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COMMENTARY

**DARBY'S SYNOPSIS OF THE
BOOKS OF THE BIBLE
PART 2: NEW TESTAMENT**

by John Nelson Darby

Books For The Ages
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John Nelson Darby, 1800-1882

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2 CORINTHIANS

The apostle writes the second Epistle to the Corinthians under the influence of the consolations of Christ — consolations experienced when the troubles which came upon him in Asia were at their height; and renewed at the moment when he wrote his letter, by the good news which Titus had brought him from Corinth — consolations which (now that he is happy about them) he imparts to the Corinthians; who, by grace, had been their source in the last instance.

The first letter had awakened their conscience, and had re-established the fear of God in their heart, and integrity in their walk. The sorrowing heart of the apostle was revived by hearing this good news. The state of the Corinthians had cast him down and a little removed from his heart the feelings produced by the consolations with which Jesus filled it during his trials at Ephesus. How various and complicated are the exercises of him who serves Christ and cares for souls! The spiritual restoration of the Corinthians, by dissipating Paul's anguish, had renewed the joy of these consolations, which the tidings of their misconduct had interrupted. He afterwards returns to this subject of his sufferings at Ephesus; and develops, in a remarkable way, the power of the life by which he lived in Christ.

He addresses all the saints of that country, as well as those in the city of Corinth, which was its capital; and, being led by the Holy Ghost to write according to the real sentiments which that Spirit produced in him, he at once places himself in the midst of the consolations which flowed into his heart, in order to acknowledge in them the God who poured them into his tried and exercised spirit.

Nothing more touching than the work of the Spirit in the apostle's heart. The mixture of gratitude and worship towards God, of joy in the consolations of Christ, and of affection for those on whose account he now rejoiced, has a beauty entirely inimitable by the mind of man. Its simplicity and its truth do but enhance the excellence and exalted character of this divine work in a human heart. "Blessed be God, even the Father of

our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; or whether we be comforted it is for your consolation and salvation.” Blessing God for the consolations which he had received, content to suffer, because his participation in suffering encouraged the faith of the Corinthians who suffered, by showing them the path ordained of God for the most excellent, he pours into their hearts the consolation of his own, as soon as comfort comes to him from God. His first thought (and it is always so with one who realizes his dependence on God, and who abides in his presence — see Genesis 24) is to bless God, and to acknowledge Him as the source of all consolation. The Christ, whom he has found both in the sufferings and in the consolation, turns his heart immediately to the beloved members of His body.

Mark at once the perversity of man’s heart and the patience of God. In the midst of sufferings for the sake of Christ, they could take part in the sin that dishonored His name — a sin unknown among the Gentiles. In spite of this sin God would not deprive them of the testimony, which those sufferings gave them, of the truth of their Christianity — sufferings which assured the apostle that the Corinthians would enjoy the consolations of Christ, which accompanied sufferings for His sake. It is beautiful to see how grace lays hold of the good, in order to conclude that the evil will surely be corrected, instead of discrediting the good because of the evil. Paul was near Christ — the source of strength.

He continues by presenting, experimentally, the doctrine of the power of life in Christ,* which had its development and its strength in death to all that is temporal, to all that links us with the old creation, to mortal life itself. He then touches upon almost every subject that had occupied him in the first epistle, but with an unburdened heart, although with a firmness that desired their good, and the glory of God, let it cost himself what sorrow it might.

[* The beginning of this Epistle presents the experimental power of that which is doctrinally taught in Romans 5:12 to chap. 8, and is extremely instructive

in this respect. It is not so much Colossians and Ephesians; the practical fruit of the doctrine there is the display of God's own character. However we have in a measure what is taught in Colossians carried out.]

Observe here the admirable connection between the personal circumstances of God's laborers, and the work to which they are called, and even the circumstances of that work. The first epistle had produced that salutary effect on the Corinthians to which the apostle, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, had destined it. Their conscience had been awakened, and they had become zealous against the evil in proportion to the depth of their fall. This is always the effect of the work of the Spirit, when the conscience of the Christian who has fallen is really touched. The apostle's heart can open with joy to their complete and sincere obedience. Meanwhile he had himself passed through terrible trials, so that he had despaired of life; and he had been able through grace to realise the power of that life in Christ which gained the victory over death, and could pour abundantly into the hearts of the Corinthians the consolations of that life, which were to raise them up again. There is a God who conducts all things in the service of His saints — the sorrow through which they pass, as all the rest.

Observe, also, that he does not need to begin by reminding the Corinthians, as he had done in the first epistle, of their calling and their privileges as sanctified in Christ. He breaks out in thanksgiving to the God of all consolation. Holiness is brought forward when it is practically wanting among the saints. If they are walking in holiness, they enjoy God, and they speak of Him. The way in which the various parts of the work of God are linked together, in and by means of the apostle, is seen in the expressions that flow from his grateful heart. God comforts him in his sufferings; and the consolation is such that it is suited to comfort others, in whatsoever affliction it may be; for it is God Himself who is the consolation, by pouring into the heart His love and His communion, as it is enjoyed in Christ.

If afflicted, it was for the comfort of others by the sight of similar afflictions in those who were honored of God, and the consciousness of unison in the same blessed cause, and relationship with God (the heart being touched and brought back to these affections by this means). If comforted, it was to comfort others with the consolations that he himself enjoyed in affliction. And the afflictions of the Corinthians were a

testimony to him that, however great their moral weakness had been, they had part in those consolations which he enjoyed himself, and which he knew to be so deep, so real, which he knew to be of God, and a token of His favor. Precious bonds of grace! And how true it is in our little measure, that the sufferings of those who labor re-animate on the one hand love towards them, and on the other re-assure the laborer as to the sincerity of the objects of his christian affection, by presenting them anew to him in the love of Christ. The affliction of the apostle had helped him in writing to the Corinthians with the grief that was suitable to their condition; but what faith was that which occupied itself with such energy and such entire forgetfulness of self about the sad state of others, amid such circumstances as then surrounded the apostle! His strength was in Christ.

His heart expands towards the Corinthians. We see that his affections flow freely — a thing of great value. He reckons on the interest they will take in the account of his sufferings; he is sure that they will rejoice in what God has given him, even as he rejoices in them as the fruit of his labors, and that they will acknowledge what he is; and he is content to be a debtor to their prayers with regard to the gifts displayed in himself, so that his success in the gospel was to them as a personal interest of their own. He could truly demand their prayers, for his course had been run in unmingled sincerity, and especially among them. This leads him to explain to them the motives of his movements, of which he had not spoken to them before, referring these movements to his own plans and motives, subject to the Lord. He is always master (under Christ) of his movements; but he can now speak freely of that which had decided him, which the Corinthians were not before in a state to know. He wishes to satisfy them, to explain things to them, so as to demonstrate his perfect love for them; and, at the same time, to maintain his entire liberty in Christ, and not make himself responsible to them for what he did. He was their servant in affliction, but free to be so, because he was amenable only to Christ, although he satisfied their conscience (because he served Christ) if their conscience was upright.

His own conscience however was clear; and he only wrote to them that which they knew and acknowledged, and, as he trusted, would acknowledge to the end; so that they should rejoice in him, as he in them.

