

1 CORINTHIANS



Salutation

1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord^a and ours:

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I give thanks to my^b God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—⁶ just as the testimony of^c Christ has been strengthened among you—⁷ so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸ He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Divisions in the Church

10 Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters,^d by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in

^a Gk *theirs*

^b Other ancient authorities lack *my*

^c Or *to*

^d Gk *brothers*

Read 1 Corinthians 1

Paul, with Sosthenes, writes to a factionalized Corinthian community likely about AD 57, calling for an end to divisions based on charismatic personalities or conflicting ideologies. Opting for a middle position, the letter argues that wisdom derives from avoiding extremes in Jewish or Hellenistic ideologies: Jesus is foolish to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews. But to believers he is the power and wisdom of God.

Reflect: The story of Jesus' death and resurrection baffles the worldly but inspires believers. To be a follower, one must dispel disbelief and embrace God's miracle.

Pray: Pray that you may be an instrument of peace in the community, one who bridges differences and unites in common cause.

Act: Become a person who sees value in all sides, recognizing the importance of tradition but reaching out to be inclusive of diversity within the community.

agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters.^a ¹² What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." ¹³ Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God^b that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.

Christ the Power and Wisdom of God

¹⁸ For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³ but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

²⁶ Consider your own call, brothers and sisters:^c not many of you were wise by human standards,^d not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no one^e might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in^f the Lord."

^a Gk *my brothers*

^b Other ancient authorities read *I am thankful*

^c Gk *brothers*

^d Gk *according to the flesh*

^e Gk *no flesh*

^f Or *of*

Read 1 Corinthians 2

Paul came humbly and without pretense to preach the gospel of Jesus. The power of the teaching trumps the pretense of the preachers. Truth comes not from the preacher but from the Spirit of God in our midst, opening hearts to the mysteries of salvation.

Reflect: Dispelling arrogance or adulation in favor of a humble reflection on God's all-embracing spirit, allow God to be arbiter of what is good and productive for salvation.

Pray: Raise your heart to accept all of God's gifts, even those not understood or deemed unworthy by the pretentious.

Act: For God's honor and glory, act with humility and understanding when discussing the word of God with non-believers.

Proclaiming Christ Crucified

2 When I came to you, brothers and sisters,^a I did not come proclaiming the mystery^b of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. ³ And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. ⁴ My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom,^c but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

The True Wisdom of God

⁶ Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. ⁷ But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,

what God has prepared for those who love him”—

¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. ¹³ And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.^d

¹⁴ Those who are unspiritual^e do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny.

¹⁶ “For who has known the mind of the Lord
so as to instruct him?”

But we have the mind of Christ.

On Divisions in the Corinthian Church

3 And so, brothers and sisters,^a I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, ³ for you are still of the flesh. For

^a Gk *brothers*

^b Other ancient authorities read *testimony*

^c Other ancient authorities read *the persuasiveness of wisdom*

^d Or *interpreting spiritual things in spiritual language, or comparing spiritual things with spiritual*

^e Or *natural*

Read 1 Corinthians 3

Blessed are those who build community with diligence and devotion. What they achieve endures and wins God's blessing. Not so those who, with pride of position, claim wisdom while driving a wedge within the community. Their works will disintegrate, for their vanity is false wisdom.

Reflect: Letting God be God is foundational for religious belief. Those who dare to dictate in God's name will be humbled.

Pray: Let us allow God to open our eyes to the wisdom of understanding the marvels of creation. There is nothing created that lacks the power for good.

Act: Choose sides with those who seek to unite rather than to divide, who include rather than exclude. Seek means to find mutual understanding amid diversity of views.

Read 1 Corinthians 4

No one owns God's word, and none should claim exclusive power over its application. In all things, let God be the judge.

Reflect: What does it mean to preach the gospel when God is its message and salvation is its gift?

Pray: Dispel any claim to authority that limits God's power.

Act: Speak humbly but with faith in God's embrace of all that is good. No one should be a stranger in God's house.

as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? ⁴For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human?

⁵What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. ⁹For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

¹⁰According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. ¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. ¹²Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—¹³the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. ¹⁴If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

¹⁶Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?^a ¹⁷If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

¹⁸Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. ¹⁹For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written,

"He catches the wise in their craftiness,"

²⁰and again,

"The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

²¹So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, ²²whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, ²³and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

The Ministry of the Apostles

4 Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. ²Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. ³But

^a In verses 16 and 17 the Greek word for you is plural

with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. ⁴ I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵ Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God.

⁶ I have applied all this to Apollos and myself for your benefit, brothers and sisters,^a so that you may learn through us the meaning of the saying, "Nothing beyond what is written," so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of one against another. ⁷ For who sees anything different in you?^b What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?

⁸ Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Quite apart from us you have become kings! Indeed, I wish that you had become kings, so that we might be kings with you! ⁹ For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals. ¹⁰ We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong.

You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. ¹¹ To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, ¹² and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; ¹³ when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day.

Fatherly Admonition

¹⁴ I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. ¹⁵ For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. ¹⁶ I appeal to you, then, be imitators of me. ¹⁷ For this reason I sent^c you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church. ¹⁸ But some of you, thinking that I am not coming to you, have become arrogant. ¹⁹ But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. ²⁰ For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power. ²¹ What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

Sexual Immorality Defiles the Church

5 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. ² And you are arrogant! Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you?

³ For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present I have already pronounced judgment ⁴ in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing.^d When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.^e

⁶ Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of

^a Cf. *brothers*

^b Or *Who makes you different from another?*

^c Or *am sending*

^d Or *on the man who has done such a thing in the name of the Lord Jesus*

^e Other ancient authorities add *Jesus*

Read 1 Corinthians 5

Evil can exist within the community when hurtful indecency, greed, idolatry, slander, or debauchery is tolerated. These create distrust and abuse within community and should be roundly condemned by all.

