieysou Christou*. God is the Father of Christ's divine nature by eternal generation, of his human nature by miraculous conception in the womb of the virgin, and of Christ as God-man, and our Redeemer, by covenant-relation, and in and through him as Mediator our God and our Father, Jn. 20:17. In the Old Testament we often meet with this title, *The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob*, to denote God's covenant-relation to them and their seed; and in the New Testament God is styled *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, to denote his covenant-relation to the

Mediator and his spiritual seed. Gal. 3:16. 2. *The Father of mercies*. There is a multitude of tender mercies in God essentially, and all mercies are from God originally: mercy in his genuine offspring and his delight. *He delighteth in mercy*, Mic. 7:18. 3. *The God of all comfort*; from his proceedeth the COMFORTER, Jn. 15:26. He giveth the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts, v. 22. All our comforts come from God, and our sweetest comforts are in him.

II. The reasons of the apostle's thanksgivings, which are these:—

1. The benefits that he himself and his companions had received from God; for God *had comforted* them *in all their tribulations*, v. 4. In the world they had trouble, but in Christ they had peace. The apostles met with many tribulations, but they found comfort in them all: their sufferings (which are called *the sufferings of Christ*, v. 5, because Christ sympathized with his members when suffering for his sake) did abound, but their consolation by Christ did abound also. Note, (1.) Then are we qualified to receive the comfort of God's mercies when we set ourselves to give him the glory of them. (2.) Then we speak best of God and his goodness when we speak from our own experience, and, in telling others, tell God also what he has done for our souls.

2. The advantage which others might receive; for God intended that they *should be able to comfort others* in trouble (v. 4), by communicating to them their experiences of the divine goodness and mercy; and the sufferings of good men have a tendency to this good end (v. 6) when they are endued with faith and patience. Note, (1.) What favours God bestows on us are intended not only to make us cheerful ourselves, but also that we may be useful to others. (2.) If we do imitate the faith and patience of good men in their afflictions, we may hope to partake of their consolations here and their salvation hereafter.

Verses 7-11

In these verses the apostle speaks for the encouragement and edification of the Corinthians; and tells them (v. 7) of his persuasion or steadfast hope that they should receive benefit by the troubles he and his companions in labour and travel had met with, that their faith should not be weakened, but their consolations increased. In order to this he tells them, 1. What their sufferings had been (v. 8): *We would not have you ignorant of our trouble*. It was convenient for the churches to know what were the sufferings of their ministers. It is not certain what particular troubles in Asia are here referred to; whether the tumult raised by Demetrius at Ephesus, mentioned Acts 19, or the fight with beasts at Ephesus, mentioned in the former epistle (ch. 15), or some other trouble; for the apostle was in deaths often. This however is evident, that they were great tribulations. They *were pushed out of measure*, to a very extraordinary degree, above the common strength of men, or of ordinary Christians, to bear up under them, insomuch that they *despaired even of life* (v. 8), and thought they should have been killed, or have fainted away and expired. 2. What they did in their distress: *They trusted in God*. And they were brought to this extremity in order *that they should not trust in themselves but in God*, v. 9. Note, God often brings his people into great straits, that they may apprehend their own insufficiency to help themselves, and may be induced to place their trust and hope in his all-sufficiency. Our extremity is God's opportunity. *In the mount will the Lord be seen*; and we may safely trust in *God, who raiseth the dead*, v. 9. God's raising the dead is a proof of his almighty power. He that can do this can do any thing, can do all things, and is worthy to be trusted in at all times. Abraham's faith fastened upon this instance of the divine power: *He believed God who*

quickeneth the dead, Rom. 4:17. If we should be brought so low as to despair even of life, yet we may then trust in God, who can bring back not only from the gates, but from the jaws, of death. 3. What the deliverance was that they had obtained; and this was seasonable and continued. Their hope and trust were not in vain, nor shall any who trust in him be ashamed. God had delivered them, and did still deliver them, v. 10. *Having obtained help of God, they continued to that day*, Acts 26:22. 4. What use they made of this deliverance: *We trust that he will yet deliver us* (v. 10), that God will deliver to the end, and *preserve to his heavenly kingdom*. Note, Past experiences are great encouragements to faith and hope, and they lay great obligations to trust in God for time to come. We reproach our experiences if we distrust God in future straits, who hath delivered as in former troubles. David, even when a young man, and when he had but a small stock of experiences, argued after the manner of the apostle here, 1 Sa. 17:37. 5. What was desired of the Corinthians upon this account: *That they would help together by prayer for them* (v. 11), by social prayer, agreeing and joining together in prayer on their behalf. Note, our trusting in God must not supersede the use of any proper and appointed means; and prayer is one of those means. We should pray for ourselves and for one another. The apostle had himself a great interest in the throne of grace, yet he desires the help of others' prayers. If we thus help one another by our prayers, we may hope for an occasion of *giving thanks by many* for answer of prayer. And it is our duty not only to help one another with prayer, but in praise and thanksgiving, and thereby to make suitable returns for benefits received.

Verses 12-14

The apostle in these verses attests their integrity by the sincerity of their conversation. This he does not in a way of boasting and vain-glory, but as one good reason for desiring the help of prayer, as well as for the more comfortably trusting in God (Heb. 13:18), and for the necessary vindication of himself from the aspersions of some persons at Corinth, who reproached his person and questioned his apostleship. Here,

I. He appeals to the testimony of conscience with rejoicing (v. 12), in which observe, 1. The witness appealed to, namely, conscience, which is instead of a thousand witnesses. This God's deputy in the soul, and the voice of conscience is the voice of God. They rejoiced in the testimony of conscience, when their enemies reproached them, and were enraged against them. Note, The testimony of conscience for us, if that be right and upon good grounds, will be matter of rejoicing at all times and in all conditions. 2. The testimony this witness gave. And here take notice, Conscience witnessed, (1.) Concerning their conversation, their constant course and tenour of life: by that we may judge of ourselves, and not by this or that single act. (2.) Concerning the nature or manner of their conversation; that it was in simplicity and godly sincerity. This blessed apostle was a true Israelite, a man of plain dealing; you might know where to have him. He was not a man who seemed to be one thing and was another, but a man of sincerity. (3.) Concerning the principle they acted from in all their conversation, both in the world and towards these Corinthians; and that was not fleshly wisdom, nor carnal politics and worldly views, but it was the grace of God, a vital gracious principle in their hearts, that cometh from God, and tendeth to God. Then will our conversation be well ordered when we live and act under the influence and command of such a gracious principle in the heart.

II. He appeals to the knowledge of the Corinthians with hope and confidence, v. 13, 14. Their conversation did in part fall

under the observation of the Corinthians; and these knew how they behaved themselves, *how holily, and justly, and unblamably*; they never found any thing in them unbecoming an honest man. This they had acknowledged in part already, and he doubted not but they would still do so to the end, that is, that they would never have any good reason to think or say otherwise of him, but that he was an honest man. And so there would be mutual rejoicing in one another. *We are your rejoicing, even as you also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus*. Note, It is happy when ministers and people do rejoice in each other here; and this joy will be complete in that day when the great Shepherd of the sheep shall appear.

Verses 15-24

The apostle here vindicates himself from the imputation of levity and inconstancy, in that he did not hold his purpose of coming to them at Corinth. His adversaries there sought all occasions to blemish his character, and reflect upon his conduct; and, it seemed, they took hold of this handle to reproach his person and discredit his ministry. Now, for his justification, I. He avers the sincerity of his intention (v. 15–17), and he does this in confidence of their good opinion of him, and that they would believe him, when he assured them he *was minded*, or did really intend, *to come* to them, and that with the design, not that he might receive, but that they might receive a *second benefit*, that is, a further advantage by his ministry. He tells them that he had not herein *used lightness* (v. 17), that, as he aimed not at any secular advantage to himself (for his purpose was not *according to the flesh*, that is, with carnal views and aims), so it was not a rash and inconsiderate resolution that he had taken up, for he had laid his measures thus of *passing by them to Macedonia, and coming again to them from Macedonia in his way to Judea* (v. 16), and therefore they might conclude that it was for some weighty reasons that he had altered his purpose; and that with him there was not *yea yea, and nay nay*, v. 17. He was not to be accused of levity and inconstancy, nor a contradiction between his words and intentions. Note, Good men should be careful to preserve the reputation of sincerity and constancy; they should not resolve but upon mature deliberation, and they will not change their resolves but for weighty reasons.

II. He would not have the Corinthians to infer that his gospel was false or uncertain, nor that it was contradictory in itself, nor unto truth, v. 18, 19. For if it had been so, that he had been fickle in his purposes, or even false in the promises he made of coming to them (which he was not justly to be accused of, and so some understand his expression, v. 18, *Our word towards you was not yea and nay*), yet it would not follow that the gospel preached not only by him, but also by others in full agreement with him, was either false or doubtful. For *God is true, and the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is true*. The true God, and eternal life. Jesus Christ, whom the apostle preached, is not *yea and nay*, but in him was *yea* (v. 19), nothing but infallible truth. And the promises of God in Christ are not *yea and nay*, but *yea and amen*, v. 20. There is an inviolable constancy and unquestionable sincerity and certainty in all the parts of the gospel of Christ. If in the promises that the ministers of the gospel make as common men, and about their own affairs, they see cause sometimes to vary from them, yet the promises of the gospel covenant, which they preach, stand firm and inviolable. Bad men are false; good men are fickle; but *God is true*, neither fickle nor false. The apostle, having mentioned the stability of the divine promises, makes a digression to illustrate this great and sweet truth, that all the promises of God are *yea and amen*. For, 1. They are the promises of the God of truth (v. 20), of him

that cannot lie, whose truth as well as mercy endureth for ever. 2. They are made in Christ Jesus (v. 20), the Amen, the true and faithful witness; he hath purchased and ratified the covenant of promises, and is the *surety of the covenant*, Heb. 7:22. 3. They are confirmed by the Holy Spirit. He does establish Christians in the faith of the gospel; he has anointed them with his sanctifying grace, which in scripture is often compared to oil; he has sealed them, for their security and confirmation; and he is given *as an earnest in their hearts*, v. 21, 22. An earnest secures the promise, and is part of the payment. The illumination of the Spirit is an earnest of everlasting life; and the comforts of the Spirit are an earnest of everlasting joy. Note, The veracity of God, the mediation of Christ, and the operation of the Spirit, are all engaged that the promises shall be sure to all the seed, and the accomplishment of them shall be to the *glory of God* (v. 20) for the glory of his rich and sovereign grace, and never-failing truth and faithfulness.

III. The apostle gives a good reason why he did not come to Corinth, as was expected, v. 23. It was that he might spare them. They ought therefore to own his kindness and tenderness. He knew there were things amiss among them, and such as deserved censure, but was desirous to show tenderness. He assures them that this is the true reason, after this very solemn manner: *I call God for a record upon my soul*—a way of speaking not justifiable where used in trivial matters; but this was very justifiable in the apostle, for his necessary vindication, and for the credit and usefulness of his ministry, which was struck at by his opposers. He adds, to prevent mistakes, that he did not pretend to have any dominion over their faith, v. 24. Christ only is the Lord of our faith; he is the *author and finisher of our faith*, Heb. 12:2. He reveals to us what we must believe. Paul, and Apollos, and the rest of the apostles, were *but ministers by whom they believed* (1 Co. 3:5), and so the *helpers of their joy*, even the joy of faith. For by faith we stand firmly, and live safely and comfortably. Our strength and ability are owing to faith, and our comfort and joy must flow from faith.

Chapter 2

In this chapter the apostle proceeds in the account of the reasons why he did not come to Corinth (v. 1-4). Then he writes concerning the incestuous person who lay under censure; and gives direction for restoring him, together with the reasons for their so doing (v. 5-11), and afterwards informs them of his labours and success in preaching the gospel in several places (v. 12-17).

Verses 1-4

In these verses, 1. The apostle proceeds in giving an account of the reason why he did not come to Corinth, as was expected; namely, because he was unwilling to grieve them, or be grieved by them, v. 1, 2. *He had determined not to come to them in heaviness*, which yet he would have done had he come and found scandal among them not duly animadverted upon: this would have been cause of grief both to him and them, for their sorrow or joy at meeting would have been mutual. If he had made them sorry, that would have been a sorrow to himself, for there would have been none to have made him glad. But his desire was to have a cheerful meeting with them, and not to have it embittered by any unhappy occasion of disagreeing. 2. He tells them it was to the same intent that he wrote his former epistle, v. 3, 4. (1) *That he might not have sorrow from those of whom he ought to rejoice*; and that he had written to them in confidence of their doing what was requisite, in order to their benefit and his comfort. The particular thing referred to, as appears by the following verses, was the case of the incestuous person about whom he had written in the first epistle, ch. 5. Nor was the apostle disappointed in his expectation. (2.) He assures them that he did not design to grieve them, but to testify his love to them, and that he wrote to them with much *anguish and affliction* in his own heart, and with great affection to them. He had *written with tears, that they might know his abundant love to them*. Note, [1.] Even in reproofs, admonitions, and acts of discipline, faithful ministers show their love. [2.] Needful censures, and the exercise of church-discipline towards offenders, are a grief to tender-spirited ministers, and are administered with regret.

Verses 5-11

In these verses the apostle treats concerning the incestuous person who had been excommunicated, which seems to be one principal cause of his writing this epistle. Here observe, 1. He tells them that the crime of that person had grieved him *in part*; and that he was grieved also with a part of them, who, notwithstanding this scandal had been found among them, were *puffed up and had not mourned*, 1 Co. 5:2. However, he was unwilling to lay too heavy a charge upon the whole church, especially seeing they had cleared themselves in that matter by observing the directions he had formerly given them. 2. He tells them that the punishment which had been inflicted upon this offender was sufficient, v. 6. The desired effect was obtained, for the man was humbled, and they had shown the proof of their obedience to his directions. 3. He therefore directs them, with all speed, to restore the excommunicated person, or to receive him again to their communion, v. 7, 8. This is expressed several ways. He beseeches them to forgive him, that is, to release him from church-censures, for they could not remit the guilt or offence against God; and also to comfort him, for in many cases the comfort of penitents depends upon their reconciliation not only

with God, but with men also, whom they have scandalized or injured. They must also confirm their love to him; that is, they should show that their reproofs and censures proceeded from love to his person, as well as hatred to his sin, and that their design was to reform, not to ruin him. Or thus: If his fall had weakened their love to him, that they could not take such satisfaction in him as formerly; yet, now that he was recovered by repentance, they must renew and confirm their love to him. 4. He uses several weighty arguments to persuade them to do thus, as, (1.) The case of the penitent called for this; for he was in danger of being *swallowed up with over-much sorrow*, v. 7. He was so sensible of this fault, and so much afflicted under his punishment, that he was in danger of falling into despair. When sorrow is excessive it does hurt; and even sorrow for sin is too great when it unfits for other duties, and drives men to despair. (2.) They had shown obedience to his directions in passing a censure upon the offender and now he would have them comply with his desire to restore him, v. 9. (3.) He mentions his readiness to forgive this penitent, and concur with them in this matter. "*To whom you forgive I forgive also*, v. 10. I will readily concur with you in forgiving him." And this he would do for their sakes, for love to them and for their advantage; and for Christ's sake, or in his name, as his apostle, and in conformity to his doctrine and example, which are so full of kindness and tender mercy towards all those who truly repent. (4.) He gives another weighty reason (v. 11): *Lest Satan get an advantage against us*. Not only was there danger lest Satan should get an advantage against the penitent, by driving him to despair; but against the churches also, and the apostles or ministers of Christ, by representing them as too rigid and severe, and so frightening people from coming among them. In this, as in other things, *wisdom is profitable to direct*, so to manage according as the case may be that the *ministry may not be blamed*, for indulging sin on the one hand, or for too great severity towards sinners on the other hand. Note, Satan is a subtle enemy, and uses many stratagems to deceive us; and we should not be *ignorant of his devices*: he is also a watchful adversary, ready to take all advantages against us, and we should be very cautious lest we give him any occasion so to do.

Verses 12-17

After these directions concerning the excommunicated person the apostle makes a long digression, to give the Corinthians an account of his travels and labours for the furtherance of the gospel, and what success he had therein, declaring at the same time how much he was concerned for them in their affairs, how he *had no rest in his spirit*, when he found not Titus at Troas (v. 13), as he expected, from whom he hoped to have understood more perfectly how it fared with them. And we find afterwards (ch. 7:5-7) that when the apostle had come into Macedonia he was comforted by the coming of Titus, and the information he gave him concerning them. So that we may look upon all that we read from this second chapter, v. 12, to ch. 7:5, as a kind of parenthesis. Observe here,

I. Paul's unwearied labour and diligence in his work, v. 12, 13. He travelled from place to place, to preach the gospel. He went to Troas from Philippi by sea (Acts 20:6), and thence he went to Macedonia; so that he was prevented from passing by Corinth, as he had designed, ch. 1:16. But, though he was prevented in his design as to the place of working, yet he was unwearied in his work.

II. His success in his work: *A great door was opened to him of the Lord*, v. 12. He had a great deal of work to do wherever he

came, and had good success in his work; for God *made manifest the savour of his knowledge* by him in every place where he came. He had an opportunity to open the door of his mouth freely, and God opened the hearts of his hearers, as the heart of Lydia (Acts 16:14), and the apostle speaks of this as a matter of thankfulness to God and of rejoicing to his soul: *Thanks be to God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ*. Note, 1. A believer's triumphs are all in Christ. In ourselves we are weak, and have neither joy nor victory; but in Christ we may rejoice and triumph. 2. True believers have constant cause of triumph in Christ, for they are more than conquerors through him who hath loved them, Rom. 8:37. 3. God causeth them to triumph in Christ. It is God who has given us matter for triumph, and hearts to triumph. To him therefore be the praise and glory of all. 4. The good success of the gospel is a good reason for a Christian's joy and rejoicing.