But had there been any lightness in his decisions, since, as he now informed them, he had intended to visit them on his way to Macedonia (where he was at the moment of writing this letter), and then a second time on his return from that country? In no wise; they were not intentions lightly formed, according to the flesh, and then abandoned. It was his affection, it was to spare them. He could not bear the idea of going with a rod to those whom he loved. Observe in what manner, although showing his affection and tenderness, he maintains his authority; and they needed the exercise of this authority. And while reminding them of his authority, he displays all his tenderness. They were not Cretans, perhaps, whom it was necessary to rebuke sharply; but there was a laxity of morals which required delicacy and care lest they should become restive, but also authority and a bridle, lest, in giving them liberty, they should fall into all sorts of bad ways. But he turns immediately to the certainty which was in Christ, the basis of all his own. He would not press too much upon the chord he had touched at the beginning. He lets his authority be known as that which might have been exercised, and he does not employ it. The groundwork of Christianity was needed, in order to put their souls into a condition to judge themselves healthily. They were quite disposed, through the intrigues of false teachers and their habit of schools of philosophy, to separate from the apostle, and, in spirit, from Christ. He brings them back to the foundation, to the sure doctrine that was common to all those that had labored among them at the beginning. He would give Satan no occasion to detach them from him (see chap 2:11).

He establishes therefore the great principles of christian joy and assurance. I do not speak of the blood, the only source of peace of conscience before God as a judge, but of the manner in which we are placed by the power of God in His presence, in the position and state into which that power introduces us according to the counsels of His grace. Simple certainty was in Christ, according to that which had been said. It was not first Yea, and then Nay: the yea remained always yea — a principle of immense importance, but for the establishment of which there was needed the power and the firmness and even perfection, and the wisdom, of God; for to assure and make stedfast that which was not wise and perfect would certainly not have been worthy of Him.

It will be seen that the question was, whether Paul had lightly changed his purpose. He says that he had not; but he leaves the thought of that which concerned him personally to speak of that which pre-occupied his thoughts — of Christ; and to him, in fact, to live was Christ. But there was a difficulty to solve, when the immutability of God's promises was the question. It is that we are not in a state to profit by that which was immutable on account of our weakness and inconstancy. He solves this difficulty by setting forth the mighty operations of God in grace.

There are two points therefore: the establishment of all the promises in Christ, and the enjoyment, by us, of the effect of these promises. The thing is, as we have seen, not merely to say, to promise, something; but not to change one's intentions, not to depart from what was said, but to keep one's word. Now there had been promises. God had made promises, whether to Abraham unconditionally, or to Israel at Sinai under the condition of obedience. But in Christ there was, not promises, but the Amen to God's promises, the verity and realisation of them. Whatever promises there had been on God's part, the Yea was in Him, and the Amen in Him. God has established — deposited, so to speak — the fulfillment of all His promises in the Person of Christ. Life, glory, righteousness, pardon, the gift of the Spirit, all is in Him; it is in Him that all is we — Yea and Amen. We cannot have the effect of any promise whatsoever out of Him. But this is not all: we, believers, are the objects of these counsels of God. They are to the glory of God by us.

But, in the first place, the glory of God is that of Him whoever glorifies Himself in His ways of sovereign grace towards us; for it is in these ways that He unfolds and displays what He is. The Yea and Amen therefore of the promises of God, the accomplishment and the realisation of the promises of God, for His glory by us, are in Christ.

But how can we participate in it, if all is Christ and in Christ? It is here that the Holy Ghost presents the second part of the ways of grace. We are in Christ, and we are in Him not according to the instability of the will of man, and the weakness that characterises him in his transitory and changeable works. He who was firmly established us in Christ is God Himself. The accomplishment of all the promises is in Him. Under the law, and under conditions the fulfillment of which depended on the stability of

man, the effect of the promise was never attained; the thing promised eluded the pursuit of man, because man needed to be in a state capable of attaining it by righteousness, and he was not in that state; the accomplishment of the promise therefore was always suspended; it would have its effect if — but the “if” was not accomplished, and the Yea and Amen did not come. But all that God has promised is in Christ. The second part is the “by us,” and how far we enjoy it. We are firmly established by God in Christ, in whom all the promises subsist, so that we securely possess in Him all that is promised us. But we do not enjoy it as that which subsists in our own hands.

But, further, God Himself has anointed us. We have by Jesus received the Holy Ghost. God has taken care that we should understand by the Spirit that which is freely given us in Christ. But the Spirit is given to us, according to the counsels of God, for other things than understanding merely His gifts in Christ. He who has received Him is sealed. God has marked him with His seal, even as He marked Christ with His seal when He anointed Him after His baptism by John. Moreover the Spirit becomes the earnest, in our own hearts, of that which we shall fully possess hereafter in Christ. We understand the things that are given us in the glory; we are marked by the seal of God to enjoy them; we have the earnest of them in our hearts — our affections are engaged by them. Established in Christ, we have the Holy Ghost, who seals us when we believe, to bring us into the enjoyment, even while here below, of that which is in Christ.

Having again spoken of the care which manifested his affection for them, he expresses his conviction that that which had pained him had pained them also; and this was demonstrated by the way in which they had treated the transgressor. He exhorts them to receive again and comfort the poor guilty one, who was in danger of being entirely overwhelmed by the discipline that had been exercised towards him by the mass of the Christians; adding, that if the Christians forgave him his fault, he forgave it likewise. He would not that Satan should get any advantage through this case to bring in dissension between himself and the Corinthians; for Paul well knew what the enemy aimed at, the object with which he made use of this affair.

This gives him occasion to show how much he had them always in his heart. Coming to Troas for the gospel, and a wide door being opened to him, nevertheless he could not remain there, because he had not found Titus; and he left Troas and continued his journey into Macedonia. It will be remembered that, instead of passing by the western shores of the Archipelago, in order to visit Macedonia, taking Corinth on his way, and then returning by the same route, the apostle had sent Titus with his first letter, and had gone by way of Asia Minor, or the eastern coast of the sea, which led him to Troas, where Titus was to meet him. But not finding him at Troas, and being uneasy with regard to the Corinthians, he could not be satisfied with there being a work to be done at Troas, but journeyed on to meet Titus and repaired to Macedonia. There he found him, as we shall see presently. But this thought of having left Troas affected him, for in fact it is a serious thing, and painful to the heart, to miss an opportunity of preaching Christ, and the more so when people are disposed to receive Him, or at least to hear of Him. To have left Troas was indeed a proof of his affection for the Corinthians; and the apostle recalls the circumstance as a strong demonstration of that affection. He comforts himself for having missed this work of evangelisation by the thought that after all God led him as in triumph (not “caused him to triumph”). The gospel which he carried with him, the testimony of Christ, was like the perfume caused by burning aromatic drugs in triumphal processions — a token of death to some of the captives, of life to others. And this perfume of the gospel was pure in his hands. The apostle was not like some who adulterated the wine they furnished; he labored in christian integrity before God.

These words give rise to an exposition of the gospel in contrast with the law, which the false teachers mixed up with the gospel. He gives this exposition with the most touching appeal to the heart of the Corinthians, who had been converted through his means. Did he begin speaking of his ministry to commend himself anew, or did he need, as others, letters of commendation to them or from them? They were his letters of commendation, the striking proof of the power of his ministry, a proof which he carried always in his heart, ready to bring it forward on every occasion. He can say this now, being happy in their obedience. And why did they serve as a letter in his favor? Because in their faith they were the living expression of his doctrine. They were Christ’s letter of

commendation, which, by means of his ministry, had been written on the fleshy tables of the heart by the power of the Holy Ghost, as the law had been graven on tables of stone by God Himself.