Reflect: Standards of moral behavior include being just and temperate. Injustice and hurtful behavior toward others are violations of right order and offensive to God's people.

Pray: Set your heart right in serving God with justice: recognize each person's worth and do not deprive people of their rightful dignity as God's people.

Act: Seek ways of ensuring for each person the rights and dignity that God bestows on all. This is a community obligation in which all must be united.

dough? ⁷ Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Sexual Immorality Must Be Judged

9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons—¹⁰ not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister^a who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? ¹³ God will judge those outside. “Drive out the wicked person from among you.”

Lawsuits among Believers

6 When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare to take it to court before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints? ² Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? ³ Do you not know that we are to judge angels—to say nothing of ordinary matters? ⁴ If you have ordinary cases, then, do you appoint as judges those who have no standing in the church? ⁵ I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer^a and another, ⁶ but a believer^a goes to court against a believer^a—and before unbelievers at that?

⁷ In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? ⁸ But you yourselves wrong and defraud—and believers^b at that.

⁹ Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, ¹⁰ thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Glorify God in Body and Spirit

¹² “All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will

^a Gk *brother*

^b Gk *brothers*

Read 1 Corinthians 6

The wisdom of mediators exceeds the power of authorities. Seek to settle differences among yourselves rather than pursuing punishment through the courts. Avoid what is not beneficial or leads to debasement of the body or spirit. We must recognize our own dignity and not engage in acts that are unworthy of our calling.

Reflect: Moral judgment begins with ourselves. Curbing our passions includes serving the needs of others rather than seeking to indulge ourselves with selfish pleasures.

Pray: Using all our faculties to build positive relationships is a worthy goal of believers in God's mercy.

Act: Let us find ways of celebrating life's delights in affirming relationships with others.

not be dominated by anything. ¹³ "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food,"^a and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, "The two shall be one flesh." ¹⁷ But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. ¹⁸ Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple^b of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰ For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

Directions concerning Marriage

7 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is well for a man not to touch a woman." ² But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. ³ The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵ Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ⁶ This I say by way of concession, not of command. ⁷ I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind.

⁸ To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. ⁹ But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.

¹⁰ To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord—that the wife should not separate from her husband ¹¹ (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

¹² To the rest I say—I and not the Lord—that if any believer^c has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. ¹³ And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his

^a The quotation may extend to the word *other*

^b Or *sanctuary*

^c Gk *brother*

Read 1 Corinthians 7

In matters of sexuality and marriage, pursue what is honorable: if you commit to marriage, be loyal to your partner; if you must divorce, do so only for grave reasons, such as endangerment to your religious faith. Practices such as circumcision are superficial and unimportant in the larger frame of what it means to be committed to keeping God's commandments. There is no greatness in virginity other than that it may help a person to focus on the higher purposes of our existence.

Reflect: Sexuality has often been the battle-ground of moral indignation. But, in fact, it is the common ground for all humans seeking to be whole.

Pray: Let us allow God to inform our sexuality with holiness and nobility. There is no denying that we are sexual, so let us allow our sexuality to grow to the richness of its potential according to God's will for us.

Act: Avoid denigrating sexuality; find ways to use it for personal growth.

wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. ¹⁵ But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. It is to peace that God has called you.^a ¹⁶ Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife.

The Life That the Lord Has Assigned

17 However that may be, let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you. This is my rule in all the churches. ¹⁸ Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. ¹⁹ Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything. ²⁰ Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called.

21 Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever.^b ²² For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ. ²³ You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters. ²⁴ In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters,^c there remain with God.

The Unmarried and the Widows

25 Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. ²⁶ I think that, in view of the impending^d crisis, it is well for you to remain as you are. ²⁷ Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. ²⁸ But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin. Yet those who marry will experience distress in this life,^e and I would spare you that. ²⁹ I mean, brothers and sisters,^c the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, ³⁰ and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, ³¹ and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

32 I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; ³³ but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife,

^a Other ancient authorities read *us*

^b Or *avail yourself of the opportunity*

^c Gk *brothers*

^d Or *present*

^e Gk *in the flesh*

³⁴ and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. ³⁵ I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord.

³⁶ If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his fiancée,^a if his passions are strong, and so it has to be, let him marry as he wishes; it is no sin. Let

them marry. ³⁷ But if someone stands firm in his resolve, being under no necessity but having his own desire under control, and has determined in his own mind to keep her as his fiancée,^a he will do well. ³⁸ So then, he who marries his fiancée^a does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.

³⁹ A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies,^b she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord. ⁴⁰ But in my judgment she is more blessed if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

Read 1 Corinthians 8

Styles of worship are important, but, in the final analysis, according to Paul, love is more important than knowledge.

Reflect: It seems natural to get caught up in arguments about proper forms of worship. We must never allow any liberty of ours to become a stumbling block to the weak.

Pray: Ask the God whom we all seek to open your heart to your brothers and sisters.

Act: History knows of too many who appoint themselves agents of divine retribution. It is better to be peacemakers than firebrands. It is better to leave all judgment of others to God.

Food Offered to Idols

8 Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. ² Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; ³ but anyone who loves God is known by him.

⁴ Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.” ⁵ Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

⁷ It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸ “Food will not bring us close to God.”^c We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹ But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? ¹¹ So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed.^d ¹² But when you thus sin against members of your family,^e and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling,^f I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them^g to fall.

^a Gk *virgin*

^b Gk *falls asleep*

^c The quotation may extend to the end of the verse

^d Gk *the weak brother...is destroyed*

^e Gk *against the brothers*

^f Gk *my brother's falling*

^g Gk *cause my brother*

Read 1 Corinthians 9

I seek to be not an obstructionist but rather a vehicle for the in-coming of God's grace to others. I don't argue against those whose ways are different from mine. I don't seek to dominate or exclude: I only preach what I believe and as I have been taught.