III. The comfort that the apostle and his companions in labour found, even when the gospel was not successful to the salvation of some who heard it, v. 15–17. Here observe,

1. The different success of the gospel, and its different effects upon several sorts of persons to whom it is preached. The success is different; for some are saved by it, while others perish under it. Nor is this to be wondered at, considering the different effects the gospel has. For, (1.) Unto some it is a *savour of death unto death*. Those who are willingly ignorant, and wilfully obstinate, disrelish the gospel, as men dislike an ill savour, and therefore they are blinded and hardened by it: it stirs up their corruptions, and exasperates their spirits. They reject the gospel, to their ruin, even to spiritual and eternal death. (2.) Unto others the gospel is a *savour of life unto life*. To humble and gracious souls the preaching of the word is most delightful and profitable. As it is sweeter than honey to the taste, so it is more grateful than the most precious odours to the senses, and much more profitable; for as it quickened them at first, *when they were dead in trespasses and sins*, so it makes them more lively, and will end in eternal life.

2. The awful impressions this matter made upon the mind of the apostle, and should also make upon our spirits: *Who is sufficient for these things?* v. 16. *Tis hikanos*—who is *worthy* to be employed in such weighty work, a work of such vast importance, because of so great consequence? Who is able to perform such a difficult work, that requires so much skill and industry? The work is great and our strength is small; yea, of ourselves we have no strength at all; *all our sufficiency is of God*. Note, If men did seriously consider what great things depend upon the preaching of the gospel, and how difficult the work of the ministry is, they would be very cautious how they enter upon it, and very careful to perform it well.

3. The comfort which the apostle had under this serious consideration, (1.) Because faithful ministers shall be accepted of God, whatever their success be: *We are, if faithful, unto God a sweet savour of Christ* (v. 15), in those who are saved and in those also who perish. God will accept of sincere intentions, and honest endeavours, though with many they are not successful. Ministers shall be accepted, and recompensed, not according to their success, but according to their fidelity. *Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord*, Isa. 49:5. (2.) Because his conscience witnessed to his faithfulness, v. 17. Though many *did corrupt the word of God*, yet the apostle's conscience witnessed to his fidelity. He did not mix his own notions with the doctrines and institutions of Christ; he durst not add to, nor diminish from, the word of God; he was faithful in dispensing the gospel, as he received it from the Lord, and had no secular turn to serve; his aim was to approve himself to God,

remembering that his eye was always upon him; he therefore spoke and acted always as in the sight of God, and therefore in sincerity. Note, What we do in religion is not of God, does not come from God, will not reach to God, unless it be done in sincerity, as in the sight of God.

Chapter 3

The apostle makes an apology for his seeming to commend himself, and is careful not to assume too much to himself, but to ascribe all praise unto God (v. 1-5). He then draws a comparison between the Old Testament and the New, and shows the excellency of the later above the former (v. 6–11), whence he infers what is the duty of gospel ministers, and the advantage of those who live under the gospel above those who lived under the law (v. 12 to the end).

Verses 1-5

In these verses,

I. The apostle makes an apology for seeming to commend himself. He thought it convenient to protest his sincerity to them, because there were some at Corinth who endeavoured to blast his reputation; yet he was not desirous of vain-glory. And he tells them, 1. That he neither needed nor desired any verbal commendation to them, nor letters testimonial from them, as some others did, meaning the false apostles or teachers, v. 1. His ministry among them had, without controversy, been truly great and honourable, how little soever his person was in reality, or how contemptible soever some would have him thought to be. 2. The Corinthians themselves were his real commendation, and a good testimonial for him, that God was with him of a truth, that he was sent of God: *You are our epistle*, v. 2. This was the testimonial he most delighted in, and what was most dear to him—they were written *in his heart*; and this he could appeal to upon occasion, for it was, or might be, *known and read of all men*. Note, There is nothing more delightful to faithful ministers, nor more to their commendation, than the success of their ministry, evidenced in the hearts and lives of those among whom they labour.

II. The apostle is careful not to assume too much to himself, but to ascribe all the praise to God. Therefore, 1. He says they were the *epistle of Christ*, v. 3. The apostle and others were but instruments, Christ was the author of all the good that was in them. The law of Christ was written in their hearts, and the love of Christ shed abroad in their hearts. This epistle was not written with *ink*, but with the *Spirit of the living God*; nor was it written in *tables of stone*, as the law of God given to Moses, but on the *heart*; and that heart not a stony one, but a heart of flesh, upon the *fleshy* (not *fleshly*, as fleshliness denotes sensuality) *tables of the heart*, that is, upon hearts that are softened and renewed by divine grace, according to that gracious promise, *I will take away the stony heart, and I will give you a heart of flesh*, Eze. 36:26. This was the good hope the apostle had concerning these Corinthians (v. 4) that their hearts were like the ark of the covenant, containing the tables of the law and the gospel, written with the finger, that is, by the Spirit, of the living God. 2. He utterly disclaims the taking of any praise to themselves, and ascribes all the glory to God: *"We are not sufficient of ourselves*, v. 5. We could never have made such good impressions on your hearts, nor upon our own. Such are our weakness and inability that we cannot of ourselves think a good thought, much less raise any good thoughts or affections in other men. *All our sufficiency is of God*; to him therefore are owing all the praise and glory of that good which is done, and from him we must receive grace and strength to do more." This is true concerning ministers and all Christians; the best are no more than what the grace of God makes them. Our hands are not sufficient for us, but our sufficiency is of God; and his grace is sufficient for us, to furnish us for every good word and work.

Verses 6-11

Here the apostle makes a comparison between the Old Testament and the New, the law of Moses and the gospel of Jesus Christ, and values himself and his fellow-labourers by this, that *they were able ministers of the New Testament*, that God had made them so, v. 6. This he does in answer to the accusations of false teachers, who magnify greatly the law of Moses.

I. He distinguishes between the letter and the spirit even of the New Testament, v. 6. As able ministers of the New Testament, they were ministers not merely of the letter, to read the written word, or to preach the letter of the gospel only, but they were ministers of the Spirit also; the Spirit of God did accompany their ministrations. The *letter killeth*; this the letter of the law does, for that is the ministration of death; and if we rest only in the letter of the gospel we shall be never the better for so doing, for even that will be a *savour of death unto death*; but the Spirit of the gospel, going along with the ministry of the gospel, giveth life spiritual and life eternal.

II. He shows the difference between the Old Testament and the New, and the excellency of the gospel above the law. For, 1. The Old-Testament dispensation was the *ministration of death* (v. 7), whereas that of the New Testament is the *ministration of life*. The law discovered sin, and the wrath and curse of God. This showed us a God above us and a God against us; but the gospel discovers grace, and *Emmanuel*, God with us. Upon this account the gospel is more glorious than the law; and yet that had a glory in it, witness the shining of Moses's face (an indication thereof) when he came down from the mount with the tables in his hand, that reflected rays of brightness upon his countenance. 2. The law was the *ministration of condemnation*, for that condemned and cursed every one who *continued not in all things written therein to do them*; but the gospel is the *ministration of righteousness*: therein the righteousness of God by faith is revealed. This shows us that the just shall live by his faith. This reveals the grace and mercy of God through Jesus Christ, for obtaining the remission of sins and eternal life. The gospel therefore so much exceeds in glory that in a manner it eclipses the glory of the legal dispensation, v. 10. As the shining of a burning lamp is lost, or not regarded, when the sun arises and goes forth in his strength; so there was no glory in the Old Testament, in comparison with that of the New. 3. The law is done away, but the gospel does and shall *remain*, v. 11. Not only did the glory of Moses's face go away, but the glory of Moses's law is done away also; yea, the law of Moses itself is now abolished. That dispensation was only to continue for a time, and then to vanish away; whereas the gospel shall remain to the end of the world, and is always fresh and flourishing and remains glorious.

Verses 12-18

In these verses the apostle draws two inferences from what he had said about the Old and New Testament:—

I. Concerning the duty of the ministers of the gospel to use great plainness or clearness of speech. They ought not, like Moses, to put a veil upon their faces, or obscure and darken those things which they should make plain. The gospel is a more clear dispensation than the law; the things of God are revealed in the New Testament, not in types and shadows, and ministers are much to blame if they do not set spiritual things, and gospel-truth and grace, in the clearest light that is possible. Though the Israelites could not look *stedfastly to the end* of what was commanded, but is now abolished, yet we may. We may see the meaning of those types and shadows by the accomplishment, seeing the veil is done away in, Christ and he is come, who was

the end of the law for righteousness to all those who believe, and whom Moses and all the prophets pointed to, and wrote of.

II. Concerning the privilege and advantage of those who enjoy the gospel, above those who lived under the law. For, 1. Those who lived under the legal dispensation had their minds blinded (v. 14), and there was a *veil upon their hearts*, v. 15. Thus it was formerly, and so it was especially as to those who remained in Judaism after the coming of the Messiah and the publication of his gospel. Nevertheless, the apostle tells us, there is a time coming when this *veil also shall be taken away*, and *when it* (the body of that people) *shall turn to the Lord*, v. 16. Or, when any particular person is converted to God, then the veil of ignorance is taken away; the blindness of the mind, and the hardness of the heart, are cured. 2. The condition of those who enjoy and believe the gospel is much more happy. For, (1.) They have liberty: *Where the Spirit of the Lord is*, and where he worketh, as he does under the gospel-dispensation, *there is liberty* (v. 17), freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, and from the servitude of corruption; liberty of access to God, and freedom of speech in prayer. The heart is set at liberty, and enlarged, to run the ways of God's commandments. (2.) They have *light*; for with *open face we behold the glory of the Lord*, v. 18. The Israelites saw the glory of God in a cloud, which was dark and dreadful; but Christians see the glory of the Lord as in a glass, more clearly and comfortably. It was the peculiar privilege of Moses for God to converse with him face to face, in a friendly manner; but now all true Christians see him more clearly with open face. He showeth them his glory. (3.) This light and liberty *are transforming*; we are changed into the *same image, from glory to glory* (v. 18), from one degree of glorious grace unto another, till grace here be consummated in glory for ever. How much therefore should Christians prize and improve these privileges! We should not rest contented without an experimental knowledge of the transforming power of the gospel, by the operation of the Spirit, bringing us into a conformity to the temper and tendency of the glorious gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Chapter 4

In this chapter we have an account, I. Of the constancy of the apostle and his fellow-labourers in their work. Their constancy is declared (v. 1), their sincerity is vouched (v. 2), an objection is obviated (v. 3, 4), and their integrity proved (v. 5-7). II. Of their courage and patience under their sufferings. Where see what their sufferings were, together with their allays (v. 8-12), and what it was that kept them from sinking and fainting under them (v. 13 to the end).

Verses 1-7

The apostle had, in the foregoing chapter, been *magnifying his office*, upon the consideration of the excellency or glory of that gospel about which he did officiate; and now in this chapter his design is to vindicate their ministry from the accusation of false teachers, who charged them as deceitful workers, or endeavoured to prejudice the minds of the people against them on account of their sufferings. He tells them, therefore, how they believed, and how they showed their value for their office as ministers of the gospel. They were not puffed up with pride, but spurred on to great diligence: "*Seeing we have this ministry, are so much distinguished and dignified, we do not take state upon ourselves, nor indulge in idleness, but are excited to the better performance of our duty.*"

I. Two things in general we have an account of:—Their constancy and sincerity in their work and labour, concerning which observe, 1. Their constancy and perseverance in their work are declared: "*We faint not* (v. 1) under the difficulty of our work, nor do we desist from our labour." And this their stedfastness was owing to the *mercy of God*. From the same mercy and grace from which they received the apostleship (Rom. 1:5), they received strength to persevere in the work of that office. Note, As it is great mercy and grace to be called to be saints, and especially to be *counted faithful, and be put into the ministry* (1 Tim. 1:12), so it is owing to the mercy and grace of God if we continue faithful and persevere in our work with diligence. The best men in the world would faint in their work, and under their burdens, if they did not receive mercy from God. *By the grace of God I am what I am*, said this great apostle in his former epistle to these Corinthians, ch. 15:10. And that mercy which has helped us out, and helped us on, hitherto, we may rely upon to help us even to the end. 2. Their sincerity in their work is avouched (v. 2) in several expressions: *We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty*. The things of dishonesty are hidden things, that will not bear the light; and those who practise them are, or should be, ashamed of them, especially when they are known. Such things the apostle did not allow of, but did renounce and avoid with indignation: *Not walking in craftiness*, or in disguise, acting with art and cunning, but in great simplicity, and with open freedom. They had no base and wicked designs covered with fair and specious pretences of something that was good. Nor did they in their preaching *handle the word of God deceitfully*; but, as he said before, they used *great plainness of speech*, and did not make their ministry serve a turn, or truckle to base designs. They had not cheated the people with falsehood instead of truth. Some think the apostle alludes to the deceit which treacherous gamesters use, or that of hucksters in the market, who mix bad wares with good. The apostles acted not like such persons, but they *manifested the truth to every man's conscience*, declaring nothing but what in their own conscience they believed to be true, and what might serve for the conviction of their consciences who heard them, who were to

judge for themselves, and to give an account for themselves. And all this they did *as in the sight of God*, desirous thus to commend themselves to God, and to the consciences of men, by their undisguised sincerity. Note, A stedfast adherence to the truths of the gospel will commend ministers and people; and sincerity or uprightness will preserve a man's reputation, and the good opinion of wise and good men concerning him.

II. An objection is obviated, which might be thus formed: "If it be thus, how then does it come to pass, that the gospel is hid, and proves ineffectual, as to some who hear it?" To which the apostle answers, by showing that this was not the fault of the gospel, nor of the preachers thereof. But the true reasons of this are, 1. *Those are lost souls* to whom the gospel is hid, or is ineffectual, v. 3. Christ came to *save that which was lost* (Mt. 17:11), and the gospel of Christ is sent to save such; and, if this do not find and save them, they are lost for ever; they must never expect any thing else to save them, for there is no other method or means of salvation. The hiding of the gospel therefore from souls is both an evidence and cause of their ruin. 2. *The god of this world hath blinded their minds*, v. 4. They are under the influence and power of the devil, who is here called *the god of this world*, and elsewhere *the prince of this world*, because of the great interest he has in this world, the homage that is paid to him by multitudes in this world, and the great sway that, by divine permission, he bears in the world, and in the hearts of his subjects, or rather slaves. And as he is the prince of darkness, and ruler of the darkness of this world, so he darkens the understandings of men, and increases their prejudices, and supports his interest by keeping them in the dark, blinding their minds with ignorance, and error, and prejudices, that they should not *behold the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God*. Observe, (1.) Christ's design by his gospel is to make a glorious discovery of God to the minds of men. Thus, as the image of God, he demonstrates the power and wisdom of God, and the grace and mercy of God for their salvation. But, (2.) The design of the devil is to keep men in ignorance; and, when he cannot keep the light of the gospel out of the world, he makes it his great business to keep it out of the hearts of men.

III. A proof of their integrity is given, v. 5. They made it their business to preach Christ, and not themselves: *We preach not ourselves*. Self was not the matter nor the end of the apostles' preaching: they did not give their own notions and private opinions, nor their passions and prejudices, for the word and will of God; nor did they seek themselves, to advance their own secular interest or glory. But they *preached Christ Jesus the Lord*; and thus it did become them and behove them to do, as being Christ's servants. Their business was to make their Master known to the world as the Messiah, or the Christ of God, and as Jesus, the only Saviour of men, and as the rightful Lord, and to advance his honour and glory. Note, All the lines of Christian doctrine centre in Christ; and in preaching Christ we preach all we should preach. "As to *ourselves*," says the apostle, "*we preach*, or declare, that *we are your servants for Jesus' sake*." This was no compliment, but a real profession of a readiness to do good to their souls, and to promote their spiritual and eternal interest, and that for *Jesus' sake*; not for their own sake or their own advantage, but for Christ's sake, that they might imitate his great example, and advance his glory. Note, Ministers should not be of proud spirits, *lording it over God's heritage*, who are servants to the souls of men: yet, at the same time, they must avoid the meanness of spirit implied in becoming the servants of the humours or the lusts of men; if they should thus *seek to please men*, they would not be the servants of Christ, Gal. 1:10. And there was good reason, 1. Why they should preach

Christ. For by gospel light we have the *knowledge of the glory of God*, which shines in the *face of Jesus Christ*, v. 6. And the light of this *Sun of righteousness* is more glorious than that light which God commanded to shine out of darkness. It is a pleasant thing for the eye to behold the sun in the firmament; but it is more pleasant and profitable when the gospel shines in the heart. Note, As light was the first-born of the first creation, so it is in the new creation: the illumination of the Spirit is his first work upon the soul. The grace of God created such a light in the soul that those who *were sometimes darkness are made light in the Lord*, Eph. 5:8. 2. Why they should not preach themselves: because they were but earthen vessels, things of little or no worth or value. Here seems to be an allusion to the lamps which Gideon's soldiers carried in earthen pitchers, Jud. 7:16. The treasure of gospel light and grace is put into earthen vessels. The ministers of the gospel are weak and frail creatures, and *subject to like passions* and infirmities as other men; they are mortal, and soon broken in pieces. And God has so ordered it that the weaker the vessels are the stronger his power may appear to be, that the treasure itself should be valued the more. Note, There is an excellency of power in the gospel of Christ, to enlighten the mind, to convince the conscience, to convert the soul, and to rejoice the heart; but all this power is from God the author, and not from men, who are but instruments, so that God in all things must be glorified.