This was Paul's confidence with regard to his ministry; his competency came from God for the ministry of the new covenant, not of the letter (not even the letter of this covenant, any more than the letter of anything else) but of the Spirit, the true force of the purpose of God, as the Spirit gave it. For the letter kills, as a rule imposed on man; the Spirit quickens, as the power of God in grace — the purpose of God communicated to the heart of man by the power of God, who imparted it to him that he might enjoy it. Now the subject of this ministry brought out the difference between it and the ministry of the law yet more strongly. The law, graven on stones, had been introduced with glory, although it was a thing that was to pass away as a means of relation between God and men. It was a ministry of death, for they were only to live by keeping it. Nor could it be otherwise ordered than on this principle. A law was to be kept; but man being already a sinner by nature and by will, having desires which the law forbade, that law could only be death to him — it was a ministry of death. It was a ministry of condemnation because the authority of God came in to give to the law the sanction of condemnation against every soul that should break it. It was a ministry of death and of condemnation because man was a sinner.

And observe, here, that to mingle grace with the law changes nothing in its effect, except to aggravate the penalty that results from it by aggravating the guilt of him who violated the law, inasmuch as he violated it in spite of the goodness and the grace. For it was still the law, and man was called to satisfy the responsibility under which the law placed him. "The soul that sinneth," said Jehovah to Moses, "will I blot out of my book." The figure used by the apostle shows that he is speaking of the second descent of Moses from Mount Sinai, when he had heard the name of Jehovah proclaimed, merciful and gracious. The face of Moses did not shine the first time that he came down: he broke the tables before he went into the camp. The second time God made all His goodness pass before him, and the face of Moses reflected the glory which he had seen, partial as it may have been. But Israel could not bear this reflection; for how can it be born, when it must judge the secrets of the heart after all? For, though grace had

been shown in sparing on Moses' intercession, the exigency of the law was still maintained, and every one was to suffer the consequences of his own disobedience. Thus the character of the law prevented Israel from understanding even the glory which was in the ordinances, as a figure of that which was better and permanent; and the whole system ordained by the hand of Moses was veiled to their eyes, and the people fell under the letter, even in that part of the law which was a testimony of things to be spoken afterwards. It was according to the wisdom of God that it should be so; for in this way all the effect of the law, as brought to bear on the heart and conscience of man, has been fully developed.

There are many Christians who make a law of Christ Himself, and in thinking of His love as a fresh motive to oblige them to love Him, think of it only as an obligation, a very great increase to the measure of the obligation which lies upon them, an obligation which they feel bound to satisfy. That is to say, they are still under the law, and consequently under condemnation.

But the ministry which the apostle fulfilled was not this; it was the ministry of righteousness and of the Spirit, not as requiring righteousness in order to stand before God, but as revealing it. Christ was this righteousness, made such on God's part for us; and we are made the righteousness of God in Him. The gospel proclaimed righteousness on God's part, instead of requiring it from man according to the law. Now the Holy Ghost could be the seal of that righteousness. He could come down upon the man Christ, because He was perfectly approved of God; He was righteous — the righteous One. He came down upon us, because we are made the righteousness of God in Christ. Thus it was the ministry of the Spirit; His power wrought in it. He was bestowed when that which it announced was received by faith; and with the Spirit they also received understanding of the mind and purposes of God, as they were revealed in the Person of a glorified Christ, in whom the righteousness of God was revealed and subsisted eternally before Him.

Thus the apostle unites, in the self-same thought, the mind of God in the word according to the Spirit, the glory of Christ who had been hidden in it under the letter, and the Holy Ghost Himself, who gave its force, revealed that glory, and, by dwelling and working in the believer, enables him to

enjoy it. Thus, where the Spirit was, there was liberty; they were no longer under the yoke of the law, of the fear of death, and of condemnation. They were in Christ before God, in peace before Him, according to perfect love and that favor which is better than life, even as it shone upon Christ, without a veil, according to the grace which reigns by righteousness. When it is said, "Now the Lord is that spirit," allusion is made to verse 6; verses 7-16 is a parenthesis. Christ glorified is the true thought of the Spirit which God had previously hidden under figures. And here is the practical result: they beheld the Lord with open (that is, with unveiled) face; they were able to do it. The glory of the face of Moses judged the thoughts and intents of the hearts, causing terror by threatening the disobedient and the sinner with death and condemnation. Who could stand in the presence of God? But the glory of the face of Jesus, a man on high, is the proof that all the sins of those who behold it are blotted out; for He who is there bore them all before He ascended, and He needed to put them all away in order to enter into that glory. We contemplate that glory by the Spirit, who has been given us in virtue of Christ's having ascended into it. He did not say, "I will go up; peradventure I shall make atonement." He made the atonement and went up. Therefore we gaze upon it with joy, we love to behold it: each ray that we see is the proof that in the eyes of God our sins are no more. Christ has been made sin for us; He is in the glory. Now, in thus beholding the glory with affection, with intelligence, taking delight in it, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the power of the Holy Ghost, who enables us to realise and to enjoy these things; and in this is christian progress. Thus the assembly too becomes the epistle of Christ.

The allusion made at the same time to the Jews at the end of the parenthesis, where the apostle makes a comparison between the two systems, is most touching. The veil, he says, is taken away in Christ. Nothing is now veiled. The glorious substance is accomplished. The veil is on the heart of the Jews, when they read the Old Testament. Now every time that Moses entered into the tabernacle to speak to God, or to hear Him, he took off his veil. Thus, says the apostle, when Israel shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.

There is but one more remark to be made. "The things that remain"* are the subject the gospel treats of, not the ministry which announces it — the

glory of the Person of Jesus Christ, the substance of that which the Jewish ordinances represented only in figure.

[* See chapter 3:11.]

The apostle returns to the subject of his ministry in connection with his sufferings, showing that this doctrine of a Christ victorious over death, truly received into the heart, makes us victorious over all fear of death, and over all the sufferings that are linked with the earthen vessel in which this treasure is carried.

Having received this ministry of righteousness and of the Spirit, the foundation of which was Christ glorified beheld with open face, he not only used great boldness of speech, but his zeal was not abated, nor his faith enfeebled by difficulties. Moreover, with the courage which through grace was imparted to him by this doctrine, he held back nothing, weakened nothing of this glory; he did not corrupt the doctrine; he manifested it in all the purity and brightness in which he had received it. It was the word of God; such as he had received it, so they received it from him, the unaltered word of God; the apostle thus approving himself, commending himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. All could not say this. The glory of the Lord Jesus was set forth by Paul's preaching in all the clearness and brightness of its revelation to himself. If, therefore, the good news which he proclaimed was hidden, it was not as in the case of Moses; not only was the glory of the Lord fully revealed with open face in Christ, it was also manifested without a veil in the pure preaching of the apostle. This is the link established between the glory accomplished in the Person of Christ, as the result of the work of redemption, and the ministry which, by the power of the Holy Ghost acting in the instrument chosen of the Lord, proclaimed this glory to the world, and made men responsible for the reception of the truth — responsible for submission to this glorious Christ, who announced Himself in grace from heaven, as having established righteousness for the sinner, and as inviting him to come freely and enjoy the love and the blessing of God.