Reflect: Living in a complex world of religions and secular realism, we can succeed only when we humbly acknowledge our limitations. The greatness of God is not limited to a single preacher, nor to a single religious belief.

Pray: Let us open our hearts to the fullness of God's mercies. Let those who understand God better than we do teach us to be all that we commit ourselves to be, children of a loving God.

Act: Divest yourself of a sense of religious hegemony and seek ways to build bridges between peoples of different faiths. In the end, God is praised through the magnificence of creation and the human spirit seeking understanding.

The Rights of an Apostle

9 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? ² If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

³ This is my defense to those who would examine me. ⁴ Do we not have the right to our food and drink? ⁵ Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife,^a as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? ⁶ Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? ⁷ Who at any time pays the expenses for doing military service? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not get any of its milk?

⁸ Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law also say the same? ⁹ For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰ Or does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was indeed written for our sake, for whoever plows should plow in hope and whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share in the crop. ¹¹ If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? ¹² If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we still more?

Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. ¹³ Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is sacrificed on the altar? ¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

¹⁵ But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this so that they may be applied in my case. Indeed, I would rather die than that—no one will deprive me of my ground for boasting! ¹⁶ If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! ¹⁷ For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. ¹⁸ What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.

¹⁹ For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I

^a Gk a sister as wife

might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. ²⁵ Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. ²⁶ So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; ²⁷ but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

Read 1 Corinthians 10

Don't think that your way is the only way. What we follow is God's way, and we follow it with humility and courage. Our faith teaches us restraint and the uplifting of the human spirit. Let us rejoice in that.

Reflect: Paul's realism is an attractive alternative to those who are dead set on marking out borders. Let people be who they are, and focus on actualizing your own potential as the child of a loving God.

Pray: Lord, give us the grace not to judge people who find other ways to you.

Act: Explore the faiths of other people, not as an alternative of your own but in order to broaden your understanding of the richness of God.

Warnings from Israel's History

10 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters,^a that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

⁶ Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷ Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." ⁸ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹ We must not put Christ^b to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. ¹⁰ And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹ These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹² So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. ¹³ No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

¹⁴ Therefore, my dear friends,^c flee from the worship of idols. ¹⁵ I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. ¹⁸ Consider the people of Israel;^d are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? ¹⁹ What do I imply then? That food sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ No, I imply that what pagans sacri-

^a Gk *brothers*

^b Other ancient authorities read *the Lord*

^c Gk *my beloved*

^d Gk *Israel according to the flesh*

fice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. ²² Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

Do All to the Glory of God

²³ “All things are lawful,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. ²⁴ Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other. ²⁵ Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience, ²⁶ for “the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s.” ²⁷ If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without

raising any question on the ground of conscience. ²⁸ But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—²⁹ I mean the other’s conscience, not your own. For why should my liberty be subject to the judgment of someone else’s conscience? ³⁰ If I partake with thankfulness, why should I be denounced because of that for which I give thanks?

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. ³² Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of **11** many, so that they may be saved. ¹ Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Head Coverings

² I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you. ³ But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband^a is the head of his wife,^b and God is the head of Christ. ⁴ Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, ⁵ but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved. ⁶ For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil. ⁷ For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection^c of God; but woman is the reflection^c of man. ⁸ Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. ⁹ Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. ¹⁰ For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of^d authority on her head,^e because of the angels. ¹¹ Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. ¹² For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God. ¹³ Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? ¹⁴ Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, ¹⁵ but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. ¹⁶ But if anyone is

^a The same Greek word means *man* or *husband*

^b Or *head of the woman*

^c Or *glory*

^d Gk lacks a *symbol of*

^e Or *have freedom of choice regarding her head*

Read 1 Corinthians 11

Men and women are different. Many of these differences are based on social conventions. Symbols carry powerful messages, but the real divide is the factions that you harbor within the community. They are your real problems that need to be addressed and resolved. The symbols we use in the Lord's Supper have special privilege among us and must be carefully safeguarded.

Reflect: Biologically, men and women are different, but is that the end of the story? Are there similarities that limit the applicability of the polarizing symbols?

Pray: May the eucharistic mysteries be a unifying symbol, enlightening us in our awareness of God's presence and of our inestimable value as God's beloved children.

Act: Consider the range and importance of symbols in society and our own lives: the flag, music, art. All have a place in our sense of who we are and what moves us to a common cause. Find an example of a symbol that particularly moves you and consider how that symbol functions in your life.

disposed to be contentious—we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

Abuses at the Lord's Supper

17 Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸ For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. ¹⁹ Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. ²⁰ When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. ²¹ For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. ²² What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!

The Institution of the Lord's Supper

23 For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for^a you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Partaking of the Supper Unworthily

27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For all who eat and drink^b without discerning the body,^c eat and drink judgment against themselves. ³⁰ For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.^d ³¹ But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined^e so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

33 So then, my brothers and sisters,^f when you come together to eat, wait for one another. ³⁴ If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation. About the other things I will give instructions when I come.

^a Other ancient authorities read *is broken for*

^b Other ancient authorities add *in an unworthy manner,*

^c Other ancient authorities read *the Lord's body*

^d *Gk fallen asleep*

^e Or *When we are judged, we are being disciplined by the Lord*

^f *Gk brothers*

Read 1 Corinthians 12

Divisions within the community often are based simply on legitimate personal differences. People are different, but the Spirit is one and in that way we are all members of the one body of Christ.

Reflect: The doctrine of the church as the Mystical Body of Christ emphasizes the unity of the community of faith, enriched by the diversity of its members.

Pray: Ask for insight into the meaning of human diversity. We all struggle to understand why people aren't all the same. Can it be that God accepts what we find it difficult even to acknowledge?

Act: Let us get beyond our prejudices and discover the value of people who are simply different from what we want them to be or think they must be.