Verses 8-18

In these verses the apostle gives an account of their courage and patience under all their sufferings, where observe, I. How their sufferings, and patience under them, are declared, v. 8–12. The apostles were great sufferers; therein they followed their Master: Christ had told them *that in the world they should have tribulation*, and so they had; yet they met with wonderful support, great relief, and many allays of their sorrows. "*We are,*" says the apostle, "*troubled on every side*, afflicted many ways, and we meet with almost all sorts of troubles; *yet not distressed*, v. 8. We are not hedged in nor cooped up, because we can see help in God, and help from God, and have liberty of access to God." Again, "*We are perplexed*, often uncertain, and in doubt what will become of us, and not always without anxiety in our minds on this account; *yet not in despair* (v. 8), even in our greatest perplexities, knowing that God is able to support us, and to deliver us, and in him we always place our trust and hope." Again, "*We are persecuted* by men, pursued with hatred and violence from place to place, as men not worthy to live; *yet not forsaken* of God," v. 9. Good men may be sometimes forsaken of their friends, as well as persecuted by their enemies; but God will never leave them nor forsake them. Again, "*We are sometimes dejected*, or *cast down*; the enemy may in a great measure prevail, and our spirits begin to fail us; there may be fears within, as well as fightings without; yet we are *not destroyed*," v. 9. Still they were preserved, and kept their heads above water. Note, Whatever condition the children of God may be in, in this world, they have a "*but not*" to comfort themselves with; their case sometimes is bad, yea very bad, but not so bad as it might be. The apostle speaks of their sufferings as constant, and as a counterpart of the sufferings of Christ, v. 10. The sufferings of Christ were, after a sort, re-acted in the sufferings of Christians; thus did they *bear about the dying of the Lord Jesus* in their body, setting before the world the great example of a suffering Christ, *that the life of Jesus might also be made manifest*, that is, that people might see the power of Christ's resurrection, and the efficacy of grace in and from the living Jesus, manifested in and towards them, who did yet live, though they were always *delivered to death* (v. 11), and though *death*

worked in them (v. 12), they being exposed to death, and ready to be swallowed up by death continually. So great were the sufferings of the apostles that, in comparison with them, other Christians were, even at this time, in prosperous circumstances: *Death worketh in us; but life in you*, v. 12.

II. What it was that kept them from sinking and fainting under their sufferings, v. 13–18. Whatever the burdens and troubles of good men may be, they have cause enough not to faint.

1. Faith kept them from fainting: *We have the same spirit of faith* (v. 13), that faith which is of the operation of the Spirit; the same faith by which the saints of old did and suffered such great things. Note, The grace of faith is a sovereign cordial, and an effectual antidote against fainting-fits in troublous times. The spirit of faith will go far to bear up the spirit of a man under his infirmities; and as the apostle had David's example to imitate, who said (Ps. 116:10), *I have believed, and therefore have I spoken*, so he leaves us his example to imitate: *We also believe*, says he, *and therefore speak*. Note, As we receive help and encouragement from the good words and examples of others, so we should be careful to give a good example to others.

2. Hope of the resurrection kept them from sinking, v. 14. They knew that Christ was raised, and that his resurrection was an earnest and assurance of theirs. This he had treated of largely in his former epistle to these Corinthians, ch. 15. And therefore their hope was firm, being well grounded, that he who raised up Christ the head will also raise up all his members. Note, The hope of the resurrection will encourage us in a suffering day, and set us above the fear of death; for what reason has a good Christian to fear death, that dies in hope of a joyful resurrection?

3. The consideration of the glory of God and the benefit of the church, by means of their sufferings, kept them from fainting, v. 15. Their sufferings were for the church's advantage (ch. 1:6), and thus did redound to God's glory. For, when the church is edified, then God is glorified; and we may well afford to bear sufferings patiently and cheerfully when we see others are the better for them—if they are instructed and edified, if they are confirmed and comforted. Note, The sufferings of Christ's ministers, as well as their preaching and conversation, are intended for the good of the church and the glory of God.

4. The thoughts of the advantage their souls would reap by the sufferings of their bodies kept them from fainting: *Though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed day by day*, v. 16. Here note, (1.) We have every one of us an outward and an inward man, a body and a soul. (2.) If the outward man perish, there is no remedy, it must and will be so, it was made to perish. (3.) It is our happiness if the decays of the outward man do contribute to the renewing of the inward man, if afflictions outwardly are gain to us inwardly, if when the body is sick, and weak, and perishing, the soul is vigorous and prosperous. The best of men have need of further renewing of the inward man, even day by day. Where the good work is begun there is more work to be done, for carrying it forward. And as in wicked men things grow every day worse and worse, so in godly men they grow better and better.

5. The prospect of eternal life and happiness kept them from fainting, and was a mighty support and comfort. As to this observe, (1.) The apostle and his fellow-sufferers saw their afflictions working towards heaven, and that they would end at last (v. 17), whereupon they weighed things aright in the balance of the sanctuary; they did as it were put the heavenly glory in one scale and their earthly sufferings in the other; and, pondering things in their thoughts, they found afflictions to be light, and the

glory of heaven to be *a far more exceeding weight*. That which sense was ready to pronounce heavy and long, grievous and tedious, faith perceived to be light and short, and but for a moment. On the other hand, the worth and weight of the crown of glory, as they are exceedingly great in themselves, so they are esteemed to be by the believing soul—far exceeding all his expressions and thoughts; and it will be a special support in our sufferings when we can perceive them appointed as the way and preparing us for the enjoyment of the future glory. (2.) Their faith enabled them to make this right judgment of things: *We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen*, v. 18. It is by faith that we see God, who is invisible (Heb. 11:27), and by this we look to an unseen heaven and hell, and faith is the *evidence of things not seen*. Note, [1.] There are unseen things, as well as things that are seen. [2.] There is this vast difference between them: unseen things are eternal, seen things but temporal, or temporary only. [3.] By faith we not only discern these things, and the great difference between them, but by this also we take our aim at unseen things, and chiefly regard them, and make it our end and scope, not to escape present evils, and obtain present good, both of which are temporal and transitory, but to escape future evil and obtain future good things, which though unseen, are real, and certain, and eternal; and faith is *the substance of things hoped for*, as well as the evidence of things not seen, Heb. 11:1.

Chapter 5

The apostle proceeds in showing the reasons why they did not faint under their afflictions, namely, their expectation, desire, and assurance of happiness after death (v. 1-5), and deduces an inference for the comfort of believers in their present state (v. 6-8), and another to quicken them in their duty (v. 9-11). Then he makes an apology for seeming to commend himself, and gives a good reason for his zeal and diligence (v. 12-15), and mentions two things that are necessary in order to our living to Christ, regeneration and reconciliation (v. 16 to the end).

Verses 1-11

The apostle in these verses pursues the argument of the former chapter, concerning the grounds of their courage and patience under afflictions. And,

I. He mentions their expectation, and desire, and assurance, of eternal happiness after death, v. 1-5. Observe particularly, 1. The believer's expectation of eternal happiness after death, v. 1. He does not only know, or is well assured by faith of the truth and reality of the thing itself—that there is another and a happy life after this present life is ended, but he has good hope through grace of his interest in that everlasting blessedness of the unseen world: "We know that we have a building of God, we have a firm and well-grounded expectation of the future felicity." Let us take notice, (1.) What heaven is in the eye and hope of a believer. He looks upon it as a house, or habitation, a dwelling-place, a resting-place, a hiding-place, our Father's house, where there are many mansions, and our everlasting home. It is a house in the heavens, in that high and holy place which as far excels all the palaces of this earth as the heavens are high above the earth. It is a building of God, whose builder and maker is God, and therefore is worthy of its author; the happiness of the future state is what God hath prepared for those that love him. It is eternal in the heavens, everlasting habitations, not like the earthly tabernacles, the poor cottages of clay in which our souls now dwell, which are mouldering and decaying, and *whose foundations are in the dust*. (2.) When it is expected this happiness shall be enjoyed—immediately after death, so soon as *our house of this earthly tabernacle is dissolved*. Note, [1.] That the body, this earthly house, is but a tabernacle, that must be dissolved shortly; the nails or pins will be drawn, and the cords be loosed, and then the body will return to dust as it was. [2.] When this comes to pass, then comes the house not made with hands. The spirit returns to God who gave it; and such as have walked with God here shall dwell with God for ever.

2. The believer's earnest desire after this future blessedness, which is expressed by this word, *stenazomen*—*we groan*, which denotes, (1.) A groaning of sorrow under a heavy load; so believers groan under the burden of life: *In this we groan earnestly*, v. 2. *We that are in this tabernacle groan, being burdened*, v. 4. The body of flesh is a heavy burden, the calamities of life are a heavy load. But believers groan because burdened with a body of sin, and the many corruptions that are still remaining and raging in them. This makes them complain, *O wretched man that I am!* Rom. 7:24. (2.) There is a groaning of desire after the happiness of another life; and thus believers groan: *Earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven* (v. 2), to obtain a blessed immortality, *that mortality might be swallowed up of life* (v. 4), *that being found clothed, we may not be naked* (v. 3), that, if it were the will of God, we might not sleep, but be changed; for it is not desirable in itself to be

unclothed. Death considered merely as a separation of soul and body is not to be desired, but rather dreaded; but, considered as a passage to glory, the believer is *willing rather* to die than live, *to be absent from the body, that he may be present with the Lord* (v. 1), to leave this body that he may go to Christ, and to put off these rags of mortality that he may put on the robes of glory. Note, [1.] Death will strip us of the clothing of flesh, and all the comforts of life, as well as put an end to all our troubles here below. Naked we came into this world, and naked shall we go out of it. But, [2.] Gracious souls are not found naked in the other world; no, they are clothed with garments of praise, with robes of righteousness and glory. They shall be delivered out of all their troubles, and shall have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, Rev. 7:14.

3. The believer's assurance of his interest in this future blessedness, on a double account:—(1.) From the experience of the grace of God, in preparing and making him meet for this blessedness. He that hath *wrought us for the self-same thing is God*, v. 5. Note, All who are designed for heaven hereafter are wrought or prepared for heaven while they are here; the stones of that spiritual building and temple above are squared and fashioned here below. And he that hath wrought us for this is God, because nothing less than a divine power can make a soul partaker of a divine nature; no hand less than the hand of God can work us for this thing. A great deal is to be done to prepare our souls for heaven, and that preparation of the heart is from the Lord. (2.) The *earnest of the Spirit* gave them this assurance: for an earnest is part of payment, and secures the full payment. The present graces and comforts of the Spirit are earnest of everlasting grace and comfort.

II. The apostle deduces an inference for the comfort of believers in their present state and condition in this world, v. 6-8. Here observe, 1. What their present state or condition is: they *are absent from the Lord* (v. 6); they are pilgrims and strangers in this world; they do but sojourn here in their earthly home, or in this tabernacle; and though God is with us here, by his Spirit, and in his ordinances, yet we are not with him as we hope to be: we cannot see his face while we live: *For we walk by faith, not by sight*, v. 7. We have not the vision and fruition of God, as of an object that is present with us, and as we hope for hereafter, when we *shall see as we are seen*. Note, Faith is for this world, and sight is reserved for the other world: and it is our duty, and will be our interest, to walk by faith, till we come to live by sight. 2. How comfortable and courageous we ought to be in all the troubles of life, and in the hour of death: *Therefore we are*, or ought to be, *always confident* (v. 6), and again (v. 8), *We are confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body*. True Christians, if they duly considered the prospect faith gives them of another world, and the good reasons of their hope of blessedness after death, would be comforted under the troubles of life, and supported in the hour of death: they should take courage, when they are encountering the last enemy, and be willing rather to die than live, when it is the will of God that they should *put off this tabernacle*. Note, As those who are born from above long to be there, so it is but being absent from the body, and we shall very soon be present with the Lord—but to die, and be with Christ—but to close our eyes to all things in this world, and we shall open them in a world of glory. Faith will be turned into sight.

III. He proceeds to deduce an inference to excite and quicken himself and others to duty, v. 9–11. So it is that well-grounded hopes of heaven will be far from giving the least encouragement to sloth and sinful security; on the contrary, they should stir us up to use the greatest care and diligence in religion: *Wherefore*, or because we hope to be present with the Lord, *we labour*

and take pains, v. 9. *Philotimoumetha*—*We are ambitious*, and labour as industriously as the most ambitious men do to obtain what they aim at. Here observe, 1. What it was that the apostle was thus ambitious of—*acceptance with God*. We labour that, living and dying, whether present in the body or absent from the body, *we may be accepted of him*, the Lord (v. 9), that we *may please him who hath chosen us*, that our great Lord may say to us, *Well done*. This they coveted as the greatest favour and the highest honour: it was the summit of their ambition. 2. What further quickening motives they had to excite their diligence, from the consideration of the judgment to come, v. 10, 11. There are many things relating to this great matter that should awe the best of men into the utmost care and diligence in religion; for example, the certainty of this judgment, for we must appear; the universality of it, for we must all appear; the great Judge before whose judgment-seat we must appear, the Lord Jesus Christ, who himself will appear in flaming fire; the recompence to be then received, for things done in the body, which will be very particular (unto every one), and very just, according to what we have done, whether good or bad. The apostle calls this awful judgment *the terror of the Lord* (v. 11), and, by the consideration thereof, was excited to persuade men to repent, and live a holy life, that, when Christ shall appear terribly, they may appear before him comfortably. And, concerning his fidelity and diligence, he comfortably appeals unto God, and the consciences of those he wrote to: *We are made manifest unto God, and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences*.

Verses 12-15

Here observe, I. The apostle makes an apology for seeming to commend himself and his fellow-labourers (v. 13), and tells them, 1. It was not to commend themselves, nor for their own sakes, that he had spoken of their fidelity and diligence in the former verses; nor was he willing to suspect their good opinion of him. But, 2. The true reason was this, to put an argument in their mouths wherewith to answer his accusers, who made vain boastings, and gloried in appearances only; that he might give them *an occasion to glory on their behalf*, or to defend them against the reproaches of their adversaries. And if the people can say that the word has been manifested to their consciences, and been effectual to their conversion and edification, this is the best defence they can make for the ministry of the word, when they are vilified and reproached.

II. He gives good reasons for their great zeal and diligence. Some of Paul's adversaries had, it is likely, reproached him for his zeal and fervour, as if he had been a madman, or, in the language of our days, a fanatic; they imputed all to enthusiasm, as the Roman governor told him, *Much learning has made thee mad*, Acts 26:24. But the apostle tells them, 1. It was for the glory of God, and the good of the church, that he was thus zealous and industrious: "*Whether we be beside ourselves, or whether we be sober* (whether you or others do think the one or the other), it is *to God*, and for his glory: and it is *for your cause*, or to promote your good," v. 13. If they manifested the greatest ardour and vehemency at some times, and used the greatest calmness in strong reasonings at other times, it was for the best ends; and in both methods they had good reason for what they did. For, 2. *The love of Christ constrained them*, v. 14. They were under the sweetest and strongest constraints to do what they did. Love has a constraining virtue to excite ministers and private Christians in their duty. Our love to Christ will have this virtue; and Christ's love to us, which was manifested in this great instance of his dying for us, will have this effect upon us, if it be duly considered and rightly judged of. For observe how the apostle argues for the reasonableness of love's constraints, and

declares, (1.) What we were before, and must have continued to be, had not Christ died for us: *We were dead*, v. 14. *If one died for all, then were all dead*; dead in law, under sentence of death; dead in sins and trespasses, spiritually dead. Note, This was the deplorable condition of all those for whom Christ died: they were lost and undone, dead and ruined, and must have remained thus miserable for ever if Christ had not died for them. (2.) What such should do, for whom Christ died; namely, that they should live to him. This is what Christ designed, that *those who live*, who are made alive unto God by means of his death, *should live to him that died for them, and rose again* for their sakes also, and that they should not live *to themselves*, v. 15. Note, We should not make ourselves, but Christ, the end of our living and actions: and it was one end of Christ's death to cure us of this self-love, and to excite us always to act under the commanding influence of his love. A Christian's life should be consecrated to Christ; and then do we live as we ought to live when we live to Christ, who died for us.

Verses 16-21

In these verses the apostle mentions two things that are necessary in order to our living to Christ, both of which are the consequences of Christ's dying for us; namely, regeneration and reconciliation.

I. Regeneration, which consists of two things; namely, 1. Weanedness from the world: *"Henceforth we know no man after the flesh*, v. 16. We do not own nor affect any person or thing in this world for carnal ends and outward advantage: we are enabled, by divine grace, not to mind nor regard this world, nor the things of this world, but to live above it. The love of Christ is in our hearts, and the world is under our feet." Note, Good Christians must enjoy the comforts of this life, and their relations in this world, with a holy indifference. *Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet*, says the apostle, *we know him no more*. It is questioned whether Paul had seen Christ in the flesh. However, the rest of the apostles had, and so might some among those he was now writing to. However, he would not have them value themselves upon that account; for even the bodily presence of Christ is not to be desired nor doted upon by his disciples. We must live upon his spiritual presence, and the comfort it affords. Note, Those who make images of Christ, and use them in their worship, do not take the way that God has appointed for strengthening their faith and quickening their affections; for it is the will of God that we should not know Christ any more after the flesh. 2. A thorough change of the heart: *For if any man be in Christ*, if any man be a Christian indeed, and will approve himself such, *he is*, or he must be, *a new creature*, v. 17. Some read it, *Let him be a new creature*. This ought to be the care of all who profess the Christian faith, that they be new creatures; not only that they have a new name, and wear a new livery, but that they have a new heart and new nature. And so great is the change the grace of God makes in the soul, that, as it follows, *old things are passed away*—old thoughts, old principles, and old practices, are passed away; and *all these things must become new*. Note, Regenerating grace creates a new world in the soul; all things are new. The renewed man acts from new principles, by new rules, with new ends, and in new company.