Now there was no other means of coming to God. To set up any other would be to put aside and declare imperfect and insufficient that which Christ had done, and that which Christ was, and to produce something

better than He. But this was not possible: for that which he announced was the manifestation of the glory of God in the Person of the Son, in connection with the revelation of perfect love, and of the making good perfect and divine righteousness; so that the pure light was the happy abode of those who by this means entered into it. There could not be anything more, unless there was something more than God in the fullness of His grace and of His perfection. If then this revelation was hidden, it was in the case of those who were lost, whose minds were blinded by the God of this world, lest the light of the good news of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine into their hearts.

This is translated “glorious gospel.” But we have seen that the fact of Christ’s being in glory, the glory of God being seen in His face, was the special subject of the preceding chapter. To that the apostle here alludes as characterising the gospel which he preached. It was the proof of the sin Christ had born being utterly put away, of victory over death, of the introduction of man into the presence of God in glory according to God’s eternal counsels of love. It was withal the full display of the divine glory in man according to grace, which the Holy Ghost takes to show to us in order to form us after the same likeness. It was the glorious ministration of righteousness, and of the Spirit, which opened the free way for man to God, even into the holiest, in entire liberty.

When Christ was thus proclaimed, there was either the joyful acceptance of the good news, submission of heart to the gospel, or else the blinding of Satan. For Paul did not preach himself (which others did not fail to do) but Jesus Christ the Lord, and himself their servant for Jesus’ sake. Because in fact (and this is another important principle) the shining forth of this gospel of the glory of Christ is the work of God’s power — of the same God who, by His word alone, caused the light instantaneously to shine out of the midst of darkness. He had shone into the apostle’s heart to give forth the light of the knowledge of His own glory in the face of Jesus Christ. The gospel shone forth by a divine operation similar to that which had, in the beginning, caused the light to shine out of darkness by a single word. The heart of the apostle was the vessel, the lamp, in which this light had been kindled to shine in the midst of the world before the eyes of men. It was the revelation of the glory which shone in the Person of Christ by the power of the Spirit of God in the heart of the apostle, in order that this

glory should shine out in the gospel before the world. It was the power of God which wrought in it, in the same manner as when light was caused by the word "Let there be light! and there was light." But the treasure of this revelation of the glory was deposited, in earthen vessels, in order that power which wrought in it should be of God alone, and not that of the instruments. In all, the weakness of the instrument showed itself in the trying circumstances which God, for this very purpose (among others), made the testimony pass through. Nevertheless the power of God was manifested in it so much the more evidently, from the vessel's showing its weakness in the difficulties that beset its path. The testimony was rendered, the work was done, the result was produced, even when man broke down and found himself without resource in presence of the opposition raised up against truth.

Afflicted by the tribulation, this was the vessel's part; not straitened, for God was with the vessel. Without means of escape, that was the vessel; yet not without resource, for God was with it. Persecuted, that was the vessel; not forsaken, for God was with it. Cast down, that was the vessel; but not destroyed, for God was with it. Always bearing about in his body the dying* of the Lord Jesus (made like Him, in that the man as such was reduced to nothing), in order that the life of Jesus, which death could not touch, which has triumphed over death, should be manifested in his body, mortal as it was. The more the natural man was annihilated, the more was it evident that a power was there which was not of man. This was the principle, but it was morally realised in the heart by faith. As the Lord's servant, Paul realised in his heart the death of all that was human life, in order that the power might be purely of God through Jesus risen. But besides this, God made him realise these things by the circumstances through which he had to pass; for, as living in this world, he was always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, in order that the life of Jesus might be manifested in his mortal flesh. Thus death wrought in the apostle; what was merely of man, of nature and natural life, disappeared, in order that life in Christ, developing itself in him on the part of God and by His power, should work in the Corinthians by his means. What a ministry! A thorough trial of the human heart, a glorious calling, for a man to be thus assimilated to Christ, to be the vessel of the power of His pure life, and by means of an entire self-renunciation, even that of life itself, to be morally

like unto Jesus. What a position by grace! What a conformity to Christ! And yet in a way in which it passed through man's heart to reach man's heart (which indeed is of the essence of Christianity itself), not surely by man's strength, but God's made good in man's weakness.

[* Or rather, "putting to death."

Therefore it was that the apostle could use the language of the Spirit of Christ in the Psalms, "I believed, and therefore have I spoken." That is to say, 'At whatever cost, in spite of everything, of all the danger, all the opposition, I have spoken for God, I have born my testimony. I have had confidence enough in God to bear testimony to Him and to His truth, whatever the consequences might be, even if I had died in doing it.' That is, the apostle said, 'I have acted as Christ Himself did, because I know that He who raised up Jesus would do the same for me, and would present me, together with you, before His face in that same glory in which Christ is now in heaven, and for my testimony to which, I have suffered death like Him.' We must clearly distinguish here between Christ's sufferings for righteousness and for His work of love, and His sufferings for sin. The former it is our privilege to share with Him; in the latter He is alone.

The apostle said, "will present me with you," for, he adds, according to the heart and mind of Christ towards His own, "all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of God." And therefore it was that he did not allow himself to be discouraged; but on the contrary, if the outward man perished, the inward man was renewed day by day. For the light affliction, which was but for a moment (for such he esteemed it in view of the glory — it was but the temporary affliction of this poor dying body), worked out for him an eternal weight of glory which was beyond all the most exalted expression of human thought or language. And this renewing took place; and he was not disheartened come what might, in that he looked not at the things that are seen, which are temporal, but at the things that are not seen, which are eternal. Thus the power of the divine life, with all its consequences, was developed in his soul by faith. He knew the result of everything on God's part.

It was not only that there were things invisible and glorious. Christians had their part in them. We know, the apostle says in their name, that if this

earthly house (passing away as it is) were destroyed — and it had very nearly been the case with himself — we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Precious certainty! He knew it. Christians know it as a part of their faith. We know* a certainty which caused this glory, which he knew to be his, to be a real and practical hope in the heart by the power of the Holy Ghost — a reality present by faith. He saw this glory as that which belonged to him, with which he was to be invested. And therefore also he groaned in his tabernacle, not (as so many do) because the desires of his flesh could not be fulfilled; and because satisfaction of heart cannot be found for man, even when those desires are fulfilled; nor because he was uncertain whether he was accepted, and the glory his or not; but because the body was a hindrance, tending to depress the divine life, to deprive him of the full enjoyment of that glory which the new life saw and desired, and which Paul saw and admired as his own. It was a burden, this earthly human nature; it was no distress to him that he could not satisfy its desires; his distress was to find himself still in this mortal nature, because he saw something better.

[* This “we know” is in fact a technical expression for the portion of Christians, known to them as such. “We know that the law is spiritual,” “we know that the Son of God is come,” and so on.]