Spiritual Gifts

12 Now concerning spiritual gifts,^a brothers and sisters,^b I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individual-ly just as the Spirit chooses.

One Body with Many Members

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴ whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But

^a Or *spiritual persons*

^b Gk *brothers*

God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has

appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Read 1 Corinthians 13

What's the meaning of love? Saint Paul describes the gift of God whereby Christians imitate the obedient, self-sacrificing dedication of Jesus. It's a lifetime of experience wrapped into the one statement: faith, hope, and love, with the greatest of these being love.

Reflect: We see indistinctly; but then we will see face to face. How deep a concept to grasp, that our knowledge and awareness are hopelessly limited here and now. We need to acknowledge that truth by opening our minds and hearts, a real life-long challenge.

Pray: Let us learn the ways of God by reflecting on the meaning of love.

Act: Try working through each of these characteristics of love in sequence, one day at a time.

The Gift of Love

13 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast,^a but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹ For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; ¹⁰ but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly,^b but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. ¹³ And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Gifts of Prophecy and Tongues

14 Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy. ² For those who speak in a tongue do not speak to other people but to God; for nobody understands them, since they are speaking mysteries in the Spirit. ³ On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. ⁴ Those who speak in a tongue build up themselves, but those who prophesy build up the church. ⁵ Now I would like all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy.

^a Other ancient authorities read *body to be burned*

^b *Gk in a riddle*

Read 1 Corinthians 14

In prayer services, speaking in tongues seems to have been a common practice. Paul recognizes this and doesn't dismiss the practice but puts it into perspective as the least of the gifts. This takes into account that people do become ecstatic, but that it's not the most important part of being religious.

Reflect: The role of emotions in worship is real and powerful. Speaking in tongues may not be your form of emotion, but it's one that others use. Try to give full acknowledgement to emotions without letting them become the essence of our religion.

Pray: Lord, help me to allow people the range of their emotions, and to accept the range of my own emotions. When we feel deeply we are more disposed to gratitude and praise.

Act: Try to speak in tongues in the privacy of your prayers. See if the experience is inspiring. Seek ways to channel this inspiration into other religious practices.

One who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

6 Now, brothers and sisters,^a if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I speak to you in some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? ⁷ It is the same way with lifeless instruments that produce sound, such as the flute or the harp. If they do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is being played? ⁸ And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? ⁹ So with yourselves; if in a tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is being said? For you will be speaking into the air. ¹⁰ There are doubtless many different kinds of sounds in the world, and nothing is without sound. ¹¹ If then I do not know the meaning of a sound, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. ¹² So with yourselves; since you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in them for building up the church.

13 Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret. ¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unproductive. ¹⁵ What should I do then? I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also; I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will sing praise with the mind also. ¹⁶ Otherwise, if you say a blessing with the spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say the "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since the outsider does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷ For you may give thanks well enough, but the other person is not built up. ¹⁸ I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you; ¹⁹ nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

20 Brothers and sisters,^a do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults. ²¹ In the law it is written,

"By people of strange tongues
and by the lips of foreigners

I will speak to this people;

yet even then they will not listen to me,"

says the Lord. ²² Tongues, then, are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers. ²³ If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind? ²⁴ But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reproved by all and called to account by all. ²⁵ After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will bow

^a Gk *brothers*

down before God and worship him, declaring, “God is really among you.”

Orderly Worship

26 What should be done then, my friends?^a When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret.²⁸ But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God.²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.³⁰ If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent.³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged.³² And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets,

³³ for God is a God not of disorder but of peace.

(As in all the churches of the saints,³⁴ women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says.³⁵ If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.^b ³⁶ Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?)

³⁷ Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord.³⁸ Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized.³⁹ So, my friends,^c be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues;⁴⁰ but all things should be done decently and in order.

The Resurrection of Christ

15 Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters,^a of the good news^d that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand,² through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

³ For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures,⁴ and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters^a at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died.^e ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

The Resurrection of the Dead

¹² Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection

^a Gk *brothers*

^b Other ancient authorities put verses 34-35 after verse 40

^c Gk *my brothers*

^d Or *gospel*

^e Gk *fallen asleep*

Read 1 Corinthians 15

A core belief for Christians is the reality of the resurrection. It symbolizes God's saving power; it brings us back from sin/death to justification/life. If there is no resurrection in Jesus, then our sins remain and our faith is futile. Jesus' resurrection is our guarantee of rebirth from sin/death. We all shall die, but by our faith in the resurrection of Jesus, we shall all live in and through him.

Reflect: The mystery of Christian faith is that sin/death can be subsumed by the righteousness of Jesus, into which Christians are reborn through the death/resurrection experience.

Pray: Allow the rebirth into righteousness be the guiding principle of your life. Consider what that means in your everyday life, and let the radiance of divine affirmation be real.

Act: In a spirit of liberation, feel free to reach out to others, not to convert them to the mysteries of Christianity but to allow them to experience the inclusion that it brings for you by recognizing all creation as blessed by God's goodness.

of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; ¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. ¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁷ If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have died^a in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.^a ²¹ For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; ²² for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end,^b when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For “God^c has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him. ²⁸ When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.

²⁹ Otherwise, what will those people do who receive baptism on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?

³⁰ And why are we putting ourselves in danger every hour? ³¹ I die every day! That is as certain, brothers and sisters,^d as my boasting of you—a boast that I make in Christ Jesus our Lord. ³² If with merely human hopes I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would I have gained by it? If the dead are not raised,

“Let us eat and drink,
for tomorrow we die.”

³³ Do not be deceived:

“Bad company ruins good morals.”