II. Reconciliation, which is here spoken of under a double notion:—

1. As an unquestionable privilege, v. 18, 19. Reconciliation supposes a quarrel, or breach of friendship; and sin has made a breach, it has broken the friendship between God and man. The heart of the sinner is filled with enmity against God, and God is justly offended with the sinner. Yet, behold, there may be a reconciliation; the offended Majesty of heaven is willing to be

reconciled. And observe, 1. He has appointed the Mediator of reconciliation. He has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, v. 18. God is to be owned from first to last in the undertaking and performance of the Mediator. All things relating to our reconciliation by Jesus Christ are of God, who by the mediation of Jesus Christ has reconciled the world to himself, and put himself into a capacity of being actually reconciled to offenders, without any wrong or injury to his justice or holiness, and does not impute to men their trespasses, but recedes from the rigour of the first covenant, which was broken, and does not insist upon the advantage he might justly take against us for the breach of that covenant, but is willing to enter into a new treaty, and into a new covenant of grace, and, according to the tenour thereof, freely to forgive us all our sins, and justify freely by his grace all those who do believe. 2. He has appointed the *ministry of reconciliation*, v. 18. By the inspiration of God the scriptures were written, which contain the word of reconciliation, showing us that peace was made by the blood of the cross, that reconciliation is wrought, and directing us how we may be interested therein. And he has appointed the office of the ministry, which is a *ministry of reconciliation*: ministers are to open and proclaim to sinners the terms of mercy and reconciliation, and persuade them to comply therewith. For,

2. Reconciliation is here spoken of as our indispensable duty, v. 20. As God is willing to be reconciled to us, we ought to be reconciled to God. And it is the great end and design of the gospel, that word of reconciliation, to prevail upon sinners to lay aside their enmity against God. Faithful ministers are Christ's ambassadors, sent to treat with sinners on peace and reconciliation: they come in God's name, with his entreaties, and act in Christ's stead, doing the very thing he did when he was upon this earth, and what he wills to be done now that he is in heaven. Wonderful condescension! Though God can be no loser by the quarrel, nor gainer by the peace, yet by his ministers he beseeches sinners to lay aside their enmity, and accept of the terms he offers, that they would be reconciled to him, to all his attributes, to all his laws, and to all his providences, to believe in the Mediator, to accept the atonement, and comply with his gospel, in all the parts of it and in the whole design of it. And for our encouragement so to do the apostle subjoins what should be well known and duly considered by us (v. 21), namely, (1.) The purity of the Mediator: *He knew no sin*. (2.) The sacrifice he offered: *He was made sin*; not a sinner, but *sin*, that is, a sin-offering, a sacrifice for sin. (3.) The end and design of all this: that *we might be made the righteousness of God in him*, might be justified freely by the grace of God through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. Note, [1.] As Christ, who knew no sin of his own, was made sin for us, so we, who have no righteousness of our own, are made the righteousness of God in him. [2.] Our reconciliation to God is only through Jesus Christ, and for the sake of his merit: on him therefore we must rely, and make mention of his righteousness and his only.

Chapter 6

In this chapter the apostle gives an account of his general errand to all to whom he preached; with the several arguments and methods he used (v. 1–10). Then he addresses himself particularly to the Corinthians, giving them good cautions with great affection and strong arguments (v. 11–18).

Verses 1-10

In these verses we have an account of the apostle's general errand and exhortation to all to whom he preached in every place where he came, with the several arguments and methods he used. Observe,

I. The errand or exhortation itself, namely, to comply with the gospel offers of reconciliation—that, being favoured with the gospel, they would not receive this *grace of God in vain*, v. 1. The gospel is a word of grace sounding in our ears; but it will be in vain for us to hear it, unless we believe it, and comply with the end and design of it. And as it is the duty of the ministers of the gospel to exhort and persuade their hearers to accept of grace and mercy which are offered to them, so they are honoured with this high title of *co-workers with God*. Note, 1. They must work; and must work for God and his glory, for souls and their good: and they are workers with God, yet under him, as instruments only; however, if they be faithful, they may hope to find God working with them, and their labour will be effectual. 2. Observe the language and way of the spirit of the gospel: it is not with roughness and severity, but with all mildness and gentleness, to beseech and entreat, to use exhortations and arguments, in order to prevail with sinners and overcome their natural unwillingness to be reconciled to God and to be happy for ever.

II. The arguments and method which the apostle used. And here he tells them,

1. The present time is the only proper season to accept of the grace that is offered, and improve that grace which is afforded: *NOW is the accepted time, NOW is the day of salvation*, v. 2. The gospel day is a day of salvation, the means of grace the means of salvation, the offers of the gospel the offers of salvation, and the present time the only proper time to accept of these offers: *To-day, while it is called to-day*. The morrow is none of ours: we know not what will be on the morrow, nor where we shall be; and we should remember that present seasons of grace are short and uncertain, and cannot be recalled when they are past. It is therefore our duty and interest to improve them while we have them, and no less than our salvation depends upon our so doing.

2. What caution they used not to give offence that might hinder the success of their preaching: *Giving no offence in any thing*, v. 3. The apostle had great difficulty to behave prudently and inoffensively towards the Jews and Gentiles, for many of both sorts watched for his halting, and sought occasion to blame him and his ministry, or his conversation; therefore he was very cautious not to give offence to those who were so apt to take offence, that he might not offend the Jews by unnecessary zeal against the law, nor the Gentiles by unnecessary compliances with such as were zealous for the law. He was careful, in all his words and actions, not to give offence, or occasion of guilt or grief. Note, When others are too apt to take offence, we should be cautious lest we give offence; and ministers especially should be careful lest they do any thing that may bring blame on their ministry or render that unsuccessful.

3. Their constant aim and endeavor in all things to approve themselves faithful, as became the ministers of God, v. 4. We see how much stress the apostle upon all occasions lays on fidelity in our work, because much of our success depends upon that. His eye was single, and his heart upright, in all his ministrations; and his great desire was to be the servant of God, and to approve himself so. Note, Ministers of the gospel should look upon themselves as God's servants or ministers, and act in every thing suitably to that character. So did the apostle, (1.) By much patience in afflictions. He was a great sufferer, and met with many afflictions, was often in necessities, and wanted the conveniences, if not the necessities, of life; in distresses, being straitened on every side, hardly knowing what to do; in stripes often (ch. 11:24); in imprisonments; in tumults raised by the Jews and Gentiles against him; in labours, not only in preaching the gospel, but in travelling from place to place for that end, and working with his hands to supply his necessities; in watchings and in fastings, either voluntary or upon a religious account, or involuntary for the sake of religion: but he exercised much patience in all, v. 4, 5. Note, [1.] It is the lot of faithful ministers often to be reduced to great difficulties, and to stand in need of much patience. [2.] Those who would approve themselves to God must approve themselves faithful in trouble as well as in peace, not only in doing the work of God diligently, but also in bearing the will of God patiently. (2.) By acting from good principles. The apostle went by a good principle in all he did, and tells them what his principles were (v. 6, 7); namely, pureness; and there is no piety without purity. A care to keep ourselves unspotted from the world is necessary in order to our acceptance with God. Knowledge was another principle; and zeal without this is but madness. He also acted with *long-suffering and kindness*, being not easily provoked, but bearing with the hardness of men's hearts, and hard treatment from their hands, to whom he kindly endeavoured to do good. He acted under the influence of the Holy Ghost, from the noble principle of unfeigned love, according to the rule of the word of truth, under the supports and assistances of the power of God, having on the armour of righteousness (a consciousness of universal righteousness and holiness), which is the best defence against the temptations of prosperity on the right hand, and of adversity on the left. (3.) By a due temper and behaviour under all the variety of conditions in this world, v. 8–10. We must expect to meet with many alterations of our circumstances and conditions in this world; and it will be a great evidence of our integrity if we preserve a right temper of mind, and duly behave ourselves, under them all. The apostles met with honour and dishonour, good report and evil report: good men in this world must expect to meet with some dishonour and reproaches, to balance their honour and esteem; and we stand in need of the grace of God to arm us against the temptations of honour on the one hand, so as to bear good report without pride, and of dishonour on the other hand, so as to bear reproaches without impatience or recrimination. It should seem that persons differently represented the apostles in their reports; that some represented them as the best, and others as the worst, of men: by some they were counted deceivers, and run down as such; by others as true, preaching the gospel of truth, and men who were true to the trust reposed in them. They were slighted by the men of the world as unknown, men of no figure or account, not worth taking notice of; yet in all the churches of Christ they were well known, and of great account: they were looked upon as dying, being killed all the day long, and their interest was thought to be a dying interest; "and yet behold," says the apostle, "we live, and live comfortably, and bear up cheerfully under all our hardships, and go on conquering and to conquer." They were chastened, and often fell under the lash of the law, yet not killed: and though it was thought that they

were sorrowful, a company of mopish and melancholy men, always sighing and mourning, yet they were always rejoicing in God, and had the greatest reason to rejoice always. They were despised as poor, upon the account of their poverty in this world; and yet they made many rich, by preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ. They were thought to have nothing, and silver and gold they had none, houses and lands they had none; yet they possessed all things: they had nothing in this world, but they had a treasure in heaven. Their effects lay in another country, in another world. They had nothing in themselves, but possessed all things in Christ. Such a paradox is a Christian's life, and through such a variety of conditions and reports lies our way to heaven; and we should be careful in all these things to approve ourselves to God.

Verses 11-18

The apostle proceeds to address himself more particularly to the Corinthians, and cautions them against mingling with unbelievers. Here observe,

I. How the caution is introduced with a profession, in a very pathetic manner, of the most tender affection to them, *even like that of a father to his children*, v. 11–13. Though the apostle was happy in a great fluency of expressions, yet he seemed to want words to express the warm affections he had for these Corinthians. As if he had said, "O ye Corinthians, to whom I am now writing, I would fain convince you how well I love you: we are desirous to promote the spiritual and eternal welfare of all to whom we preach, yet *our mouth is open unto you, and our heart is enlarged unto you*, in a special manner." And, because his heart was thus enlarged with love to them, therefore he opened his mouth so freely to them in kind admonitions and exhortations: "*You are not,*" says he, "*straitened in us*; we would gladly do you all the service we can, and promote your comfort, as helpers of your faith and your joy; and, if it be otherwise, the fault is in yourselves; it is because you are straitened in yourselves, and fail in suitable returns to us, through some misapprehensions concerning us; and all we desire as a recompense is only that you would be proportionably affected towards us, as children should love their father." Note, It is desirable that there should be a mutual good affection between ministers and their people, and this would greatly tend to their mutual comfort and advantage.

II. The caution or exhortation itself, not to mingle with unbelievers, not to be *unequally yoked* with them, v. 14. Either,

1. In stated relations. It is wrong for good people to join in affinity with the wicked and profane; these will draw different ways, and that will be galling and grievous. Those relations that are our choice must be chosen by rule; and it is good for those who are themselves the children of God to join with those who are so likewise; for there is more danger that the bad will damage the good than hope that the good will benefit the bad.
2. In common conversation. We should not yoke ourselves in friendship and acquaintance with wicked men and unbelievers. Though we cannot wholly avoid seeing, and hearing, and being with such, yet we should never choose them for our bosom-friends.
3. Much less should we join in religious communion with them; we must not join with them in their idolatrous services, nor concur with them in their false worship, nor any abominations; we must not confound together the table of the Lord and the table of devils, the house of God and the house of Rimmon. The apostle gives several good reasons against this corrupt

mixture. (1.) It is a very great absurdity, v. 14, 15. It is an unequal yoking of things together that will not agree together; as bad as for the Jews to have ploughed with an ox and an ass or to have sown divers sorts of grain intermixed. What an absurdity is it to think of joining righteousness and unrighteousness, or mingling light and darkness, fire and water, together! Believers are, and should be, righteous; but unbelievers are unrighteous. Believers are made light in the Lord, but unbelievers are in darkness; and what comfortable communion can these have together? Christ and Belial are contrary one to the other; they have opposite interests and designs, so that it is impossible there should be any concord or agreement between them. It is absurd, therefore, to think of enlisting under both; and, if the believer has part with an infidel, he does what in him lies to bring Christ and Belial together. (2.) It is a dishonour to the Christian's profession (v. 16); for Christians are by profession, and should be in reality, the *temples of the living God*—dedicated to, and employed for, the service of God, who has promised to reside in them, *to dwell and walk in them*, to stand in a special relation to them, and take a special care of them, that he will be their God and they shall be his people. Now there can be no agreement between *the temple of God and idols*. Idols are rivals with God for his honour, and God is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another. (3.) There is a great deal of danger in communicating with unbelievers and idolators, danger of being defiled and of being rejected; therefore the exhortation is (v. 17) *to come out from among them*, and keep at a due distance, *to be separate*, as one would avoid the society of those who have the leprosy or the plague, for fear of taking infection, and not *to touch the unclean thing*, lest we be defiled. Who can touch pitch, and not be defiled by it? We must take care not to defile ourselves by converse with those who defile themselves with sin; so is the will of God, as we ever hope to be received, and not rejected, by him. (4.) It is base ingratitude to God for all the favours he has bestowed upon believers and promised to them, v. 18. God has promised to be a Father to them, and that they shall be his sons and his daughters; and is there a greater honour or happiness than this? How ungrateful a thing then must it be if those who have this dignity and felicity should degrade and debase themselves by mingling with unbelievers! *Do we thus requite the Lord, O foolish and unwise?*

Chapter 7

This chapter begins with an exhortation to progressive holiness and a due regard to the ministers of the gospel (v. 1-4). Then the apostle returns from a long digression to speak further of the affair concerning the incestuous person, and tells them what comfort he received in his distress about that matter, upon his meeting with Titus (v. 5-7), and how he rejoiced in their repentance, with the evidences thereof (v. 8-11). And, lastly, he concludes with endeavouring to comfort the Corinthians, upon whom his admonitions had had so good an effect (v. 12-16).

Verses 1-4

These verses contain a double exhortation:—

I. To make a progress in holiness, or *to perfect holiness in the fear of God*, v. 1. This exhortation is given with most tender affection to those who were dearly beloved, and enforced by strong arguments, even the consideration of those exceedingly great and precious promises which were mentioned in the former chapter, and which the Corinthians had an interest in and a title to. The promises of God are strong inducements to sanctification, in both the branches thereof; namely, 1. The dying unto sin, or mortifying our lusts and corruptions: we must *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit*. Sin is filthiness, and there are defilements of body and mind. There are sins of the flesh, that are committed with the body, and sins of the spirit, spiritual wickednesses; and we must cleanse ourselves from the filthiness of both, for God is to be glorified both with body and soul. 2. The living unto righteousness and holiness. If we hope God is our Father, we must endeavour to be *partakers of his holiness*, to be holy as he is holy, and perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. We must be still perfecting holiness, and not be contented with sincerity (which is our gospel perfection), without aiming at sinless perfection, though we shall always come short of it while we are in this world; and this we must do in the *fear of God*, which is the root and principle of all religion, and there is no holiness without it. Note, Faith and hope in the promises of God must not destroy our fear of God, *who taketh pleasure in those that fear him and hope in his mercy*.

II. To show a due regard to the ministers of the gospel: *Receive us*, v. 2. Those who labour in the word and doctrine should *be had in reputation*, and *be highly esteemed for their work's sake*: and this would be a help to making progress in holiness. If the ministers of the gospel are thought contemptible because of their office, there is danger lest the gospel itself be contemned also. The apostle did not think it any disparagement to court the favour of the Corinthians; and, though we must flatter none, yet we must be gentle towards all. He tells them, 1. He had done nothing to forfeit their esteem and good-will, but was cautious not to do any thing to deserve their ill-will (v. 2): "*We have wronged no man*: we have done you no harm, but always designed your good." *I have coveted no man's silver, nor gold, nor apparel*, said he to the elders of Ephesus, Acts 20:33. "*We have corrupted no man*, by false doctrines or flattering speeches. *We have defrauded no man*; we have not sought ourselves, nor to promote our own secular interests by crafty and greedy measures, to the damage of any persons." This is an appeal like that of Samuel, 1 Sa. 12. Note, Then may ministers the more confidently expect esteem and favour from the people when they can safely appeal to them that they are guilty of nothing that deserves disesteem or displeasure. 2. He did not herein reflect upon

them for want of affection to him, v. 3, 4. So tenderly and cautiously did the apostle deal with the Corinthians, among whom there were some who would be glad of any occasion to reproach him, and prejudice the minds of others against him. To prevent any insinuations against him on account of what he had said, as if he intended to charge them with wronging him, or unjust accusations of him for having wronged them, he assures them again of his great affection to them, insomuch that he could spend his last breath at Corinth, and *live and die with them*, if his business with other churches, and his work as an apostle (which was not to be confined to one place only), would permit him to do so. And he adds it was his great affection to them that made him use such *boldness* or freedom of *speech towards them*, and caused him to *glory*, or make his boast of them, in all places, and upon all occasions, being *filled with comfort, and exceedingly joyful in all their tribulations*.

Verses 5-11

There seems to be a connection between ch. 2:13 (where the apostle said he had no rest in his spirit when he found not Titus at Troas) and the fifth verse of this chapter: and so great was his affection to the Corinthians, and his concern about their behaviour in relation to the incestuous person, that, in his further travels, he still had no rest till he heard from them. And now he tells them,

I. How he was distressed, v. 5. He was troubled when he did not meet with Titus at Troas, and afterwards when for some time he did not meet with him in Macedonia: this was a grief to him, because he could not hear what reception he met with at Corinth, nor how their affairs went forward. And, besides this, they met with other troubles, with incessant storms of persecutions; there were *fightings without*, or continual contentions with, and opposition from, Jews and Gentiles; and there were *fears within*, and great concern for such as had embraced the Christian faith, lest they should be corrupted or seduced, and give scandal to others, or be scandalized.