Not however that he desired to be unclothed, for he saw in Christ glorified a power of life capable of swallowing up and annihilating every trace of mortality; for the fact that Christ was on high in the glory was the result of this power, and at the same time the manifestation of the heavenly portion that belonged to them that were His. Therefore the apostle desired, not to be unclothed but clothed upon, and that that which was mortal in him should be absorbed by life, that the mortality that characterised his earthly human nature should disappear before the power of life which he saw in Jesus, and which was his life. That power was such that there was no need to die. And this was not a hope which had no other foundation than the desire awakened by a view of the glory might produce: God had formed Christians for this very thing. He who was a Christian was formed for this, and not for anything else. It was God Himself who had formed him for this — this glory, in which Christ, the last Adam, was at the right hand of God. Precious assurance! Happy confidence in the grace and the mighty work of God! Ineffable joy to be able to attribute all to God Himself, to be thus certified of His love, to glorify Him as the God of love — our Benefactor,

to know that it was His work, and that we rest upon a finished work — the work of God. It is not here resting upon a work done for us; but the blessed consciousness that God has wrought us for this: we are His workmanship.

Nevertheless something else was necessary to our enjoying this, since we are not yet glorified in fact; and God has given it — the earnest of the Spirit.

Thus, we have the glory before us, we are wrought for it by God Himself, and we have the earnest of the Spirit till we are there, and know that Christ has so entirely overcome death that, if the time were come, we should be transformed into glory without dying at all. Mortality would be swallowed up of life. This is our portion through grace in the last Adam, through the power of life in which Christ was raised.

But next the apostle will treat of the effect as to the natural portion of the first fallen man, death and judgment; for the testimony here is very complete.

What then is the effect of the possession of life in Christ as applied to death and judgment, the two natural objects of men's fears, the fruit of sin? If our bodies are not yet transformed; and if that which is mortal is not yet swallowed up, we are equally full of confidence, because, being formed for glory, and Christ (who has manifested the victorious power that opened the path of heaven to Him) being our life, if we should leave this tabernacle and be absent from the body before we are clothed upon with the glory, this life remains untouched; it has already in Jesus triumphed over all these effects of the power of death. We should be present with the Lord; for we walk by faith, not by the sight of these excellent things. Therefore we prefer to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. For this reason we seek to be well-pleasing to Him, whether we are found absent from this body, or present in this body, when Christ shall come to take us to Himself and make us share His glory.

And this leads on to the second point — judgment. For we must all be manifested before the tribunal of Christ, in order that each may receive according to that which he shall have done in the body, be it good or evil. A happy and precious thought, after all, solemn as it may be; for, if we

have really understood grace, if we are standing in grace, if we know what God is, all love for us, all light for us, we shall like to be in the full light. It is a blessed deliverance to be in it. It is a burden, an encumbrance, to have anything concealed, and although we have had much sin in us that no one knows (perhaps even some that we have committed, and which it would be no profit for any one to know), it is a comfort — if we know the perfect love of God — that all should be in perfect light since He is there. This is the case by faith and for faith, wherever there is solid peace: we are before God as He is, and as we are — all sin in ourselves alas! except so far as He has wrought in us by quickening us; and He is all love in this light in which we are placed; for God is light, and He reveals Himself. Without the knowledge of grace, we fear the light: it cannot be otherwise. But knowing grace, knowing that sin has been put away as regards the glory of God, and that the offense is no longer before His eyes, we like to be in the light, it is joy to us, it is that which the heart needs, without which it cannot be satisfied, when there is the life of the new man. Its nature is to love the light, to love purity in all that perfection which does not admit the evil of darkness, which shuts out all that is not itself. Now to be thus in the light, and to be manifested, is the same thing, for the light makes everything manifest.

We are in the light by faith when the conscience is in the presence of God. We shall be according to the perfection of that light when we appear before the tribunal of Christ. I have said that it is a solemn thing — and so it is, for everything is judged according to that light; but it is that which the heart loves, because — thanks to our God! — we are light in Christ.

But there is more than this. When the Christian is thus manifested, he is already glorified, and, perfectly like Christ, has then no remains of the evil nature in which he sinned. And he now can look back at all the way God has led him in grace, helped, lifted up, kept from falling, not withdrawn His eyes from the righteous. He knows as he is known. What a tale of grace and mercy! If I look back now, my sins do not rest on my conscience; though I have horror of them, they are put away behind God's back. I am the righteousness of God in Christ, but what a sense of love and patience, and goodness and grace! How much more perfect then, when all is before me! Surely there is great gain as to light and love, in giving an account of ourselves to God; and not a trace remains of the evil in us. We

are like Christ. If a person fears to have all out thus before God, I do not believe he is free in soul as to righteousness — being the righteousness of God in Christ, not fully in the light. And we have not to be judged for anything: Christ has put it all away.

But there is another idea in the passage — retribution. The apostle does not speak of judgment on persons, because the saints are included, and Christ has stood in their place for all that regards the judgment of their persons: “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.” They do not come into judgment. But they shall be manifested before His tribunal, and receive that which they have done in the body. The good deserves nothing: they received that by which they have wrought what is good — grace produced it in them; nevertheless they shall receive its reward. What they have done is counted as their own act. If, by neglecting grace and the witness of the Spirit in them, the fruits which He would have produced have been turned aside, they will bear the consequences. It is not that, in this case, God will have forsaken them; it is not that the Holy Ghost will not act in them with regard to the condition they are in; but it will be in their conscience that He acts, judging the flesh which has prevented the man’s bearing the natural fruit of His presence and operation in the new man. So that the Holy Ghost will have done all that is necessary with respect to their state of heart; and the perfect counsel of God with regard to the person will have been accomplished, His patience manifested, His wisdom, His ways in governing, the care which He deigns to take of each one individually in His most condescending love. Each one will have his place, as it was prepared for him of the Father. But the natural fruit of the presence and operation of the Holy Ghost in a soul which has (or, according to the advantages it has enjoyed, ought to have had) a certain measure of light, will not have been produced. It will be seen what it was that prevented. It will judge, according to the judgment of God, all that was good and evil in itself, with a solemn reverence for that which God is, and a fervent adoration on account of what He has been for us. The perfect light will be appreciated; the ways of God known and understood in all their perfection, by the application of the perfect light to the whole course of our life and of His dealings with us, in which we shall thoroughly recognise that love — perfect, sovereign above all things — has reigned, with ineffable grace.

Thus the majesty of God will have been maintained by His judgment, at the same time that the perfection and tenderness of His dealings will be the eternal recollection of our souls. Light without cloud or darkness will be understood in its own perfection. To understand it is to be in it and to enjoy it. And light is God Himself. How wonderful to be thus manifested! What love is that which in its perfect wisdom, in its marvelous ways overruling all evil, could bring such beings as we are to enjoy this unclouded light — beings knowing good and evil (the natural prerogative of those only of whom God can say “one of us”), under the yoke of the evil which they knew, and driven out by a bad conscience from the presence of God, to whom that knowledge belonged, having testimony enough in their conscience as to the judgment of God, to make them avoid Him and be miserable, but nothing to draw them to Him who alone could find a remedy! What love and holy wisdom which could bring such to the source of good, of pure happiness, in whom the power of good repels absolutely the evil which it judges!

With regard to the unrighteous, at the judgment-day they will have to answer personally for their sins, under a responsibility which rests entirely on themselves.

However great the happiness of being in the perfect light (and this happiness is complete and divine in its character), it is on the side of conscience that the subject is here presented. God maintains His majesty by the judgment which He executes, as it is written, “The Lord is known by the judgment that he executeth”: there, in His government of the world; here, final, eternal, and personal judgment. And, for my part, I believe that it is very profitable for the soul to have the judgment of God present to our minds, and the sense of the unchangeable majesty of God maintained in the conscience by this means. If we were not under grace, it would be — it ought to be — insupportable; but the maintenance of this sentiment does not contradict grace. It is indeed only under grace that it can be maintained in its truth; for who otherwise could bear the thought, for an instant, of receiving that which he had done in the body? None but he who is completely blinded.