³⁴ Come to a sober and right mind, and sin no more; for some people have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

The Resurrection Body

³⁵ But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” ³⁶ Fool! What

^a Gk fallen asleep

^b Or Then come the rest

^c Gk he

^d Gk brothers

you sow does not come to life unless it dies.³⁷ And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.³⁹ Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.⁴⁰ There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another.⁴¹ There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in glory.

42 So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.⁴³ It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.⁴⁴ It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.⁴⁵ Thus it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.⁴⁶ But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual.⁴⁷ The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is^a from heaven.⁴⁸ As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the

man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven.⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will^b also bear the image of the man of heaven.

50 What I am saying, brothers and sisters,^c is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.⁵¹ Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die,^d but we will all be changed,⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.⁵³ For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.⁵⁴ When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?”

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved,^e be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

The Collection for the Saints

16 Now concerning the collection for the saints: you should follow the directions I gave to the churches of Galatia.² On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come.³ And when I arrive, I will send any whom you approve with letters to take your gift to Jerusalem.⁴ If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

Plans for Travel

5 I will visit you after passing through Macedonia—for I intend to pass through Macedonia—⁶ and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way, wherever I go.⁷ I do not want to see you now just in passing, for I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.⁸ But I will stay in

^a Other ancient authorities add *the Lord*

^b Other ancient authorities read *let us*

^c Gk *brothers*

^d Gk *fall asleep*

^e Gk *beloved brothers*

Read 1 Corinthians 16

Venturing forth, Paul commits himself to a collection for the community in Jerusalem, in recognition of the respect owed to that community. It is his way of acknowledging the honorable status the Jerusalem community has for all followers of Jesus and his people, Israel.

Reflect: How can Christians and Jewish people today relate in a respectful way that acknowledges God's covenant with the people of Israel?

Pray: The peace of Jerusalem must always be our goal, not just in spirit but in fact.

Act: Follow Paul's exhortation: stand firm in the faith, be courageous, be strong, and do everything with love.

Ephesus until Pentecost, ⁹ for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

10 If Timothy comes, see that he has nothing to fear among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord just as I am; ¹¹ therefore let no one despise him. Send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I am expecting him with the brothers.

12 Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, but he was not at all willing^a to come now. He will come when he has the opportunity.

Final Messages and Greetings

13 Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. ¹⁴ Let all that you do be done in love.

15 Now, brothers and sisters,^b you know that members of the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints; ¹⁶ I urge you to put yourselves at the service of such people, and of everyone who works and toils with them. ¹⁷ I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence; ¹⁸ for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. So give recognition to such persons.

19 The churches of Asia send greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, greet you warmly in the Lord. ²⁰ All the brothers and sisters^b send greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

21 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. ²² Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord. Our Lord, come!^c ²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. ²⁴ My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus.^d

^a Or it was not at all God's will for him

^b Gk brothers

^c Gk *Marana tha*. These Aramaic words can also be read *Maran atha*, meaning *Our Lord has come*

^d Other ancient authorities add *Amen*



2 CORINTHIANS

Read 2 Corinthians 1

Paul is distressed, first, because he was not able to make his intended visit to his beloved Corinthian community, and second, because an incident arose that threatened his life. Now there is reason to be further concerned about the Corinthian community itself.

Reflect: Enduring pain and stress is part of everyone's life. In times of distress we look for a still point for our lives. For Christians this is Jesus, who endured all and gave all for us and in whom we find our strength.

Pray: Ask the Lord for the grace to keep your eyes and your heart focused always on Jesus.

Act: Empathizing with those who suffer prompts us to feel solidarity with others in distress. Renew your commitment to such people, without blaming them for their plight, but rather recognizing a bond in suffering.

Salutation

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

To the church of God that is in Corinth, including all the saints throughout Achaia:

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's Thanksgiving after Affliction

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, ⁴ who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. ⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. ⁶ If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. ⁷ Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.

8 We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters,^a of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. ⁹ Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on our-

^a Gk brothers

Read 2 Corinthians 2

Since my joy is in you, I have no wish to cause you pain. Despite this I wrote a letter that brought forth many tears, disturbed as I was about the discord in your midst. But, if you forgive the one whose offence caused such pain, so indeed shall I. Forgiveness unites us all.

Reflect: With offence comes the potential for forgiveness and renewed commitment of love. Getting beyond the offence enables us to go from death to life, since we are so bound together in Christ.

Pray: Celebrate rebirth in your relationships with those who have caused you pain. Get beyond the offence to a new manner of life through forgiveness.

Act: Seek out someone who has caused you distress, and find a way to reconcile as a rebirth of love.

selves but on God who raises the dead. ¹⁰ He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again, ¹¹ as you also join in helping us by your prayers, so that many will give thanks on our^a behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

The Postponement of Paul's Visit

12 Indeed, this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with frankness^b and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God—and all the more toward you. ¹³ For we write you nothing other than what you can read and also understand; I hope you will understand until the end—¹⁴ as you have already understood us in part—that on the day of the Lord Jesus we are your boast even as you are our boast.

15 Since I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a double favor;^c ¹⁶ I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on to Judea. ¹⁷ Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to ordinary human standards,^d ready to say “Yes, yes” and “No, no” at the same time? ¹⁸ As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been “Yes and No.” ¹⁹ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not “Yes and No”; but in him it is always “Yes.” ²⁰ For in him every one of God's promises is a “Yes.” For this reason it is through him that we say the “Amen,” to the glory of God. ²¹ But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, ²² by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first installment.

23 But I call on God as witness against me: it was to spare you that I did not come again to Corinth. ²⁴ I do not mean to imply that we lord it over your faith; rather, we are workers with you for your joy, because you stand firm in the faith. ¹ So I made up my mind not to make you another painful visit. ² For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? ³ And I wrote as I did, so that when I came, I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice; for I am confident about all of you, that my joy would be the joy of all of you. ⁴ For I wrote you out of much distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain, but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.