II. How he was comforted, v. 6, 7. Here observe, 1. The very coming of Titus was some comfort to him. It was matter of joy to see him, whom he long desired and expected to meet with. The very coming of Titus and his company, who was dear to him as his *own son in the common faith* (Tit. 1:4), was a great comfort to the apostle in his travels and troubles. But, 2. The good news which Titus brought concerning the Corinthians was matter of greater consolation. He found Titus to be comforted in them; and this filled the apostle with comfort, especially when he acquainted him with their earnest desire to give good satisfaction in the things about which the apostle had written to them; and of their mourning for the scandal that was found among them and the great grief they had caused to others, and their fervent mind or great affection towards the apostle, who had dealt so faithfully with them in reproving their faults: so true is the observation of Solomon (Prov. 28:23), *He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with his tongue*. 3. He ascribes all his comfort to God as the author. It was God who comforted him by the coming of Titus, even the God of all comfort: *God, who comforteth those that are cast down*, v. 6. Note, We should look above and beyond all means and instruments, unto God, as the author of all the consolation and the good that we enjoy.

III. How greatly he rejoiced at their repentance, and the evidences thereof. The apostle was sorry that he had grieved them, that some pious persons among them laid to heart very greatly what he said in his former epistle, or that it was needful he should

make those sorry whom he would rather have made glad, v. 8. But now he rejoiced, when he found they had *sorrowed to repentance*, v. 9. Their sorrow in itself was not the cause of his rejoicing; but the nature of it, and the effect of it (*repentance unto salvation*, v. 10), made him rejoice; for now it appeared that they had received damage by him in nothing. Their sorrow was *but for a season*; it was turned into joy, and that joy was durable. Observe here,

1. The antecedent of true repentance is godly sorrow; this worketh repentance. It is not repentance itself, but it is a good preparative to repentance, and in some sense the cause that produces repentance. The offender had great sorrow, he was in danger of being *swallowed up with overmuch sorrow*; and the society was greatly sorrowful which before was puffed up: and this sorrow of theirs was after a godly manner, or according to God (as it is in the original), that is, it was according to the will of God, tended to the glory of God, and was wrought by the Spirit of God. It was a godly sorrow, because a sorrow for sin, as an offence against God, an instance of ingratitude, and a forfeiture of God's favour. There is a great difference between this sorrow of a godly sort and the sorrow of this world. Godly sorrow produces repentance and reformation, and will end in salvation; but worldly sorrow worketh death. The sorrows of worldly men for worldly things will bring down gray hairs the sooner to the grave, and such a sorrow even for sin as Judas had will have fatal consequences, as his had, which wrought death. Note, (1.) Repentance will be attended with salvation. Therefore, (2.) True penitents will never repent that they have repented, nor of any thing that was conducive thereto. (3.) Humiliation and godly sorrow are previously necessary in order to repentance, and both of them are from God, the giver of all grace.

2. The happy fruits and consequences of true repentance are mentioned (v. 11); and those *fruits that are meet for repentance* are the best evidences of it. Where the heart is changed, the life and actions will be changed too. The Corinthians made it evident that their sorrow was a godly sorrow, and such as wrought repentance, because it wrought in them great carefulness about their souls, and to avoid sin, and please God; it wrought also a clearing of themselves, not by insisting upon their own justification before God, especially while they persisted in their sin, but by endeavours to put away the accursed thing, and so free themselves from the just imputation of approving the evil that had been done. It wrought indignation at sin, at themselves, at the tempter and his instruments; it wrought fear, a fear of reverence, a fear of watchfulness, and a fear of distrust, not a distrust of God, but of themselves; an awful fear of God, a cautious fear of sin, and a jealous fear of themselves. It wrought vehement desires after a thorough reformation of what had been amiss, and of reconciliation with God whom they had offended. It wrought zeal, a mixture of love and anger, a zeal for duty, and against sin. It wrought, lastly, revenge against sin and their own folly, by endeavours to make all due satisfaction for injuries that might be done thereby. And thus *in all things had they approved themselves to be clear in that matter*. Not that they were innocent, but that they were penitent, and therefore clear of guilt before God, who would pardon and not punish them; and they ought no longer to be reproved, much less to be reproached, by men, for what they had truly repented of.

Verses 12-16

In these verses the apostle endeavours to comfort the Corinthians, upon whom his admonitions had had such good effect. And in order thereto, 1. He tells them he had a good design in his former epistle, which might be thought severe, v. 12. It was not

chiefly *for his cause that did the wrong*, not only for his benefit, much less merely that he should be punished; nor was it merely *for his cause that suffered wrong*, namely, the injured father, and that he might have what satisfaction could be given him; but it was also to manifest his great and sincere concern and *care for them*, for the whole church, lest that should suffer by letting such a crime, and the scandal thereof, remain among them without due remark and resentment. 2. He acquaints them with the joy of Titus as well as of himself upon the account of their repentance and good behaviour. Titus was rejoiced, and his spirit refreshed, with their comfort, and this comforted and rejoiced the apostle also (v. 13); and, as Titus was comforted while he was with them, so when he remembered his reception among them, expressing their obedience to the apostolical directions, and their fear and trembling at the reproofs that were given them, the thoughts of these things inflamed and increased his affections to them, v. 15. Note, Great comfort and joy follow upon godly sorrow. As sin occasions general grief, so repentance and reformation occasion general joy. Paul was glad, and Titus was glad, and the Corinthians were comforted, and the penitent ought to be comforted; and well may all this joy be on earth, when there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. 3. He concludes this whole matter with expressing the entire confidence he had in them: He was not ashamed of his boasting concerning them to Titus (v. 14); for he was not disappointed in his expectation concerning them, which he signified to Titus, and he could now with great joy declare what confidence he still had in them as to all things, that he did not doubt of their good behaviour for the time to come. Note, It is a great comfort and joy to a faithful minister to have to do with a people whom he can confide in, and who he has reason to hope will comply with every thing he proposes to them that is for the glory of God, the credit of the gospel, and their advantage.

Chapter 8

In this and the following chapter Paul is exhorting and directing the Corinthians about a particular work of charity—to relieve the necessities of the poor saints at Jerusalem and in Judea, according to the good example of the churches in Macedonia, Rom. 15:26. The Christians at Jerusalem, through war, famine, and persecution, had become poor, many of them had fallen into decay, and perhaps most of them were but poor when they first embraced Christianity; for Christ said, "The poor receive the gospel." Now Paul, though he was the apostle of the Gentiles, had a fonder regard, and kind concern, for those among the Jews who were converted to the Christian faith; and, though many of them had not so much affection to the Gentile converts as they ought to have had, yet the apostle would have the Gentiles to be kind to them, and stirred them up to contribute liberally for their relief. Upon this subject he is very copious, and writes very affectingly. In this eighth chapter he acquaints the Corinthians with, and commends, the good example of the Macedonians in this work of charity, and that Titus was sent to Corinth to collect their bounty (v. 1-6). He then proceeds to urge this duty with several cogent arguments (v. 7-15), and commends the persons who were employed in this affair (v. 16-24).

Verses 1-6

Observe here,

I. The apostle takes occasion from the good example of the churches of Macedonia, that is, of Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and others in the region of Macedonia, to exhort the Corinthians and the Christians in Achaia to the good work of charity. And, 1. He acquaints them with their great liberality, which he calls *the grace of God bestowed on the churches*, v. 1. Some think the words should be rendered, *the gift of God given in or by the churches*. He certainly means the charitable gifts of these churches, which are called the grace or gifts of God, either because they were very large, or rather because their charity to the poor saints did proceed from God as the author, and was accompanied with true love to God, which also was manifested this way. The grace of God must be owned as the root and fountain of all the good that is in us, or done by us, at any time; and it is great grace and favour from God, and bestowed on us, if we are made useful to others, and are forward to any good work. 2. He commends the charity of the Macedonians, and sets it forth with good advantage. He tells them, (1.) They were but in a low condition, and themselves in distress, yet they contributed to the relief of others. *They were in great tribulation and deep poverty*, v. 2. It was a time of great affliction with them, as may be seen, Acts 18:17. The Christians in these parts met with ill treatment, which had reduced them to deep poverty; yet, as they had abundance of joy in the midst of tribulation, they abounded in their liberality; they gave out of a little, trusting in God to provide for them, and make it up to them. (2.) They gave very largely, with *the riches of liberality* (v. 2), that is, as liberally as if they had been rich. It was a large contribution they made, all things considered; it was *according to, yea beyond, their power* (v. 3), as much as could well be expected from them, if not more. Note, Though men may condemn the indiscretion, yet God will accept the pious zeal, of those who in real works of piety and charity do rather beyond their power. (3.) They were very ready and forward to this good work. *They were willing of themselves* (v. 3), and were so far from needing that Paul should urge and press them with many arguments that they

prayed him with much entreaty to receive the gift, v. 4. It seems Paul was backward to undertake this trust, for *he would give himself to the word and prayer*; or, it may be, he was apprehensive how ready his enemies would be to reproach and blacken him upon all occasions, and might take a handle against him upon account of so large a sum deposited in his hands, to suspect or accuse him of indiscretion and partiality in the distribution, if not of some injustice. Note, How cautious ministers should be, especially in money-matters, not to give occasion to those who seek occasion to speak reproachfully! (4.) Their charity was founded in true piety, and this was the great commendation of it. They performed this good work in a right method: *First they gave themselves to the Lord, and then they gave unto us their contributions, by the will of God* (v. 5), that is, according as it was the will of God they should do, or to be disposed of as the will of God should be, and for his glory. This, it seems, exceeded the expectation of the apostle; it was more than he hoped for, to see such warm and pious affections shining in these Macedonians, and this good work performed with so much devotion and solemnity. They solemnly, jointly, and unanimously, made a fresh surrender of themselves, and all they had, unto the Lord Jesus Christ. They had done this before, and now they do it again upon this occasion; sanctifying their contributions to God's honour, by first giving themselves to the Lord. Note, [1.] We should give ourselves to God; we cannot bestow ourselves better. [2.] When we give ourselves to the Lord, we then give him all we have, to be called for and disposed of according to his will. [3.] Whatever we use or lay out for God, it is only giving to him what is his own. [4.] What we give or bestow for charitable uses will not be accepted of God, nor turn to our advantage, unless we first give ourselves to the Lord.

II. The apostle tells them that Titus was desired to go and make a collection among them (v. 6), and Titus, he knew, would be an acceptable person to them. He had met with a kind reception among them formerly. They had shown good affection to him, and he had a great love for them. Besides, Titus had already begun this work among them, therefore he was desired to finish it. So that he was, on all accounts, a proper person to be employed; and, when so good a work had already prospered in so good a hand, it would be a pity if it should not proceed and be finished. Note, It is an instance of wisdom to use proper instruments in a work we desire to do well; and the work of charity will often succeed the best when the most proper persons are employed to solicit contributions and dispose of them.

Verses 7-15

In these verses the apostle uses several cogent arguments to stir up the Corinthians to this good work of charity.

I. He urges upon them the consideration of their eminence in other gifts and graces, and would have them excel in this of charity also, v. 7. Great address and much holy art are here used by the apostle. When he would persuade the Corinthians to this good thing, he commends them for other good things that were found in them. Most people love to be complimented, especially when we ask a gift of them for ourselves or others; and it is a justice we owe to those in whom God's grace shines to give them their due commendation. Observe here, What it was that the Corinthians abounded in. Faith is mentioned first, for that is the root; and, as *without faith it is impossible to please God* (Heb. 11:6), so those who abound in faith will abound in other graces and good works also; and this will work and show itself by love. To their faith was added utterance, which is an excellent gift, and redounds much to the glory of God and the good of the church. Many have faith who want utterance. But

these Corinthians excelled most churches in spiritual gifts, and particularly in utterance; and yet this was not in them, as in too many, both the effect and evidence of ignorance; for with their utterance there appeared knowledge, abundance of knowledge. They had a treasury of things new and old, and in their utterance they brought out of this treasury. They abounded also in all diligence. Those who have great knowledge and ready utterance are not always the most diligent Christians. Great talkers are not always the best doers; but these Corinthians were diligent to do, as well as know and talk, well. And further, they had abundant love to their minister; and were not like too many, who, having gifts of their own, are but too apt to slight their ministers, and neglect them. Now to all these good things the apostle desires them to add this grace also, to abound in charity to the poor; that, where so much good was found, there should be found yet more good. Before the apostle proceeds to another argument he takes care to prevent any misapprehensions of his design to impose on them, or to bind heavy burdens upon them by his authority; and tells them (v. 8) he does not speak by commandment, or in a way of authority. I give *my advice*, v. 10. He took occasion from the forwardness of others to propose what would be expedient for them, and would prove the sincerity of their love, or be the genuine effect and evidence thereof. Note, A great difference should be made between plain and positive duty, and the improvement of a present opportunity of doing or getting good. Many a thing which is good for us to do, yet can not be said to be, by express and indispensable commandment, our duty at this or that time.

II. Another argument is taken from the consideration of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The best arguments for Christian duties are those that are taken from the love of Christ, *that constraineth us*. The example of the churches of Macedonia was such as the Corinthians should imitate; but the example of our Lord Jesus Christ should have much greater influence. And *you know*, saith the apostle, *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ* (v. 9), *that though he was rich*, as being God, equal in power and glory with the Father, rich in all the glory and blessedness of the upper world, *yet for your sakes he became poor*; not only did he become man for us, but he became poor also. He was born in poor circumstances, lived a poor life, and died in poverty; and this was for our sakes, that we thereby might be made rich, rich in the love and favour of God, rich in the blessings and promises of the new covenant, rich in the hopes of eternal life, being heirs of the kingdom. This is a good reason why we should be charitable to the poor out of what we have, because we ourselves live upon the charity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. Another argument is taken from their good purposes, and their forwardness to begin this good work. As to this he tells them, 1. It was expedient for them to perform what they purposed, and finish what they had begun, v. 10, 11. What else did their good purposes and good beginnings signify? Good purposes, indeed, are good things; they are like buds and blossoms, pleasant to behold, and give hopes of good fruit; but they are lost, and signify nothing, without performances. So good beginnings are amiable; but we shall lose the benefit unless there be perseverance, and we bring forth fruit to perfection. Seeing therefore the Corinthians had shown a readiness to will, he would have them be careful also in the performance, according to their ability. For, 2. This would be acceptable to God. *This willing mind is accepted* (v. 12), when accompanied with sincere endeavours. When men purpose that which is good, and endeavour, according to their ability, to perform also, God will accept of what they have, or can do, and not reject them for what they have not, and what is not in their power to do: and this is true as to other things besides the work of charity. But let us note here that this scripture will by no means justify

those who think good meanings are enough, or that good purposes, and the profession of a willing mind, are sufficient to save them. It is accepted, indeed, where there is a performance as far as we are able, and when Providence hinders the performance, as in David's case concerning building a house for the Lord, 2 Sa. 7.

IV. Another argument is taken from the discrimination which the divine Providence makes in the distribution of the things of this world, and the mutability of human affairs, v. 13–15. The force of the arguing seems to be this:—Providence gives to some more of the good things of this world, and to some less, and that with this design, that those who have a greater *abundance may supply those who are in want*, that there may be room for charity. And further, considering the mutability of human affairs, and how soon there may be an alteration, so that those who now have an abundance may stand in need of being supplied themselves in their wants, this should induce them to be charitable while they are able. It is the will of God that, by our mutually supplying one another, there should *be some sort of equality*; not an *absolute* equality indeed, or such a levelling as would destroy property, for in such a case there could be no exercise of charity. But as in works of charity there should be an equitable proportion observed, that the burden should not lie too heavy on some, while others are wholly eased, so all should think themselves concerned to supply those who are in want. This is illustrated by the instance of gathering and distributing manna in the wilderness, concerning which (as we may read, Ex. 16) it was the duty of every family, and all in the family, to gather what they could, which, when it was gathered, was put into some common receptacle for each family, whence the master of the family distributed to every one as he had occasion, to some more than they were able, through age and infirmity, to gather up; to others less than they gathered, because they did not need so much: and thus *he that had gathered much* (more than he had occasion for) had nothing over, when a communication was made to him *that had gathered little*, who by this method had no lack. Note, Such is the condition of men in this world that we mutually depend on one another, and should help one another. Those who have ever so much of this world have no more than food and raiment; and those who have but a little of this world seldom want these; nor, indeed, should those who have abundance suffer others to want, but be ready to afford supply.

Verses 16-24

In these verses the apostle commends the brethren who were sent to them to collect their charity; and as it were, gives them letters credential, that, if they *were enquired after* (v. 23), if any should be inquisitive or suspicious concerning them, it might be known who they were and how safely they might be trusted.

I. He commends Titus, 1. For his earnest care and great concern of heart for them, and desire in all things to promote their welfare. This is mentioned with thankfulness to God (v. 16), and it is cause of thankfulness if God hath put it into the hearts of any to do us or others any good. 2. For his readiness to this present service. He accepted the office, and was forward to go upon this good errand, v. 17. Asking charity for the relief of others is by many looked upon as a thankless office; yet it is a good office, and what we should not be shy of when we are called to it.

II. He commends another brother, who was sent with Titus. It is generally thought that this was Luke. He is commended, 1. As a man whose *praise was in the gospel through all the churches*, v. 18. His ministerial services of several kinds were well

known, and he had approved himself praiseworthy in what he had done. 2. As one chosen of the churches (v. 19) and joined with the apostle in his ministrations. This was done, it is most likely, at the motion and request of Paul himself; for this reason, *that no man might blame him in that abundance which was administered by him* (v. 20), so cautious was the apostle to avoid all occasions that evil-minded men might lay hold on to blacken him. He would not give occasion to any to accuse him of injustice or partiality in this affair, and thought it to be his duty, as it is the duty of all Christians, *to provide for things honest, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men*; that is, to act so prudently as to prevent, as far as we can, all unjust suspicions concerning us, and all occasions of scandalous imputations. Note, We live in a censorious world, and should cut off occasion from those who seek occasion to speak reproachfully. It is the crime of others if they reproach or censure us without occasion; and it is our imprudence at least if we give them any occasion, when there may not be a just cause for them so to do.