But the authority, the holy authority of God, which asserts itself in judgment, forms a part of our relationship with Him; the maintenance of

this sentiment, associated with the full enjoyment of grace, a part of our Holy Spiritual affections. It is the fear of the Lord. It is in this sense, that "Happy is he who feareth always." If this weakens the conviction that the love of God rests fully, eternally, upon us, then we get off the only possible ground of any relation whatever with God, unless perdition could be so called. But, in the sweet and peaceful atmosphere of grace, conscience maintains its rights and its authority against the subtle encroachments of the flesh, through the sense of God's judgment, in virtue of a holiness which cannot be separated from the character of God without denying that there is a God: for if there is a God, He is holy. This sentiment engages the heart of the accepted believer, to endeavor to please the Lord in every way; and, in the sense of how solemn a thing it is for a sinner to appear before God, the love that necessarily accompanies it in a believer's heart urges him to persuade men with a view to their salvation, while maintaining his own conscience in the light. And he who is now walking in the light, whose conscience reflects that light, will not fear it in the day when it shall appear in its glory. We must be manifested; but, walking in the light in the sense of the fear of God, realising His judgment of evil, we are already manifested to God: nothing hinders the sweet and assured flow of His love. Accordingly the walk of such a one justifies itself in the end to the consciences of others; one is manifested as walking in the light.

These are therefore the two great practical principles of the ministry: to walk in the light, in the sense of God's solemn judgment for every one; and, the conscience being thus pure in the light, the sense of the judgment (which in this case cannot trouble the soul for itself, or obscure its view of the love of God) impels the heart to seek in love those who are in danger of this judgment. This connects itself with the doctrine of Christ, the Savior, through His death upon the cross; and the love of Christ constrains us, because we see that, if one died for all, it is that all were dead. This was the universal condition of souls. The apostle seeks them in order that they may live unto God by Christ. But this goes farther. First, as regards fallen man's lot, death is gain. The saint, if absent from the body, is present with the Lord. As to judgment, he owns the solemnity of it, but it does not make him tremble. He is in Christ — will be like Christ; and Christ, before whom he is to appear, has put away all the sins he had to be judged for.

The effect is the sanctifying one of bringing him fully manifested into the presence of God now. But it stimulates his love as to others, nor is it only by fear of judgment to come for them; Christ's love constrains him love manifested in death. But this proves more than the acts of sin which bring judgment: Christ died because all were dead. The Spirit of God goes to the source and spring of their whole condition, their state, not merely the fruits of an evil nature — all were dead. We find the same important instruction in John 5:24, "He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment that which applies to sins], but is passed from death unto life"; he has come out of the whole state and condition, as an already lost one, into another and different one in Christ. This is a very important aspect of the truth. And the distinction, largely developed in Romans, is found in many passages.

The work of manifestation before God in the light is already true, in so far as we have realised the light. Cannot I, being now in peace, look back at what I was before conversion, and at all my failures since my conversion, humbled but adoring the grace of God in all He has done for me, but without a thought of fear, or imputation of sin? Does not this awaken a very deep sense of all that God is in holy grace and love, in unbounded patience towards me, both keeping and helping and restoring? Such will be the case perfectly when we are manifested, when we shall know as we are known.

That this point may be still more clear, for it is an important one, let me add some further observations here. What we find in this passage is the perfect manifestation of all that a person is and has been before a throne characterised by judgment, without judgment as to the person in question being guilty. No doubt when the wicked receives the things done in the body, he is condemned. But it is not said "judged" here, because all then must be condemned. But this manifestation is exactly what brings all morally before the heart, when it is capable of judging evil for itself: were it under judgment, it could not. Freed from all fear, and in the perfect light and with the comfort of perfect love (for where we have the conscience of sin, and of its not being imputed, we have the sense, though in a humbling way, of perfect love), and at the same time the sense of authority and divine government fully made good in the soul, all is judged by the soul

itself as God judges it, and communion with Himself entered into. This is exceedingly precious.

We have to remember that, at our appearing before the judgment-seat of Christ, we are already glorified. Christ has come Himself in perfect love to fetch us; and has changed our vile body according to the resemblance of His glorious body. We are glorified and like Christ before the judgment takes place. And mark the effect on Paul. Does the thought of being manifested awaken anxiety or dread? Not the least. He realizes all the solemnity of such a process. He knows the terror of the Lord; he has it before his eyes; and what is the consequence? He sets about to persuade others who are in need of it.

There are, so to speak, two parts in God's nature and character: His righteousness, which judges everything; and His perfect love. These are one for us in Christ, ours in Christ. If indeed we realise what God is, both will have their place: but the believer in Christ is the righteousness which God, from His very nature, must have before Him on His throne, if we are to be with Him and enjoy Him. But the Christ, in the judgment-seat, before whom we are, is our righteousness. He judges by the righteousness which He is; but we are that righteousness, the righteousness of God in Him. Hence this point can raise no question in the soul, will make us adore such grace, but can raise no question, only enhance the sense we have of grace ourselves, make us understand it, as suited to man as he is, and feel the solemn and awful consequences of not having part in it, since there is such a judgment. Hence that other and indeed essential part of the divine nature, love, will work in us towards others; and, knowing the terror of the Lord, we shall persuade men. Thus Paul (it is conscience in view of that most solemn moment) possessed the righteousness which he saw in the Judge, for that which judged was His righteousness; but then he consequently seeks others earnestly, according to the work which had thus brought him near to God, to which he then turns (v. 13, 14). But this view of judgment and our complete manifestation in that day, has a present effect on the saint according to its own nature. He realizes it by faith. He is manifested. He does not fear being manifested. It will unfold all God's past ways towards him when he is in glory; but he is manifested now to God, his conscience exercised in the light. It has thus a present sanctifying power.

Observe here the assemblage of powerful motives, of pre-eminently important principles; contradictory in appearance, but which, to a soul which walks in light, instead of clashing and destroying each other, unite to give its complete and thoroughly furnished character to the christian minister and ministry.

First of all, the glory, in such a power of life, that he who realizes it does not desire death, because he sees in the power of life in Christ that which can absorb whatever in him is mortal, and he sees it with the certainty of enjoying it — such a consciousness of possessing this life (God having formed him for it, and given him the earnest of the Spirit), that death if it arrive to him is but a happy absence from the body in order to be present with the Lord.

Now the thought of ascending to Christ gives the desire of being acceptable to Him, and presents Him (the second motive or principle that gives a form to this ministry) as the Judge who will render to every one that which he has done. The solemn thought of how much this judgment is to be feared takes possession of the apostle's heart. What a difference between this thought and the "building of God," for which he was waiting with certainty! Nevertheless this thought does not alarm him; but, in the solemn sense of the reality of that judgment, it impels him to persuade others.

But here a third principle comes in, the love of Christ with reference to the condition of those whom Paul sought to persuade. Since this love of Christ's shows itself in His death, there is in it the witness that all were already dead and lost.