Forgiveness for the Offender

5 But if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it

^a Other ancient authorities read *your*

^b Other ancient authorities read *holiness*

^c Other ancient authorities read *pleasure*

^d Gk according to the flesh

not to me, but to some extent—not to exaggerate it—to all of you. ⁶ This punishment by the majority is enough for such a person; ⁷ so now instead you should forgive and console him, so that he may not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸ So I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. ⁹ I wrote for this reason: to test you and to know whether you are obedient in everything. ¹⁰ Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ. ¹¹ And we do this so that we may not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

Paul's Anxiety in Troas

12 When I came to Troas to proclaim

the good news of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord; ¹³ but my mind could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said farewell to them and went on to Macedonia.

14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. ¹⁵ For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; ¹⁶ to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? ¹⁷ For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many;^a but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence.

Read 2 Corinthians 3

Formalities are hardly needed when personal relationships are strong. We now recognize that sin is not terminal when we are open to God's mercy in and through Christ. Aware of such benevolence, we can only celebrate forgiveness and focus on the enduring bonds that unite us to God and to one another.

Reflect: Paul's stress on God's forgiveness of our sins is applied here to offences within the believing community. We must not hold grudges but instead seek ways to reconcile, even in the face of broken trust.

Pray: If sin is human and forgiveness divine, we need to seek divine guidance and strength to let forgiveness renew our fractured relationships.

Act: Seek out a fractured relationship in your life and find ways to mend it with forgiveness and love.

Ministers of the New Covenant

3 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of commendation to you or from you, do we? ² You yourselves are our letter, written on our^b hearts, to be known and read by all; ³ and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

⁴ Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, ⁶ who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

⁷ Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets,^c came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, ⁸ how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? ⁹ For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory! ¹⁰ Indeed, what once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory; ¹¹ for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory!

¹² Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, ¹³ not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that^d was being set aside. ¹⁴ But their minds

^a Other ancient authorities read *like the others*

^b Other ancient authorities read *your*

^c Gk on stones

^d Gk of what

were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. ¹⁵ Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; ¹⁶ but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

Read 2 Corinthians 4

What we are about—proclaiming Jesus as risen—must serve as a guiding force in all we do. No suffering or tribulation can overwhelm us when we dedicate ourselves to the cause in which we have the fullness of life.

Reflect: Total dedication to a cause enables that cause to affect everything our lives. We must choose our dedications carefully, recognizing that, once chosen, they will inform who we are and what we are all about.

Pray: The greatest cause in life is to share the good news of the one who loves completely. Let us seek to do that act of love in our lives.

Act: Loving means commitment. Find a commitment in your life that needs regeneration.

Treasure in Clay Jars

4 Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. ² We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

⁷ But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. ⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. ¹¹ For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.

¹³ But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—"I believed, and so I spoke"—we also believe, and so we speak, ¹⁴ because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵ Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

Living by Faith

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory be-

yond all measure, ¹⁸ because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

Read 2 Corinthians 5

Putting away things that distract us from our higher calling, we recognize that anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. God has freed us from sin's grip through Christ and given us a ministry of reconciliation to make all things new in Christ.

Reflect: Being freed from sin's grip ourselves, we are enabled to participate in the renewal of all creation in Christ. We thus look beyond ourselves to seek the liberation of others who are in need.

Pray: Liberation of body and spirit is a gift of God in Christ. Acceptance of this gift means being willing to share its fruits with others.

Act: Liberation requires taking steps to free ourselves and others from exploitation and unfair economic, political, and social practices. Identify one form of exploitation that you can address in a practical way.

5 For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling—³ if indeed, when we have taken it off^a we will not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

⁶ So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord—⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰ For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.

The Ministry of Reconciliation

¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. ¹² We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. ¹³ For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴ For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view;^b even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view,^b we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,^c not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ So we are am-

^a Other ancient authorities read *put it on*

^b *Gk according to the flesh*

^c *Or God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself*

bassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Read 2 Corinthians 6

Putting off responding to our call to reconciliation simply won't do; the cost may be high, but as ministers of God's benevolence we are blessed with the power of God, which gives us endurance. We can find strength also through collaboration with others of like mind and commitment.

Reflect: God's gift in Christ requires corresponding commitments from us: being liberated means that we have to be willing to help liberate others. In what ways can we do this?

Pray: We can find strength in the assembly of God's people (i.e., all people). Recognizing God's call to renew all of creation, let us be willing to allow into our assembly those who are different from ourselves.

Act: Seek ways of joining with others in God's work of renewing the face of the earth. There is strength in numbers.

6 As we work together with him,^a we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ² For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you."

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! ³ We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴ but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶ by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷ truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸ in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

¹¹ We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. ¹² There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. ¹³ In return—I speak as to children—open wide your hearts also.

The Temple of the Living God

¹⁴ Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? ¹⁵ What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we^b are the temple of the living God; as God said,

"I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

¹⁷ Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you,

¹⁸ and I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

^a Gk *As we work together*

^b Other ancient authorities read *you*

Read 2 Corinthians 7

On returning from Corinth, Titus brought good news to Paul regarding the repair of relations there, in response to Paul's earlier communications. Paul rejoices because he has confidence in the Corinthians.

Reflect: Every relationship, family, and community is sometimes faced with conflicts and must find a path to reconciliation. Paul's team worked with the Corinthian community in finding such a path. We also may sometimes need the help of others to repair fractured relations.

Pray: Pray for the openness of heart to be willing to be reconciled with someone with whom you have been in conflict.

Act: Become a peacemaker and bridge builder. Begin in your own life and work out from there. Make a commitment to seek peace wherever possible.

7 Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God.

Paul's Joy at the Church's Repentance

2 Make room in your hearts^a for us; we have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. **3** I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. **4** I often boast about you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with consolation; I am overjoyed in all our affliction.