III. He commends also another brother who was joined with the two former in this affair. This brother is thought to be Apollos. Whoever he was, he had *approved himself diligent in many things*; and therefore was fit to be employed in this affair. Moreover, he had great desire to this work, because of the confidence or good opinion he had of the Corinthians (v. 22), and it is a great comfort to see those employed in good works who have formerly approved themselves diligent.

IV. He concludes this point with a general good character of them all (v. 23), as *fellow-labourers with him* for their welfare; as the *messengers of the churches*; as the *glory of Christ*, who were to him for a name and a praise, who brought glory to Christ as instruments and had obtained honour from Christ to be counted faithful and employed in his service. Wherefore, upon the whole, he exhorts them to show their liberality, answerable to the great expectation others had concerning them at this time, that these messengers of the churches, and the churches themselves, might see a full *proof of their love* to God and to their afflicted brethren, and that it was with good reason the apostle had even *boasted on their behalf*, v. 24. Note, The good opinion others entertain of us should be an argument with us to do well.

Chapter 9

In this chapter the apostle seems to excuse his earnestness in pressing the Corinthians to the duty of charity (v. 1-5), and proceeds to give directions about the acceptable way and manner of performing it, namely, bountifully, deliberately, and freely; and gives good encouragement for so doing (v. 6 to the end).

Verses 1-5

In these verses the apostle speaks very respectfully to the Corinthians, and with great skill; and, while he seems to excuse his urging them so earnestly to charity, still presses them thereto, and shows how much his heart was set upon this matter.

I. He tells them it was needless to press them with further arguments to afford relief to their poor brethren (v. 1), being satisfied he had said enough already to prevail with those of whom he had so good an opinion. For, 1. *He knew their forwardness* to every good work, and how they had begun this good work a year ago, insomuch that, 2. He had boasted of their zeal to the Macedonians, and this had provoked many of them to do as they had done. Wherefore he was persuaded, that, as they had begun well, they would go on well; and so, commending them for what they had done, he lays an obligation on them to proceed and persevere.

II. He seems to apologize for sending Titus and the other brethren to them. He is unwilling they should be offended at him for this, as if he were too earnest, and pressed too hard upon them; and tells the true reasons why he sent them, namely, 1. That, having this timely notice, they might be fully ready (v. 3), and not surprised with hasty demands, when he should come to them. When we would have others to do that which is good we must act towards them prudently and tenderly, and give them time. 2. That he might not be ashamed of his boasting concerning them, if they should be found unready, v. 3, 4. He intimates that some from Macedonia might *haply come with him*: and, if the collection should not then be made, this would make him, not to say them, ashamed, considering the boasting of the apostle concerning them. Thus careful was he to preserve their reputation and his own. Note, Christians should consult the reputation of their profession, and endeavour to *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour*.

Verses 6-15

Here we have,

I. Proper directions to be observed about the right and acceptable manner of bestowing charity; and it is of great concernment that we not only do what is required, but do it as is commanded. Now, as to the manner in which the apostle would have the Corinthians give, observe, 1. It should be bountifully; this was intimated, v. 5, that a liberal contribution was expected, a matter of bounty, not what savoured of covetousness; and he offers to their consideration that men who expect a good return at harvest are not wont to pinch and spare in sowing their seed, for the return is usually proportionable to what they sow, v. 6. 2. It should be deliberately *Every man, according as he purposes in his heart*, v. 7. Works of charity, like other good works, should be done with thought and design; whereas some do good only by accident. They comply, it may be hastily, with the importunity of others, without any good design, and give more than they intended, and then repent of it afterwards. Or

possibly, had they duly considered all things, they would have given more. Due deliberation, as to this matter of our own circumstances, and those of the persons we are about to relieve, will be very helpful to direct us how liberal we should be in our contributions for charitable uses. 3. It should be freely, whatever we give, be it more or less: *Not grudgingly, nor of necessity*, but cheerfully, v. 7. Persons sometimes will give merely to satisfy the importunity of those who ask their charity, and what they give is in a manner squeezed or forced from them, and this unwillingness spoils all they do. We ought to give more freely than the modesty of some necessitous persons will allow them to ask: we should not only deal out bread, but draw out our souls to the hungry, Isa. 58:10. We should give liberally, with an open hand, and cheerfully, with an open countenance, being glad we have ability and an opportunity to be charitable.

II. Good encouragement to perform this work of charity in the manner directed. Here the apostle tells the Corinthians,

1. They themselves would be no losers by what they gave in charity. This may serve to obviate a secret objection in the minds of many against this good work who are ready to think they may want what they give away; but such should consider that what is given to the poor in a right manner is far from being lost; as the precious seed which is cast into the ground is not lost, though it is buried there for a time, for it will spring up, and bear fruit; the sower shall receive it again with increase, v. 6. Such good returns may those expect who give freely and liberally in charity. For, (1.) God loveth a cheerful giver (v. 7), and what may not those hope to receive who are the objects of the divine love? Can a man be a loser by doing that with which God is pleased? May not such a one be sure that he shall some way or other be a gainer? Nay, are not the love and favour of God better than all other things, *better than life* itself? (2.) God is able to make our charity redound to our advantage, v. 8. We have no reason to distrust the goodness of God, and surely we have no reason to question his power; he is *able to make all grace abound* towards us, and abound in us; to give a large increase of spiritual and temporal good things. He can cause us to have a sufficiency in all things, to be content with what we have, to make up what we give, to be able to give yet more: as it is written (Ps. 112:9) concerning the charitable man, *He hath dispersed abroad. He hath given to the poor. His righteousness*, that is, his almsgiving, *endureth for ever*. The honour of it is lasting, the reward of it eternal, and he is still able to live comfortably himself and to give liberally to others. (3.) The apostle puts up a prayer to God in their behalf that they might be gainers, and not losers, v. 10, 11. Here observe, [1.] To whom the prayer is made—to God, *who ministereth seed to the sower*, who by his providence giveth such an increase of the fruits of the earth that we have not only bread sufficient to eat for one year, but enough to sow again for a future supply: or thus, It is God who giveth us not only a competency for ourselves, but that also wherewith we may supply the wants of others, and so should be as seed to be sown. [2.] For what he prayeth. There are several things which he desires for them, namely, that they may have *bread for their food*, always a competency for themselves, *food convenient*,—that God will *multiply their seed sown*, that they may still be able to do more good,—and that there may be *an increase of the fruits of righteousness*, that they may reap plentifully, and have the best and most ample returns of their charity, so as to be *enriched in every thing to all bountifulness* (v. 11),—that upon the whole they may find it true that they shall be no losers, but great gainers. Note, Works of charity are so far from impoverishing us that they are the proper means truly to enrich us, or make us truly rich.

2. While they would be no losers, the poor distressed saints would be gainers; for this service would *supply their wants*, v. 12. If we have reason to think them to be saints, whom we believe to be of the household of faith, whose wants are great, how ready should we be to do them good! Our goodness can not extend unto God, but we should freely extend it to these *excellent ones of the earth*, and thus show that we delight in them.

3. This would redound to the praise and glory of God. Many thanksgivings would be given to God on this account, by the apostle, and by those who were employed in this ministration, v. 11. These would bless God, who had made them happy instruments in so good a work, and rendered them successful in it. Besides these, others also would be thankful; the poor, who were supplied in their wants, would not fail to be very thankful to God, and bless God for them; and all who wished well to the gospel would *glorify God for this experiment*, or *proof of subjection to the gospel of Christ*, and true love to all men, v. 13. Note, (1.) True Christianity is a subjection to the gospel, a yielding of ourselves to the commanding influence of its truths and laws. (2.) We must evince the sincerity of our subjection to the gospel by works of charity. (3.) This will be for the credit of our profession, and to the praise and glory of God.

4. Those whose wants were supplied would make the best return they were able, by sending up many prayers to God for those who had relieved them, v. 14. And thus should we recompense the kindnesses we receive when we are not in a capacity of recompensing them in any other way; and, as this is the only recompence the poor can make, so it is often greatly for the advantage of the rich.

Lastly, The apostle concludes this whole matter with this doxology, *Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift*, v. 15. Some think that by this unspeakable gift he means the gift of grace bestowed on the churches, in making them able and willing to supply the necessities of the saints, which would be attended with unspeakable benefit both to the givers and receivers. It should seem rather that he means Jesus Christ, who is indeed the unspeakable gift of God unto this world, a gift we have all reason to be very thankful for.

Chapter 10

There was no place in which the apostle Paul met with more opposition from false apostles than at Corinth; he had many enemies there. Let not any of the ministers of Christ think it strange if they meet with perils, not only from enemies, but from false brethren; for blessed Paul himself did so. Though he was so blameless and inoffensive in all his carriage, so condescending and useful to all, yet there were those who bore him ill-will, who envied him, and did all they could to undermine him, and lessen his interest and reputation. Therefore he vindicates himself from their imputation, and arms the Corinthians against their insinuations. In this chapter the apostle, in a mild and humble manner, asserts the power of his preaching, and to punish offenders (v. 1-6). He then proceeds to reason the case with the Corinthians, asserting his relation to Christ, and his authority as an apostle of Christ (v. 7-11), and refuses to justify himself, or to act by such rules as the false teachers did, but according to the better rules he had fixed for himself (v. 12 to the end).

Verses 1-6

Here we may observe,

I. The mild and humble manner in which the blessed apostle addresses the Corinthians, and how desirous he is that no occasion may be given him to use severity. 1. He addresses them in a very mild and humble manner: *I Paul myself beseech you*, v. 1.

We find, in the introduction to this epistle, he joined Timothy with himself; but now he speaks only for himself, against whom the false apostles had particularly levelled their reproaches; yet in the midst of the greatest provocations he shows humility and mildness, from the consideration of the *meekness and gentleness of Christ*, and desires this great example may have the same influence on the Corinthians. Note, When we find ourselves tempted or inclined to be rough and severe towards any body, we should think of the meekness and gentleness of Christ, that appeared in him in the days of his flesh, in the design of his undertaking, and in all the acts of his grace towards poor souls. How humbly also does this great apostle speak of himself, as *one in presence base among them!* So his enemies spoke of him with contempt, and he seems to acknowledge it; while others thought meanly, and spoke scornfully of him, he had low thoughts of himself, and spoke humbly of himself. Note, We should be sensible of our own infirmities, and think humbly of ourselves, even when men reproach us for them.

2. He is desirous that no occasion may be given to use severity, v. 2. *He beseeches them* to give no occasion for him to be bold, or to exercise his authority against them in general, as he had resolved to do against some who unjustly charged him as *walking according to the flesh*, that is, regulating his conduct, even in his ministerial actions, according to carnal policy or with worldly views. This was what the apostle had renounced, and this is contrary to the spirit and design of the gospel, and was far from being the aim and design of the apostle. Hereupon,

II. He asserts the power of his preaching and his power to punish offenders.

1. The power of his preaching, v. 3, 5. Here observe, (1.) The work of the ministry is a warfare, not *after the flesh* indeed, for it is a spiritual warfare, with spiritual enemies and for spiritual purposes. And though ministers walk in the flesh, or live in the body, and in the common affairs of life act as other men, yet in their work and warfare they must not go by the maxims of the

flesh, nor should they design to please the flesh: this must be crucified with its affections and lusts; it must be mortified and kept under. (2.) The doctrines of the gospel and discipline of the church are the weapons of this warfare; and these are not carnal: outward force, therefore, is not the method of the gospel, but strong persuasions, by the power of truth and the meekness of wisdom. A good argument this is against persecution for conscience' sake: conscience is accountable to God only; and people must be persuaded to God and their duty, not driven by force of arms. And so the weapons of our warfare are mighty, or very powerful; the evidence of truth is convincing and cogent. This indeed is through God, or owing to him, because they are his institutions, and accompanied with his blessing, which makes all opposition to fall before his victorious gospel. We may here observe, [1.] What opposition is made against the gospel by the powers of sin and Satan in the hearts of men. Ignorance, prejudices, beloved lusts, are Satan's strong-holds in the souls of some; vain imaginations, carnal reasonings, and high thoughts, or proud conceits, in others, *exalt themselves against the knowledge of God*, that is, by these ways the devil endeavours to keep men from faith and obedience to the gospel, and secures his possession of the hearts of men, as his own house or property. But then observe, [2.] The conquest which the word of God gains. These strong-holds are pulled down by the gospel as the means, through the grace and power of God accompanying it as the principal efficient cause. Note, The conversion of the soul is the conquest of Satan in that soul.

2. The apostle's power to punish offenders (and that in an extraordinary manner) is asserted in v. 6. The apostle was a prime-minister in the kingdom of Christ, and chief officer in his army, and *had in readiness* (that is, he had power and authority at hand) *to revenge all disobedience*, or to punish offenders in a most exemplary and extraordinary manner. The apostle speaks not of personal revenge, but of punishing disobedience to the gospel, and disorderly walking among church-members, by inflicting church-censures. Note, Though the apostle showed meekness and gentleness, yet he would not betray his authority; and therefore intimates that when he would commend those whose obedience was fulfilled or manifested others would fall under severe censures.

Verses 7-11

In these verses the apostle proceeds to reason the case with the Corinthians, in opposition to those who despised him, judged him, and spoke hardly of him: "*Do you,*" says he, "*look on things after the outward appearance?*" v. 7. Is this a fit measure or rule to make an estimate of things or persons by, and to judge between me and my adversaries?" In outward appearance, Paul was mean and despicable with some; he did not make a figure, as perhaps some of his competitors might do: but this was a false rule to make a judgment by. It should seem that some boasted mighty things of themselves, and made a fair show. But there are often false appearances. A man may seem to be learned who has not learned Christ, and appear virtuous when he has not a principle of grace in his heart. However, the apostle asserts two things of himself:—

I. His relation to Christ: *If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's*, v. 7. It would seem by this that Paul's adversaries boasted of their relation to Christ as his ministers and servants. Now the apostle reasons thus with the Corinthians: "Suppose it to be so, allowing what they say to be true (and let us observe that, in fair arguing, we should allow all that may be reasonably granted, and should not think it impossible but those who differ from us very much may yet belong to

Christ, as well as we), allowing them," might the apostle say, "what they boast of, yet they ought also to allow this to us, that *we also are Christ's*." Note, 1. We must not, by the most charitable allowances we make to others who differ from us, cut ourselves off from Christ, nor deny our relation to him. For, 2. There is room in Christ for many; and those who differ much from one another may yet be one in him. It would help to heal the differences that are among us if we would remember that, how confident soever we may be that we belong to Christ, yet, at the same time, we must allow that those who differ from us may belong to Christ too, and therefore should be treated accordingly. We must not think that we are the people, and that none belong to Christ but ourselves. This we may plead for ourselves, against those who judge us and despise us that, how weak soever we are, yet, as they are Christ's, so are we: we profess the same faith, we walk by the same rule, we build upon the same foundation, and hope for the same inheritance.

II. His authority from Christ as an apostle. This he had mentioned before (v. 6), and now he tells them that he might speak of it again, and that with some sort of boasting, seeing it was a truth, that the *Lord had given it to him*, and it was more than his adversaries could justly pretend to. It was certainly what he should not be ashamed of, v. 8. Concerning this observe, 1. The nature of his authority: it was for *edification, and not for destruction*. This indeed is the end of all authority, civil and ecclesiastical, and was the end of that extraordinary authority which the apostles had, and of all church-discipline. 2. The caution with which he speaks of his authority, professing that his design was not to terrify them with big words, nor by angry letters, v. 9. Thus he seems to obviate an objection that might have been formed against him, v. 10. But the apostle declares he did not intend to frighten those who were obedient, nor did he write any thing in his letters that he was not able to make good by deeds against the disobedient; and he would have his adversaries *know this* (v. 11), that he would, by the exercise of his apostolical power committed to him, make it appear to have a real efficacy.

Verses 12-18

In these verses observe,

I. The apostle refuses to justify himself, or to act by such rules as the false apostles did, v. 12. He plainly intimates that they took a wrong method to commend themselves, in *measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves*, which was *not wise*. They were pleased, and did pride themselves, in their own attainments, and never considered those who far exceeded them in gifts and graces, in power and authority; and this made them haughty and insolent. Note, If we would compare ourselves with others who excel us, this would be a good method to keep us humble; we should be pleased and thankful for what we have of gifts or graces, but never pride ourselves therein, as if there were none to be compared with us or that did excel us. The apostle would not be of the number of such vain men: let us resolve that we will not make ourselves of that number.

II. He fixes a better rule for his conduct, namely, *not to boast of things without his measure*, which was the measure *God had distributed* to him, v. 13. His meaning is, either that he would not boast of more gifts or graces, or power and authority, than God had really bestowed on him; or, rather, that he would not act beyond his commission as to persons or things, nor go beyond the line prescribed to him, which he plainly intimates the false apostles did, while they *boasted of other men's labors*.

The apostle's resolution was to keep within his own province, and that compass of ground which God had marked out for him. His commission as an apostle was to preach the gospel every where, especially among the Gentiles, and he was not confined to one place; yet he observed the directions of Providence, and the Holy Spirit, as to the particular places whither he went or where he did abide.

III. He acted according to this rule: *We stretch not ourselves beyond our measure*, v. 14. And, particularly, he acted according to this rule in preaching at Corinth, and in the exercise of his apostolical authority there; for he came thither by divine direction, and there he converted many to Christianity; and, therefore, in boasting of them as his charge, he acted not contrary to his rule, he boasted not of *other men's labours*, v. 15.

IV. He declares his success in observing this rule. His hope was that their faith was increased, and that others beyond them, even in the remoter parts of Achaia, would embrace the gospel also; and in all this he exceeded not his commission, nor acted in another man's line.