Thus we have here set before us glory, with the personal certainty of enjoying it, and death become the means of being present with the Lord; the tribunal of Christ, and the necessity of being manifested before it; and the love of Christ in His death, all being already dead. How are such diverse principles as these to be reconciled and arranged in the heart? It is that the apostle was manifested to God. Hence the thought of being manifested before the tribunal produced, along with the present sanctification, no other effect on him than that of solemnity, for he was not to come into judgment; but it became an urgent motive for preaching to others, according to the love which Christ had manifested in His death.

The idea of the tribunal did not in the least weaken his certainty of glory.* His soul, in the full light of God, reflected what was in that light, namely, the glory of Christ ascended on high as man. And the love of this same Jesus was strengthened in its active operation in him by the sense of the tribunal which awaits all men.

[* The truth is, the judgment-seat is what most brings out our assurance before God; for as He is, so are we in this world; and it is when Christ shall appear we shall be like Him.]

What a marvelous combination of motives we find in this passage, to form a ministry characterised by the development of all that in which God reveals Himself, and by which He acts on the heart and conscience of man! And it is in a pure conscience that these things can have their force together. If the conscience were not pure, the tribunal would obscure the glory, at least as belonging to oneself, and weaken the sense of His love. At any rate one would be occupied with self in connection with these things, and ought to be so. But when pure before God, it only sees a tribunal which excites no sense of personal uneasiness, and therefore has all its true moral effect, as an additional motive for seriousness in our walk, and a solemn energy in the appeal which the known love of Jesus impels it to address to man.

As to how far our own relations with God enter into the service which we have to render to others, the apostle adds another thing that characterised his walk, and that was the result of the death and resurrection of Christ. He lived in an entirely new sphere, in a new creation, which had left behind, as in another world, all that belonged to a natural existence in the flesh here below. The proof that Christ had died for all proved that all were dead; and that He died for all in order that those who live should live no longer to themselves but to Him who died for them and rose again. They are in connection with this new order of things in which Christ exists as risen. Death is on everything else. Everything is shut up under death. If I live, I live in a new order of things, in a new creation, of which Christ is the type and the head. Christ, so far as in connection with this world below, is dead. He might have been known as the Messiah, living on the earth, and in connection with promises made to men living on the earth in the flesh. The apostle no longer knew Him thus. In fact Christ, as bearing

that character, was dead; and now, being risen, He has taken a new and a heavenly character.

Therefore if any one is in Christ, he belongs to this new creation, he is of the new creation. He belongs no more at all to the former; the old things have passed away; all things are I become new. The system is not the fruit of human nature and of sin, like all that surrounds us here below, according to the I flesh. Already, looked at as a system existing morally before God, in this new creation, all things are of God. All that is found in it is of God, of Him who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ. We live in an order of things, a world, a new creation, entirely of God. We are there in peace, because God, who is its center and its source, has reconciled us to Himself. We enjoy it, because we are new creatures in Christ; and everything in this new world is of Him, and corresponds with that new nature. He had also committed to the apostle a ministry of reconciliation, according to the order of things into which he had been himself introduced. Being reconciled, and knowing it by the revelation of God who had accomplished it for him, he proclaimed a reconciliation, the effect of which he was enjoying.

All this flowed from an immense and all-powerful truth. God was in Christ. But then, in order that others might have a part with him, and the apostle be the minister of this, it was also necessary that Christ should be made sin for us. One of these truths presents the character in which God has drawn nigh to us, the other, the efficacy of that which has been wrought for the believer.

Here is the first of these truths, in connection with the apostle's ministry, which form the subject of these chapters. God was in Christ (that is to say, when Christ was on earth). The day of judgment had not been waited for. God had come down in love into the world alienated from Him. Such was Christ. Three things were connected with and characterised this great and essential truth: reconciling the world, not imputing transgression, and putting the word of reconciliation into the apostle. As the result of this third consequence of the incarnation, the apostle assumes the character of ambassador for Christ, as though God exhorted by his means, he besought men, in the name of Christ, to be reconciled to God. But such an embassy supposed the absence of Christ; His ambassador acted in His stead. It was

in fact based upon another truth of immeasurable importance, namely, that God had made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, in order that we should be made the righteousness of God in Him. This was the true way to reconcile us, and that entirely, to God, according to the perfection of God fully revealed. For He had set His love upon us where we were, giving His Son, who was without spot or motion or principle of sin; and making Him (for He offered Himself to accomplish the will of God) sin for us, in order to make us in Him — who in that condition had perfectly glorified Him — the expression of His divine righteousness, before the heavenly principalities through all eternity; to make us His delight, as regards righteousness; “that we should be the righteousness of God in him.” Man has no righteousness for God: God has made the saints, in Jesus, His righteousness. It is in us that this divine righteousness is seen fully verified — of course in Christ first, in setting Him at His right hand, and in us as in Him. Marvellous truth! which, if its results in us cause thanksgiving and praise to resound when looking at Jesus, silences the heart, and bows it down in adoration, astonished at the sight of His wonderful acts in grace.*

[* It should be observed that, in verse 20, the word “you” ought to be omitted. It was the way in which the apostle fulfilled his ministry to the world.]

Paul had said that God exhorted by his means. In chapter 6 the affection of the apostle carries on by the Spirit this divine work, beseeching the Corinthians that it might not be in vain in their case that this grace had been brought to them. For it was the acceptable time, the day of salvation.* The apostle had spoken of the great principles of his ministry, and of its origin. He reminds the Corinthians of the way in which he had exercised it in the varied circumstances through which he had been led. The cardinal point of his service is that he was the minister of God, that he represented Him in his service. This rendered two things needful: first, that he should be in all things without reproach; and then that he should maintain this character of God’s minister, and the exercise of his ministry, through all the opposition, and in all the circumstances through which the enmity of man’s heart, and the cunning even of Satan, could make him pass. Everywhere and in all things he avoided, by his conduct, all real occasion of being reproached, in order that no one should have room to blame the ministry. He approved himself in all things as a minister of God, worthily representing Him in whose name he spoke to men; and that with

a patience, and in the midst of persecution and contradiction of sinners, which showed an inward energy, a sense of obligation to God, and a dependence on Him, which the realisation of His presence and of our duty to Him can alone maintain. It was a quality which reigned through all the circumstances of which the apostle speaks, and had dominion over them.

[* The passage is a quotation from Isaiah 49:8, which speaks of the blessing that should be brought to the Gentiles when Christ was rejected by the Jews, but through Christ's work and by the resurrection.]

Thus he showed himself to be the minister of God in everything which could test him; in pureness, in kindness, in love; as a vessel of power; whether disgraced or applauded; unknown to the world, and known and eminent; outwardly trodden under foot of man and chastened, inwardly victorious and joyful, enriching others, and in possession of all things. Here ends his description of the sources, the character, the victory over circumstances, of a ministry which displayed the power of God in a vessel of weakness, whose best portion was death.

The restoration of the Corinthians to a moral state befitting the gospel, associated with the circumstances through which he had just been passing, had allowed him to open his heart to them. Pre-occupied till now with his subject of the glorious Christ, who, having accomplished redemption, sent him as the messenger of the grace to which that redemption had given free course, and having spoken with a free heart of all that was comprised in his ministry, he returns with affection to his beloved Corinthians, showing that it was with them that he had all this openness, this enlargement of heart. "My mouth is open unto you, O Corinthians," he says, "my heart is enlarged; ye are not straitened in me, but in your own affections." As a recompense for the affections that overflowed from his heart towards them, he only asks for the enlargement of their own hearts.