5 For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted in every way—disputes without and fears within. **6** But God, who consoles the downcast, consoled us by the arrival of Titus, **7** and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was consoled about you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. **8** For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it (though I did regret it, for I see that I grieved you with that letter, though only briefly). **9** Now I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because your grief led to repentance; for you felt a godly grief, so that you were not harmed in any way by us. **10** For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death. **11** For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves guiltless in the matter. **12** So although I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong, nor on account of the one who was wronged, but in order that your zeal for us might be made known to you before God. **13** In this we find comfort.

In addition to our own consolation, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his mind has been set at rest by all of you. **14** For if I have been somewhat boastful about you to him, I was not disgraced; but just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting to Titus has proved true as well. **15** And his heart goes out all the more to you, as he remembers the obedience of all of you, and how you welcomed him with fear and trembling. **16** I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you.

Encouragement to Be Generous

8 We want you to know, brothers and sisters,^b about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; **2** for during a severe ordeal of

^a Gk lacks *in your hearts*

^b Gk *brothers*

Read 2 Corinthians 8

When commitments are made, they need to be tested for genuineness and durability. Paul describes Titus as tested and true, as his partner and co-worker.

Reflect: The road to hell may be paved with good intentions, but without good intentions nothing is likely to be achieved. Good outcomes result from pursuing what is good and true.

Pray: In addition to being disposed toward what is good, we need strength for endurance. We must rely upon God's graciousness both as a model and as a pillar for our commitment.

Act: Seek out support for doing what is good and right. When our commitments are shared we have greater likelihood of success.

affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the privilege^a of sharing in this ministry to the saints—⁵ and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, ⁶ so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking^b among you. ⁷ Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.^b

⁸ I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. ⁹ For you know the generous act^d of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. ¹⁰ And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something—¹¹ now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. ¹² For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. ¹³ I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between ¹⁴ your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. ¹⁵ As it is written,

“The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.”

Commendation of Titus

¹⁶ But thanks be to God who put in the heart of Titus the same eagerness for you that I myself have. ¹⁷ For he not only accepted our appeal, but since he is more eager than ever, he is going to you of his own accord. ¹⁸ With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his proclaiming the good news;^e ¹⁹ and not only that, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us while we are administering this generous undertaking^b for the glory of the Lord himself^f and to show our goodwill. ²⁰ We intend that no one should blame us about this generous gift that we are administering, ²¹ for we intend to do what is right not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of others. ²² And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found eager in many matters, but who is now more eager than ever be-

^a Gk *grace*

^b Gk *this grace*

^c Other ancient authorities read *your love for us*

^d Gk *the grace*

^e Or *the gospel*

^f Other ancient authorities lack *himself*

cause of his great confidence in you. ²³ As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker in your service; as for our brothers, they are messengers^a of the churches, the glory

of Christ. ²⁴ Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.

Read 2 Corinthians 9

Sending a team of brothers ahead to arrange in advance for a collection for the poor, Paul encourages the Corinthians to be generous and mindful of the appropriateness as well as need for their gifts.

Reflect: Generosity of spirit often requires generosity from our resources. Lip service isn't sufficient.

Pray: In your prayer, ask for the grace of discernment as well as the energy and commitment to be truly generous.

Act: Resolve to be cheerful in your giving.

The Collection for Christians at Jerusalem

9 Now it is not necessary for me to write you about the ministry to the saints, ² for I know your eagerness, which is the subject of my boasting about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them. ³ But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you may not prove to have been empty in this case, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be; ⁴ otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—in this undertaking.^b ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion.

⁶ The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. ⁹ As it is written, “He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness^c endures forever.”

¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.^c ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; ¹² for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Paul Defends His Ministry

10 I myself, Paul, appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I

^a Gk *apostles*

^b Other ancient authorities add *of boasting*

^c Or *benevolence*

Read 2 Corinthians 10

Paul's admonitions to the Corinthians must be taken as coming from the heart as well as from his apostleship, which he bears with pride and commitment.

Reflect: In being true to ourselves, we must acknowledge our skills and abilities and use them effectively. There is no merit in denying who we are or what we can do. Still, we recognize as well where those talents came from and acknowledge the giver as we use the gift.

Pray: Pray for the grace to recognize that everything you have comes from God, and that what you lack can be filled in with God's help.

Act: Discern your abilities and assets. Find ways to share these in meaningful ways with others.

am away!—²I ask that when I am present I need not show boldness by daring to oppose those who think we are acting according to human standards.^a ³Indeed, we live as human beings,^b but we do not wage war according to human standards;^a ⁴for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human,^c but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments ⁵and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ. ⁶We are ready to punish every disobedience when your obedience is complete.

⁷Look at what is before your eyes. If you are confident that you belong to Christ, remind yourself of this, that just as you belong to Christ, so also do we. ⁸Now, even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it. ⁹I do not want to seem as though I am trying to frighten you with my letters. ¹⁰For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible." ¹¹Let such people understand that what we say by letter when absent, we will also do when present.

¹²We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they do not show good sense. ¹³We, however, will not boast beyond limits, but will keep within the field that God has assigned to us, to reach out even as far as you. ¹⁴For we were not overstepping our limits when we reached you; we were the first to come all the way to you with the good news^d of Christ. ¹⁵We do not boast beyond limits, that is, in the labors of others; but our hope is that, as your faith increases, our sphere of action among you may be greatly enlarged, ¹⁶so that we may proclaim the good news^d in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in someone else's sphere of action. ¹⁷"Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." ¹⁸For it is not those who commend themselves that are approved, but those whom the Lord commends.