V. He seems to check himself in this matter, as if he had spoken too much in his own praise. The unjust accusations and reflections of his enemies had made it needful he should justify himself; and the wrong methods they took gave him good occasion to mention the better rule he had observed: yet he is afraid of boasting, or taking any praise to himself, and therefore he mentions two things which ought to be regarded:—1. *He that glorieth should glory in the Lord*, v. 17. If we are able to fix good rules for our conduct, or act by them, or have any good success in so doing, the praise and glory of all are owing unto God. Ministers in particular must be careful not to glory in their performances, but must give God the glory of their work, and the success thereof. 2. *Not he that commendeth himself is approved, but he whom the Lord commendeth*, v. 18. Of all flattery, self-flattery is the worst, and self-applause is seldom any better than self-flattery and self-deceit. At the best, self-commendation is no praise, and it is oftentimes as foolish and vain as it is proud; therefore, instead of praising or commending ourselves, we should strive to approve ourselves to God, and his approbation will be our best commendation.

Chapter 11

In this chapter the apostle goes on with his discourse, in opposition to the false apostles, who were very industrious to lessen his interest and reputation among the Corinthians, and had prevailed too much by their insinuations. I. He apologizes for going about to commend himself, and gives the reason for what he did (v. 1-4). II. He mentions, in his own necessary vindication, his equality with the other apostles, and with the false apostles in this particular of preaching the gospel to the Corinthians freely, without wages (v. 5–15). III. He makes another preface to what he was about further to say in his own justification (v. 16–21). And, IV. He gives a large account of his qualifications, labours, and sufferings, in which he exceeded the false apostles (v. 22 to the end).

Verses 1-4

Here we may observe, 1. The apology the apostle makes for going about to commend himself. He is loth to enter upon this subject of self-commendation: *Would to God you could bear with me a little in my folly*, v. 1. He calls this folly, because too often it is really no better. In his case it was necessary; yet, seeing others might apprehend it to be folly in him, he desires them to bear with it. Note, As much against the grain as it is with a proud man to acknowledge his infirmities, so much is it against the grain with a humble man to speak in his own praise. It is no pleasure to a good man to speak well of himself, yet in some cases it is lawful, namely, when it is for the advantage of others, or for our own necessary vindication; as thus it was here. For, 2. We have the reasons for what the apostle did. (1.) To preserve the Corinthians from being corrupted by the insinuations of the false apostles, v. 2, 3. He tells them *he was jealous over them with godly jealousy*; he was afraid lest their faith should be weakened by hearkening to such suggestions as tended to lessen their regard to his ministry, by which they were brought to the Christian faith. He had *espoused them to one husband*, that is, converted them to Christianity (and the conversion of a soul is its marriage to the Lord Jesus); and he was desirous to *present them as a chaste virgin*—pure, and spotless, and faithful, not having *their minds corrupted* with false doctrines by false teachers, as *Eve was beguiled by the subtlety of the serpent*. This godly jealousy in the apostle was a mixture of love and fear; and faithful ministers cannot but be afraid and concerned for their people, lest they should lose that which they have received, and turn from what they have embraced, especially when *deceivers have gone abroad*, or have *crept in among them*. (2.) To vindicate himself against the false apostles, forasmuch as they could not pretend they had another Jesus, or another Spirit, or another gospel, to preach to them, v. 4. If this had been the case, there would have been some colour of reason to bear with them, or to hearken to them. But seeing there is but one Jesus, one Spirit, and one gospel, that is, or at least that ought to be, preached to them and received by them, what reason could there be why the Corinthians should be prejudiced against him, who first converted them to the faith, by the artifices of any adversary? It was a just occasion of jealousy that such persons designed to preach another Jesus, another Spirit, and another gospel.

Verses 5-15

After the foregoing preface to what he was about to say, the apostle in these verses mentions, I. His equality with the other apostles—that *he was not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles*, v. 5. This he expresses very

modestly: *I suppose so*. He might have spoken very positively. The apostleship, as an office, was equal in all the apostles; but the apostles, like other Christians, differed one from another. These *stars differed one from another in glory*, and Paul was indeed of the first magnitude; yet he speaks modestly of himself, and humbly owns his personal infirmity, that he was *rude in speech*, had not such a graceful delivery as some others might have. Some think that he was a man of very low stature, and that his voice was proportionably small; others think that he may have had some impediment in his speech, perhaps a stammering tongue. However, he was not *rude in knowledge*; he was not unacquainted with the best rules of oratory and the art of persuasion, much less was he ignorant of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, as had been *thoroughly manifested among them*.

II. His equality with the false apostles in this particular—the preaching of the gospel unto them freely, without wages. This the apostle largely insists on, and shows that, as they could not but own him to be a minister of Christ, so they ought to acknowledge he had been a good friend to them. For, 1. He had preached the gospel to them freely, v. 7–10. He had proved at large, in his former epistle to them, the lawfulness of ministers' receiving maintenance from the people, and the duty of the people to give them an honourable maintenance; and here he says he himself had *taken wages of other churches* (v. 8), so that he had a right to have asked and received from them: yet he waived his right, and chose rather to abase himself, by working with his hands in the trade of tent-making to maintain himself, than be burdensome to them, that they might *be exalted*, or encouraged to receive the gospel, which they had so cheaply; yea, he chose rather to be supplied from Macedonia than to be chargeable unto them. 2. He informs them of the reason of this his conduct among them. It was not because *he did not love them* (v. 11), or was unwilling to receive tokens of their love (for love and friendship are manifested by mutual giving and receiving), but it was to avoid offence, that *he might cut off occasion from those that desired occasion*. He would not give occasion for any to accuse him of worldly designs in preaching the gospel, or that he intended to make a trade of it, to enrich himself; and that others who opposed him at Corinth might not in this respect gain an advantage against him: that wherein *they gloried*, as to this matter, *they might be found even as he*, v. 12. It is not improbable to suppose that the chief of the false teachers at Corinth, or some among them, were rich, and taught (or deceived) the people freely, and might accuse the apostle or his fellow-labourers as mercenary men, who received hire or wages, and therefore the apostle kept to his resolution not to be chargeable to any of the Corinthians.

III. The false apostles are charged *as deceitful workers* (v. 13), and that upon this account, because they would *transform themselves* into the likeness of the apostles of Christ, and, though they were the ministers of Satan, would seem to be the *ministers of righteousness*. They would be as industrious and as generous in promoting error as the apostles were in preaching truth; they would endeavour as much to undermine the kingdom of Christ as the apostles did to establish it. There were counterfeit prophets under the Old Testament, who wore the garb and learned the language of the prophets of the Lord. So there were counterfeit apostles under the New Testament, who seemed in many respects like the true apostles of Christ. And no marvel (says the apostle); hypocrisy is a thing not to be much wondered at in this world, especially when we consider the great influence Satan has upon the minds of many, who *rules in the hearts of the children of disobedience*. As he can turn himself

into any shape, and put on almost any form, and look sometimes *like an angel of light*, in order to promote his kingdom of darkness, so he will teach his ministers and instruments to do the same. But it follows, *Their end is according to their works* (v. 15); the end will discover them to be deceitful workers, and their work will end in ruin and destruction.

Verses 16-21

Here we have a further excuse that the apostle makes for what he was about to say in his own vindication. 1. He would not have them think he was guilty of folly, in saying what he said to vindicate himself: *Let no man think me a fool*, v. 16. Ordinarily, indeed, it is unbecoming a wise man to be much and often speaking in his own praise. Boasting of ourselves is usually not only a sign of a proud mind, but a mark of folly also. However, says the apostle, yet *as a fool receive me*; that is, if you count it folly in me to *boast a little*, yet give due regard to what I shall say. 2. He mentions a caution, to prevent the abuse of what he should say, telling them that what he spoke, *he did not speak after the Lord*, v. 17. He would not have them think that boasting of ourselves, or glorying in what we have, is a thing commanded by the Lord in general unto Christians, nor yet that this is always necessary in our own vindication; though it may be lawfully used, because not contrary to the Lord, when, strictly speaking, it is not after the Lord. It is the duty and practice of Christians, in obedience to the command and example of the Lord, rather to humble and abase themselves; yet prudence must direct in what circumstances it is needful to do that which we may do lawfully, even speak of what God has wrought for us, and in us, and by us too. 3. He gives a good reason why they should suffer him to boast a little; namely, because they suffered others to do so who had less reason. *Seeing many glory after the flesh* (of carnal privileges, or outward advantages and attainments), *I will glory also*, v. 18. But he would not glory in those things, though he had as much or more reason than others to do so. But he gloried in his infirmities, as he tells them afterwards. The Corinthians thought themselves wise, and might think it an instance of wisdom to bear with the weakness of others, and therefore suffered others to do what might seem folly; therefore the apostle would have them bear with him. Or these words, *You suffer fools gladly, seeing you yourselves are wise* (v. 19), may be ironical, and then the meaning is this: "Notwithstanding all your wisdom, you willingly suffer yourselves to be *brought into bondage* under the Jewish yoke, or suffer others to tyrannize over you; nay, to *devour you*, or make a prey of you, and *take of you* hire for their own advantage, and to *exalt themselves* above you, and lord it over you; nay, even to *smite you on the face*, or impose upon you to your very faces (v. 20), upbraiding you while they reproach me, as if you had been very weak in showing regard to me," v. 21. Seeing this was the case, that the Corinthians, or some among them, could so easily bear all this from the false apostles, it was reasonable for the apostle to desire, and expect, they should bear with what might seem to them an indiscretion in him, seeing the circumstances of the case were such as made it needful that *whereinsoever any were bold* he should be *bold also*, v. 21.

Verses 22-33

Here the apostle gives a large account of his own qualifications, labours, and sufferings (not out of pride or vain-glory, but to the honour of God, who had enabled him to do and suffer so much for the cause of Christ), and wherein he excelled the false apostles, who would lessen his character and usefulness among the Corinthians. Observe,

I. He mentions the privileges of his birth (v. 22), which were equal to any they could pretend to. He was a Hebrew of the

Hebrews; of a family among the Jews that never intermarried with the Gentiles. He was also an Israelite, and could boast of his being descended from the beloved Jacob as well as they, and was also of the seed of Abraham, and not of the proselytes. It should seem from this that the false apostles were of the Jewish race, who gave disturbance to the Gentile converts.

II. He makes mention also of his apostleship, that he was more than an ordinary minister of Christ, v. 23. God had counted him faithful, and had put him into the ministry. He had been a useful minister of Christ unto them; they had found full proofs of his ministry: *Are they ministers of Christ? I am more so.*

III. He chiefly insists upon this, that he had been an extraordinary sufferer for Christ; and this was what he gloried in, or rather he gloried in the grace of God that had enabled him to be more *abundant in labours*, and to endure very great sufferings, such as *stripes above measure, frequent imprisonments, and often the dangers of death*, v. 23. Note, When the apostle would prove himself an extraordinary minister, he proves that he had been an extraordinary sufferer. Paul was the apostle of the Gentiles, and for that reason was hated of the Jews. They did all they could against him; and among the Gentiles also he met with hard usage. Bonds and imprisonments were familiar to him; never was the most notorious malefactor more frequently in the hands of public justice than Paul was for righteousness' sake. The jail and the whipping-post, and all other hard usages of those who are accounted the worst of men, were what he was accustomed to. As to the Jews, whenever he fell into their hands, they never spared him. *Five times* he fell under their lash, and received *forty stripes save one*, v. 24. Forty stripes was the utmost their law allowed (Deu. 25:3), but it was usual with them, that they might not exceed, to abate one at least of that number. And to have the abatement of one only was all the favour that ever Paul received from them. The Gentiles were not tied up to that moderation, and among them *he was thrice beaten with rods*, of which we may suppose once was at Philippi, Acts 16:22. *Once he was stoned* in a popular tumult, and was taken up for dead, Acts 14:19. He says that *thrice he suffered shipwreck*; and we may believe him, though the sacred history gives a relation but of one. *A night and a day he had been in the deep* (v. 25), in some deep dungeon or other, shut up as a prisoner. Thus he was all his days a constant confessor; perhaps scarcely a year of his life, after his conversion, passed without suffering some hardship or other for his religion; yet this was not all, for, wherever he went, he went in perils; he was exposed to perils of all sorts. If he journeyed by land, or voyaged by sea, he was in perils of robbers, or enemies of some sort; the Jews, his own countrymen, sought to kill him, or do him a mischief; the heathen, to whom he was sent, were not more kind to him, for among them he was in peril. If he was in the city, or in the wilderness, still he was in peril. He was in peril not only among avowed enemies, but among those also who called themselves brethren, but were false brethren, v. 26. Besides all this, he had great weariness and painfulness in his ministerial labours, and these are things that will come into account shortly, and people will be reckoned with for all the care and pains of their ministers concerning them. Paul was a stranger to wealth and plenty, power and pleasure, preferment and ease; he was in *watchings often*, and exposed to *hunger and thirst*; in *fastings often*, it may be out of necessity; and endured *cold and nakedness*, v. 27. Thus was he, who was one of the greatest blessings of the age, used as if he had been the burden of the earth, and the plague of his generation. And yet this is not all; for, as an apostle, the *care of all the churches* lay on him, v. 28. He mentions this last, as if this lay the heaviest upon him, and as if he could better bear all the persecutions of his enemies than the scandals that were to

be found in the churches he had the oversight of. *Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?* v. 29.

There was not a weak Christian with whom he did not sympathize, nor any one scandalized, but he was affected therewith. See what little reason we have to be in love with the pomp and plenty of this world, when this blessed apostle, one of the best of men that ever lived, excepting Jesus Christ, felt so much hardship in it. Nor was he ashamed of all this, but, on the contrary, it was what he accounted his honour; and therefore, much against the grain as it was with him to glory, yet, says he, *if I must needs glory*, if my adversaries will oblige me to it in my own necessary vindication, *I will glory in these my infirmities*, v. 30.

Note, Sufferings for righteousness' sake will, the most of any thing, redound to our honour.

In the last two verses, he mentions one particular part of his sufferings out of its place, as if he had forgotten it before, or because the deliverance God wrought for him was most remarkable; namely, the danger he was in at Damascus, soon after he was converted, and not settled in Christianity, at least in the ministry and apostleship. This is recorded, Acts 9:24, 25. This was his first great danger and difficulty, and the rest of his life was a piece with this. And it is observable that, lest it should be thought he spoke more than was true, the apostle confirms this narrative with a solemn oath, or appeal to the omniscience of God, v. 31. It is a great comfort to a good man that *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, who is an omniscient God, knows the truth of all he says, and knows all he does and all he suffers for his sake.

Chapter 12

In this chapter the apostle proceeds in maintaining the honour of his apostleship. He magnified his office when there were those who vilified it. What he says in his own praise was only in his own justification and the necessary defence of the honour of his ministry, the preservation of which was necessary to its success. First, He makes mention of the favour God had shown him, the honour done him, the methods God took to keep him humble, and the use he made of this dispensation (v. 1–10). Then he addresses himself to the Corinthians, blaming them for what was faulty among them, and giving a large account of his behaviour and kind intentions towards them (v. 11 to the end).

Verses 1-10

Here we may observe,

I. The narrative the apostle gives of the favours God had shown him, and the honour he had done him; for doubtless he himself is the man in Christ of whom he speaks. Concerning this we may take notice, 1. Of the honour itself which was done to the apostle: he was *caught up into the third heaven*, v. 2. When this was we cannot say, whether it was during those three days that he lay without sight at his conversion or at some other time afterwards, much less can we pretend to say *how* this was, whether by a separation of his soul from his body or by an extraordinary transport in the depth of contemplation. It would be presumption for us to determine, if not also to enquire into, this matter, seeing the apostle himself says, *Whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell*. It was certainly a very extraordinary honour done him: in some sense he was caught up into the *third heaven*, the heaven of the blessed, above the aerial heaven, in which the fowls fly, above the starry heaven, which is adorned with those glorious orbs: it was into the third heaven, where God most eminently manifests his glory. We are not capable of knowing all, nor is it fit we should know very much, of the particulars of that glorious place and state; it is our duty and interest to give diligence to make sure to ourselves a mansion there; and, if that be cleared up to us, then we should long to be removed thither, to abide there for ever. This third heaven is called paradise (v. 4), in allusion to the earthly paradise out of which Adam was driven for his transgression; it is called the paradise of God (Rev. 2:7), signifying to us that by Christ we are restored to all the joys and honours we lost by sin, yea, to much better. The apostle does not mention what he saw in the third heaven or paradise, but tells us that *he heard unspeakable words*, such as it is not possible for a man to utter—such are the sublimity of the matter and our unacquaintedness with the language of the upper world: nor was it lawful to utter those words, because, while we are here in this world, we have a more sure word of prophecy than such visions and revelations. 2 Pt. 1:19. We read of the tongue of angels as well as men, and Paul knew as much of that as ever any man upon earth did, and yet preferred charity, that is, the sincere love of God and our neighbour. This account which the apostle gives us of his vision should check our curious desires after forbidden knowledge, and teach us to improve the revelation God has given us in his word. Paul himself, who had been in the third heaven, did not publish to the world what he had heard there, but adhered to the doctrine of Christ: on this foundation the church is built, and on this we must build our faith and hope. 2. The modest and humble manner in which the apostle mentions this matter is observable. One would be apt to think that one who had had such

visions and revelations as these would have boasted greatly of them; but, says he, *It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory*, v. 1. He therefore did not mention this immediately, nor till *above fourteen years* after, v. 2. And then it is not without some reluctance, as a thing which in a manner he was forced to by the necessity of the case. Again, he speaks of himself in the third person, and does not say, I am the man who was thus honoured above other men. Again, his humility appears by the check he seems to put upon himself (v. 6), which plainly shows that he delighted not to dwell upon this theme. Thus was he, who was not behind the chief of the apostles in dignity, very eminent for his humility. Note, It is an excellent thing to have a lowly spirit in the midst of high advancements; and those who abase themselves shall be exalted.