Paul and the False Apostles

11 I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! ²I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. ³But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure^e devotion to Christ. ⁴For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a

^a Gk according to the flesh

^b Gk in the flesh

^c Gk fleshly

^d Or the gospel

^e Other ancient authorities lack and pure

Read 2 Corinthians 11

Paul is reluctant to ask for support from those he serves in his apostolic mission. Nevertheless, support comes from generous people who are willing to underwrite his further missionary activities. When judging his apostolic service, people should know that he acts with integrity and dedication, no matter how foolish he may seem. He has proven himself through having endured extreme hardships in the cause of righteousness.

Reflect: At times we have to pay the price for our personal commitments. It is at such times that we can take stock of the extent of our dedication.

Pray: We know the price that Jesus and his apostles paid for the commitment they made. We too have made a faith commitment, and it is through prayer that we will find the strength to honor and live out our commitment.

Act: We need to question those who attack people who dedicate themselves to doing what is right and just. Our silence aids the prejudiced, the bullies, and the exploiters.

different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. ⁵ I think that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. ⁶ I may be untrained in speech, but not in knowledge; certainly in every way and in all things we have made this evident to you.

⁷ Did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I proclaimed God's good news^a to you free of charge? ⁸ I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. ⁹ And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for my needs were supplied by the friends^b who came from Macedonia. So I refrained and will continue to refrain from burdening you in any way. ¹⁰ As the truth of Christ is in me, this boast of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. ¹¹ And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

¹² And what I do I will also continue to do, in order to deny an opportunity to those who want an opportunity to be recognized as our equals in what they boast about. ¹³ For such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness. Their end will match their deeds.

Paul's Sufferings as an Apostle

¹⁶ I repeat, let no one think that I am a fool; but if you do, then accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. ¹⁷ What I am saying in regard to this boastful confidence, I am saying not with the Lord's authority, but as a fool; ¹⁸ since many boast according to human standards,^c I will also boast. ¹⁹ For you gladly put up with fools, being wise yourselves! ²⁰ For you put up with it when someone makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or gives you a slap in the face. ²¹ To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!

But whatever anyone dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. ²³ Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman—I am a better one: with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city,

^a Gk the gospel of God

^b Gk brothers

^c Gk according to the flesh

danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters;^a ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. ²⁸ And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant?

³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus (blessed be he forever!) knows that I do not lie. ³² In Damascus, the governor^b under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to^c seize me, ³³ but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall,^d and escaped from his hands.

Read 2 Corinthians 12

Paul boasts in having been being called, even if his service can be criticized or faulted. Some may call him foolish, but there is no question that he serves with a heart firm and true.

Reflect: Dismissive ridicule can destroy even the best of people. It is easier to undermine than to instill confidence. Ridicule rarely produces a fair assessment of people.

Pray: Prayerful reflection on the good and the true can help in the development of a discerning heart.

Act: Seek to make fair assessments and avoid undermining those who pursue good goals.

Paul's Visions and Revelations

12 It is necessary to boast; nothing is to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. ² I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. ³ And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows—⁴ was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. ⁵ On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. ⁶ But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, ⁷ even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep^e me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated.^f ⁸ Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, ⁹ but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power^g is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

Paul's Concern for the Corinthian Church

¹¹ I have been a fool! You forced me to it. Indeed you should have been the ones commending me, for I am not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing. ¹² The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works. ¹³ How have you been worse off than the other churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!

¹⁴ Here I am, ready to come to you this third time. And I will not be a burden, because I do not want what is yours but you; for children ought not to lay up for

^a Gk *brothers*

^b Gk *ethnarch*

^c Other ancient authorities read *and wanted to*

^d Gk *through the wall*

^e Other ancient authorities read *To keep*

^f Other ancient authorities lack *to keep me from being too elated*

^g Other ancient authorities read *my power*

their parents, but parents for their children. ¹⁵ I will most gladly spend and be spent for you. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? ¹⁶ Let it be assumed that I did not burden you. Nevertheless (you say) since I was crafty, I took you in by deceit. ¹⁷ Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? ¹⁸ I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Titus did not take advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves with the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?

¹⁹ Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves be-

fore you? We are speaking in Christ before God. Everything we do, beloved, is for the sake of building you up. ²⁰ For I fear that when I come, I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish; I fear that there may perhaps be quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. ²¹ I fear that when I come again, my God may humble me before you, and that I may have to mourn over many who previously sinned and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and licentiousness that they have practiced.

Read 2 Corinthians 13

As Jesus was crucified in his human weakness, he was raised by God's divine power. So, the apostle must acknowledge human weakness but trust in divine strength to achieve a successful outcome.

Reflect: We need to distinguish between what our limited strength can achieve and the power that God brings to the tasks we face. Working with others, bonded by the grace of God's calling, we will achieve much more than we could by working alone.

Pray: Seeking peace and reconciliation is a goal that we can pursue with an absolute assurance of God's support.

Act: Discern what is benevolent, seek guidance and support, and know that God's favor will provide strength for the endeavor.

Further Warning

13 This is the third time I am coming to you. "Any charge must be sustained by the evidence of two or three witnesses." ² I warned those who sinned previously and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again, I will not be lenient—³ since you desire proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful in you. ⁴ For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we are weak in him,^a but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.

⁵ Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test! ⁶ I hope you will find out that we have not failed. ⁷ But we pray to God that you may not do anything wrong—not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. ⁸ For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. ⁹ For we rejoice when we are weak and you are strong. This is what we pray for, that you may become perfect. ¹⁰ So I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come, I may not have to be severe in using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

Final Greetings and Benediction

¹¹ Finally, brothers and sisters,^b farewell.^c Put things in order, listen to my appeal,^d agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹² Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

¹³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of^e the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

^a Other ancient authorities read *with him*

^b Gk *brothers*

^c Or *rejoice*

^d Or *encourage one another*

^e Or *and the sharing in*

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