II. The apostle gives an account of the methods God took to keep him humble, and to prevent his *being lifted up above measure*; and this he speaks of to balance the account that was given before of the visions and revelations he had had. Note, When God's people communicate their experiences, let them always remember to take notice of what God has done to keep them humble, as well as what he has done in favour to them and for their advancement. Here observe,

1. The apostle was pained with a thorn in the flesh, and buffeted with a messenger of Satan, v. 7. We are much in the dark what this was, whether some great trouble or some great temptation. Some think it was an acute bodily pain or sickness; others think it was the indignities done him by the false apostles, and the opposition he met with from them, particularly on the account of his speech, which was contemptible. However this was, God often brings this good out of evil, that the reproaches of our enemies help to hide pride from us; and this is certain, that what the apostle calls a thorn in his flesh was for a time very grievous to him: but the thorns Christ wore for us, and with which he was crowned, sanctify and make easy all the thorns in the flesh we may at any time be afflicted with; for *he suffered, being tempted, that he might be able to succour those that are tempted*. Temptations to sin are most grievous thorns; they are messengers of Satan, to buffet us. Indeed it is a great grievance to a good man to be so much as tempted to sin.

2. The design of this was to keep the apostle humble: *Lest he should be exalted above measure*, v. 7. Paul himself knew he *had not yet attained, neither was already perfect*; and yet he was in danger of being lifted up with pride. If God love us, he will hide pride from us, and keep us from being exalted above measure; and spiritual burdens are ordered, to cure spiritual pride. This thorn in the flesh is said to be a messenger of Satan, which he did not send with a good design, but on the contrary, with ill intentions, to discourage the apostle (who had been so highly favoured of God) and hinder him in his work. But God designed this for good, and he overruled it for good, and made this messenger of Satan to be so far from being a hindrance that it was a help to the apostle.

3. The apostle prayed earnestly to God for the removal of this sore grievance. Note, Prayer is a salve for every sore, a remedy for every malady; and when we are afflicted with thorns in the flesh we should give ourselves to prayer. Therefore we are sometimes tempted that we may learn to pray. The apostle *besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from him*, v. 8. Note, Though afflictions are sent for our spiritual benefit, yet we may pray to God for the removal of them: we ought indeed to desire also that they may reach the end for which they are designed. The apostle prayed earnestly, and repeated his requests; he *besought the Lord thrice*, that is, often. So that if an answer be not given to the first prayer, nor to the second, we must hold on,

and hold out, till we receive an answer. Christ himself prayed to his Father thrice. As troubles are sent to teach us to pray, so they are continued to teach us to continue instant in prayer.

4. We have an account of the answer given to the apostle's prayer, that, although the trouble was not removed, yet an equivalent should be granted: *My grace is sufficient for thee*. Note, (1.) Though God accepts the prayer of faith, yet he does not always answer it in the letter; as he sometimes grants in wrath, so he sometimes denies in love. (2.) When God does not remove our troubles and temptations, yet, if he gives us grace sufficient for us, we have no reason to complain, nor to say that he deals ill by us. It is a great comfort to us, whatever thorns in the flesh we are pained with, that God's grace is sufficient for us. Grace signifies two things:—[1.] The good-will of God towards us, and this is enough to enlighten and enliven us, sufficient to strengthen and comfort us, to support our souls and cheer up our spirits, in all afflictions and distresses. [2.] The good work of God in us, the grace we receive from the fulness that is in Christ our head; and from him there shall be communicated that which is suitable and seasonable, and sufficient for his members. Christ Jesus understands our case, and knows our need, and will proportion the remedy to our malady, and not only strengthen us, but glorify *himself*. *His strength is made perfect in our weakness*. Thus his grace is manifested and magnified; he ordains his praise out of the mouths of babes and sucklings.

III. Here is the use which the apostle makes of this dispensation: *He gloried in his infirmities* (v. 9), and took pleasure in them, v. 10. He does not mean his sinful infirmities (those we have reason to be ashamed of and grieved at), but he means his afflictions, his reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses for Christ's sake, v. 10. And the reason of his glory and joy on account of these things was this—they were fair opportunities for Christ to manifest the power and sufficiency of his grace resting upon him, by which he had so much experience of the strength of divine grace that he could say, *When I am weak, then am I strong*. This is a Christian paradox: when we are weak in ourselves, then we are strong in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; when we see ourselves weak in ourselves, then we go out of ourselves to Christ, and are qualified to receive strength from him, and experience most of the supplies of divine strength and grace.

Verses 11-21

In these verses the apostle addresses himself to the Corinthians two ways:—

I. He blames them for what was faulty in them; namely, that they had not stood up in his defence as they ought to have done, and so made it the more needful for him to insist so much on his own vindication. They in manner compelled him to commend himself, who *ought to have been commended of them* v. 11. And had they, or some among them, not failed on their part, it would have been less needful for him to have said so much on his own behalf. He tells them further that they in particular had good reason to speak well of him, as being *in nothing behind the very chief apostles*, because he had given them full proof and evidence of his apostleship; for *the signs of an apostle were wrought among them in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds*. Note, 1. It is a debt we owe to good men to stand up in the defence of their reputation; and we are under special obligations to those we have received benefit by, especially spiritual benefit, to own them as instruments in God's hand of good to us, and to vindicate them when they are calumniated by others. 2. How much soever we are, or ought to be, esteemed by

others, we ought always to think humbly of ourselves. See an example of this in this great apostle, who thought himself to be nothing, though in truth he was not behind the greatest apostles—so far was he from seeking praise from men, though he tells them their duty to vindicate his reputation—so far was he from applauding himself, when he was forced to insist upon his own necessary self-defence.

II. He gives a large account of his behaviour and kind intentions towards them, in which we may observe the character of a faithful minister of the gospel. 1. He was not willing to be burdensome to them, nor did he seek theirs, but them. He says (v. 13) he had not been burdensome to them, for the time past, and tells them (v. 14) he would not be burdensome to them for the time to come, when he should come to them. He spared their purses, and did not covet their money: *I seek not yours but you*. He sought not to enrich himself, but to save their souls: he did not desire to make a property of them to himself, but to gain them over to Christ, whose servant he was. Note, Those who aim at clothing themselves with the fleece of the flock, and take no care of the sheep, are hirelings, and not good shepherds. 2. He would gladly spend and be spent for them (v. 15); that is, he was willing to take pains and to suffer loss for their good. He would spend his time, his parts, his strength, his interest, his all, to do them service; nay, so spend as to be spent, and be like a candle, which consumes itself to give light to others. 3. He did not abate in his love to them, notwithstanding their unkindness and ingratitude to him; and therefore was contented and glad to take pains with them, though *the more abundantly he loved them the less he was loved*, v. 15. This is applicable to other relations: if others be wanting in their duty to us it does not follow therefore that we may neglect our duty to them. 4. He was careful not only that he himself should not be burdensome, but that none he employed should. This seems to be the meaning of what we read, v. 16–18. If it should be objected by any that though he did not himself burden them, *yet, being crafty, he caught them with guile*, that is, he sent those among them who pillaged them, and afterwards he shared with them in the profit: "This was not so," says the apostle; "I did not make a gain of you myself, nor by any of those whom I sent; nor did Titus, nor any others—We walked by the same spirit and in the same steps." They all agreed in this matter to do them all the good they could, without being burdensome to them, to promote the gospel among them and make it as easy to them as possible. Or, this may be read with an interrogation, as utterly disclaiming any guile in himself and others towards them. 5. He was a man who did all things for edifying, v. 19. This was his great aim and design, to do good, to lay the foundation well, and then with care and diligence to build the superstructure. 6. He would not shrink from his duty for fear of displeasing them, though he was so careful to make himself easy to them. Therefore he was resolved to be faithful in reproofing sin, though he was therein *found to be such as they would not*, v. 20. The apostle here mentions several sins that are too commonly found among professors of religion, and are very reprobable: *debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults*; and, though those who are guilty of these sins can hardly bear to be reproofed for them, yet faithful ministers must not fear offending the guilty by sharp reproofs, as they are needful, in public and in private. 7. He was grieved at the apprehension that he should find scandalous sins among them not duly repented of. This, he tells them, would be the cause of great humiliation and lamentation. Note, (1.) The falls and miscarriages of professors cannot but be a humbling consideration to a good minister; and God sometimes takes this way to humble those who might be under temptation to be lifted up: *I fear lest my God will humble me*

among you. (2.) We have reason to bewail those who sin and do not repent, to *bewail many that have sinned, and have not repented*, v. 21. If these have not, as yet, grace to mourn and lament their own case, their case is the more lamentable; and those who love God, and love them, should mourn for them.

Chapter 13

In this chapter the apostle threatens to be severe against obstinate sinners, and assigns the reason thereof (v. 1-6); then he makes a suitable prayer to God on the behalf of the Corinthians, with the reasons inducing him thereto (v. 7-10), and concludes his epistle with a valediction and a benediction (v. 11-14).

Verses 1-6

In these verses observe,

I. The apostle threatens to be severe against obstinate sinners when he should come to Corinth, having now sent to them a first and second epistle, with proper admonitions and exhortations, in order to reform what was amiss among them. Concerning this we may notice, 1. The caution with which he proceeded in his censures: he was not hasty in using severity, but gave a first and second admonition. So some understand his words (v. 1): *This is the third time I am coming to you*, referring to his first and second epistles, by which he admonished them, as if he were present with them, though in person he was absent, v. 2. According to this interpretation, these two epistles are the witnesses he means in the first verse, referring rather to the direction of our Saviour (Mt. 17:16) concerning the manner how Christians should deal with offenders before they proceed to extremity than to the law of Moses (Deu. 17:6; 19:15) for the behaviour of judges in criminal matters. We should go, or send, to our brother, once and again, to tell him of his fault. Thus the apostle had told these Corinthians before, in his former epistle, and now he tells them, or *writes to those who heretofore had sinned, and to all others*, giving warning unto all before he came in person *the third time*, to exercise severity against scandalous offenders. Others think that the apostle had designed and prepared for his journey to Corinth twice already, but was providentially hindered, and now informs them of his intentions a third time to come to them. However this be, it is observable that he kept an account how often he endeavoured, and what pains he took with these Corinthians for their good: and we may be sure that an account is kept in heaven, and we must be reckoned with another day for the helps we have had for our souls, and how we have improved them. 2. The threatening itself: *That if* (or when) *he came again* (in person) *he would not spare* obstinate sinners, and such as were impenitent, in their scandalous enormities. He had told them before, he feared *God would humble him among them*, because he should find some who *had sinned and had not repented*; and now he declares he would not spare such, but would inflict church-censures upon them, which are thought to have been accompanied in those early times with visible and extraordinary tokens of divine displeasure. Note, Though it is God's gracious method to bear long with sinners, yet he will not bear always; at length he will come, and will not spare those who remain obstinate and impenitent, notwithstanding all his methods to reclaim and reform them.

II. The apostle assigns a reason why he would be thus severe, namely, for a *proof of Christ's speaking in him*, which they *sought after*, v. 3. The evidence of his apostleship was necessary for the credit, confirmation, and success, of the gospel he preached; and therefore such as denied this were justly and severely to be censured. It was the design of the false teachers to make the Corinthians call this matter into question, of which yet they had not weak, but strong and mighty proofs (v. 3), notwithstanding the mean figure he made in the world and the contempt which by some was cast upon him. Even as Christ

himself *was crucified through weakness*, or appeared in his crucifixion as a weak and contemptible person, *but liveth by the power of God*, or in his resurrection and life manifests his divine power (v. 4), so the apostles, how mean and contemptible soever they appeared to the world, did yet, as instruments, manifest the power of God, and particularly the power of his grace, in converting the world to Christianity. And therefore, as a proof to those who among the *Corinthians sought a proof of Christ's speaking in the apostle*, he puts them upon proving their Christianity (v. 5): *Examine yourselves*, etc. Hereby he intimates that, if they could prove their own Christianity, this would be a proof of his apostleship; for if they were in the faith, if Jesus Christ was in them, this was a proof that Christ spoke in him, because it was by his ministry that they did believe. He had been not only an instructor, but a father to them. He had begotten them again by the gospel of Christ. Now it could not be imagined that a divine power should go along with his ministrations if he had not his commission from on high. If therefore they could prove themselves *not to be reprobates*, not to be rejected of Christ, *he trusted they would know that he was not a reprobate* (v. 6), not disowned by Christ. What the apostle here says of the duty of the Corinthians to *examine themselves*, etc., with the particular view already mentioned, is applicable to the great duty of all who call themselves Christians, to examine themselves concerning their spiritual state. We should examine whether we be in the faith, because it is a matter in which we may be easily deceived, and wherein a deceit is highly dangerous: we are therefore concerned to *prove our own selves*, to put the question to our own souls, whether Christ be in us, or not; and *Christ is in us, except we be reprobates*: so that either we are true Christians or we are great cheats; and what a reproachful thing is it for a man not to know himself, not to know his own mind!

Verses 7-10

Here we have,

I. The apostle's prayer to God on the behalf of the Corinthians, that they might *do no evil*, v. 7. This is the most desirable thing we can ask of God, both for ourselves and for our friends, to be kept from sin, that we and they may do no evil; and it is most needful that we often pray to God for his grace to keep us, because without this we cannot keep ourselves. We are more concerned to pray that we may not do evil than that we may not suffer evil.

II. The reasons why the apostle put up this prayer to God on behalf of the Corinthians, which reasons have a special reference to their case, and the subject-matter about which he was writing to them. Observe, he tells them, 1. It was not so much for his own personal reputation as for the honour of religion: *"Not that we should appear approved, but that you should do that which is honest*, or decent, and for the credit of religion, though we should be reproached and vilified, and accounted as reprobates," v. 7. Note, (1.) The great desire of faithful ministers of the gospel is that the gospel they preach may be honoured, however their persons may be vilified. (2.) The best way to adorn our holy religion is *to do that which is honest*, and of good report, to walk as becomes the gospel of Christ. 2. Another reason was this: that they might be free from all blame and censure when he should come to them. This is intimated in v. 8, *We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth*. If therefore they did not do evil, nor act contrary to their profession of the gospel, the apostle had no power nor authority to punish them. He had said before (ch. 10:8) and says here (v. 10) that the power which the Lord had given him was to edification, not to destruction; so

that, although the apostle had great powers committed to him for the credit and advancement of the gospel, yet he could not do anything to the disparagement of the truth, nor the discouragement of those who obeyed it. He could not, that is, he would not, he dared not, he had no commission to act against the truth; and it is remarkable how the apostle did rejoice in this blessed impotency: "*We are glad,*" says he (v. 9), "*when we are weak and you are strong;* that is, that we have no power to censure those who are strong in faith and fruitful in good works." Some understand this passage thus: "Though we are weak through persecutions and contempt, we bear it patiently, and also joyfully, while we see that you are strong, that you are prosperous in holiness, and persevering in well-doing." For, 3. He desired their perfection (v. 9); that is, that they might be sincere, and aim at perfection (sincerity is our gospel-perfection), or else he wished there might be a thorough reformation among them. He not only desired that they might be kept from sin, but also that they might grow in grace, and increase in holiness, and that all that was amiss among them might be rectified and reformed. This was the great end of his writing this epistle, and that freedom he used with them by *writing these things* (those friendly admonitions and warnings), *being absent, that so, being present, he should not use sharpness* (v. 10), that is, not proceed to the utmost extremity in the exercise of the power which the Lord had given him as an apostle, *to revenge all disobedience*, ch. 10:6.

Verses 11-14

Thus the apostle concludes this epistle with,

I. A valediction. He gives them a parting farewell, and takes his leave of them for the present, with hearty good wishes for their spiritual welfare. In order to this,

1. He gives them several good exhortations. (1.) To be perfect, or to be knit together in love, which would tend greatly to their advantage as a church, or Christian society. (2.) To be of good comfort under all the sufferings and persecutions they might endure for the cause of Christ or any calamities and disappointments they might meet with in the world. (3.) To be of one mind, which would greatly tend to their comfort; for the more easy we are with our brethren the more ease we shall have in our own souls. The apostle would have them, as far as was possible, to be of the same opinion and judgment; however, if this could not be attained, yet, (4.) He exhorts them to live in peace, that difference in opinion should not cause an alienation of affections—that they should be at peace among themselves. He would have all the schisms that were among them healed, that there should be no more contention and wrath found among them, to prevent which they should avoid *debates, envyings, backbitings, whisperings*, and such like enemies to peace.

2. He encourages them with the promise of God's presence among them: *The God of love and peace shall be with you*, v. 11.

Note, (1.) God is the God of love and peace. He is the author of peace, and lover of concord. He hath loved us, and is willing to be at peace with us; he commands us to love him, and to be reconciled to him, and also that we love one another, and be at peace among ourselves. (2.) God will be with those who live in love and peace. He will love those who love peace; he will dwell with them here, and they shall dwell with him for ever. Such shall have God's gracious presence here, and be admitted to his glorious presence hereafter.

3. He gives directions to them to salute each other, and sends kind salutations to them from those who were with him, v. 12,

13. He would have them testify their affection to one another by the sacred rite of a kiss of charity, which was then used, but has long been disused, to prevent all occasions of wantonness and impurity, in the more declining and degenerate state of the church.

II. The apostolical benediction (v. 14): *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.* Thus the apostle concludes his epistle, and thus it is usual and proper to dismiss worshipping assemblies. This plainly proves the doctrine of the gospel, and is an acknowledgment that Father, Son, and Spirit, are three distinct persons, yet but one God; and herein the same, that they are the fountain of all blessings to men. It likewise intimates our duty, which is to have an eye by faith to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—to live in a continual regard to the three persons in the Trinity, into whose name we were baptized, and in whose name we are blessed. This is a very solemn benediction, and we should give all diligence to inherit this blessing. The grace of Christ, the love of God, and the communion (or communication) of the Holy Ghost: the grace of Christ as Redeemer, the love of God who sent the Redeemer, and all the communications of this grace and love, which come to us by the Holy Ghost; it is the communications of the Holy Ghost that qualify us for an interest in the grace of Christ, and the love of God: and we can desire no more to make us happy than the grace of Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*