He spoke as to his children. But he avails himself of this tender relationship to exhort the Corinthians to maintain the place in which God had set them: "Be not in the same yoke with unbelievers." Having a hold upon their affections, and rejoicing deeply before God in the grace which had restored them to right sentiments, his heart is free to give way, as though beside himself, to the joy that belonged to him in Christ glorified: and, with a sober mind after all when his dear children in the faith were in question,* he seeks to detach them from all that recognised the flesh, or

implied that a relationship which recognised it were possible for a Christian — from everything that denied the position of a man who has his life and his interests in the new creation, of which Christ is the Head in glory. An angel can serve God in this world: little would it concern him in what way, provided that way was God's; but to associate himself with its interests, as forming a part of it, to ally himself with those who are governed by the motives that influence the men of this world, so that a common conduct would show that the one and the other acted according to the principles that form its character, would be, to those heavenly beings, to lose their position and their character. The Christian, whose portion is the glory of Christ — who has his world, his life, his true associations, there where Christ has entered in — should not either; nor can he, as a Christian, put himself under the same yoke with those who can have only worldly motives, to draw the chariot of life in a path common to both.

[* What a blessed state is that of a man, who, when he is taken out of himself and a state of calm reflection, is entirely absorbed with, or turned towards, God, and, when he does think soberly and calculates, is occupied in love in seeking the good of his brethren, the members of Christ: who is either rapt up into the contemplation of God and communion with Him, or filled with Him, so as to think only of others in love!

What communion is there between Christ and Belial; between light and darkness; faith and unbelief; the temple of God and idols? Christians are the temple of the living God who dwells and walks among them. He is a God to them; they are a people to Him. Therefore must they come out from all fellowship with the worldly, and be separate from them. As Christians, they must stand apart, for they are the temple of God. God dwells among them and walks there, and He is their God. They are therefore to come out from the world and be separate, and God will own them, and will be to them in relationship of a Father with sons and daughters who are dear to Him.

This, observe, is the special relationship which God assumes with us. The two preceding revelations of God with men are named here, and He takes a third. To Abraham He revealed Himself as Almighty; to Israel as Jehovah or Lord. Here the Lord Almighty declares that He will be a Father to His own, to His sons and daughters. We come out from among the worldly, for it is just that (not physically out of the world, but while in it), in order to enter into the relationship of sons and daughters to the Almighty God:

otherwise we cannot practically realise this relationship. God will not have worldlings in relation with Himself as sons and daughters; they have not entered into this position with regard to Him. Nor will He recognise those who remain identified with the world, as having this position; for the world has rejected His Son, and the friendship of the world is enmity against God: and he who is the friend of the world is the enemy of God. It is not being His child in a practical sense. God says therefore, "Come out from among them, and be separate, and ye shall be to me for sons and daughters." Remember that it is not a question of coming out of the world — it is while we are in it — but of coming out from among the worldly, to enter into the relationship of sons and daughters, in order to be to Him for sons and daughters, to be owned of Him in this relationship.*

[* The reader may remark that the passage sets two things before us: that God is present in the assembly of those who are separated from the world, and walks among them, as He did in the case of Israel in the wilderness when they had come out of Egypt; and that the individuals who compose the assembly enter into the relationship of sons and daughters.]

But it is not only that from which we are separated to be in this position of sons and daughters that engages the apostle's attention, but the legitimate consequences of such promises. Sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty, holiness becomes us. It is not only that we are to be separate from the world; but, in relationship with God, to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit: holiness in the outward walk, and that which is quite as important with regard to our relationship to God, purity of thought. For, although man does not see the thoughts, the flow of the Spirit is stopped in the heart. There is not enlargement of heart in communion with God, It is much if His presence is felt, His relationship to us realised; grace is known, but God scarcely at all, in the way in which He makes Himself gradually known in communion.

The apostle returns to his own relationships with the Corinthians — relations formed by the word of his ministry. And now having laid open what this ministry really was, he seeks to prevent the bonds being broken, which had been formed by this ministry between the Corinthians and himself through the power of the Holy Ghost.

"Receive us: we have wronged no one" — he is anxious not to wound the feelings of these restored ones, who found themselves again in their old

affection for the apostle, and thus in their true relation with God. "I do not say this to condemn you," he adds; "for I have said before that ye are in my heart to die and live with you. My boldness is great towards you, great is my glorying of you. I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all my tribulation." He is not now unfolding the principles of the ministry, but the heart of a minister, all that he had felt with regard to the state of the Corinthians. When he had arrived in Macedonia (whither, it will be remembered, he had gone without visiting Corinth), after he had left Troas, because he did not find Titus there, who was to bring him the answer to his first letter to the Corinthians — when he was come into Macedonia, his flesh had no rest there either; he was troubled on every side: without were fightings, within were fears. There however God, who comforts those who are cast down, comforted him by the arrival of Titus, for whom he had waited with so much anxiety; and not only by his coming, but by the good news he brought from Corinth. His joy went beyond all his sorrow, for his heart was to die and live with them. He saw the moral fruits of the operation of the Spirit, their desire, their tears, their zeal with regard to the apostle; and his heart turns again to them in order to bind up, by the expression of his affection, all the wounds (needful as they were) which his first letter might have made in their hearts.

Nothing more touching than the conflict in his heart between the necessity he had felt, on account of their previous state, to write to them with severity, and in some sort with a cold authority, and the affections which, now that the effect had been produced, dictated almost an apology for the grief he might have caused them. If, he says, I made you sorry by the letter, I do not repent: even though he might have repented and had done so for a moment. For he saw that the letter had grieved them, were it but for a season. But now he rejoiced, not that they had been made sorry, but that they had sorrowed unto repentance. What solicitude! What a heart for the good of the saints! If they had a fervent mind towards him, assuredly he had given them the occasion and the motive. No rest till he had tidings: nothing, not open doors, nor distress, could remove his anxiety. He regrets perhaps having written the letter, fearing that he had alienated the hearts of the Corinthians; and now, still pained at the thought of having grieved them, he rejoices, not at having grieved them, but because their godly sorrow had wrought repentance.

He writes a letter according to the energy of the Holy Ghost. Left to the affections of his heart, we see him, in this respect, below the level of the energy of inspiration which had dictated that letter which the spiritual were to acknowledge as the commandments of the Lord; his heart trembles at the thought of its consequences, when he receives no tidings. It is very interesting to see the difference between the individuality of the apostle and inspiration. In the first letter we remarked the distinction which he makes between that which he said as the result of his experience, and the commandments of the Lord communicated through him. Here we find the difference in the experience itself. He forgets the character of his epistle for a moment, and, given up to his affections, he fears to have lost the Corinthians by the effort he had made to reclaim them. The form of the expression he uses shows that it was but for a moment that this sentiment took possession of his heart. But the fact that he had it plainly shows the difference between Paul the individual and Paul the inspired writer.

Now he is satisfied. The expression of this deep interest which he feels for them is a part of his ministry, and valuable instruction for us, to show the way in which the heart enters into the exercise of this ministry, the flexibility of this mighty energy of love, in order to win and bend hearts by the opportune expression of that which is passing in our own: an expression which will assuredly take place when the occasion makes it right and natural, if the heart is filled with affection; for a strong affection likes to make itself known to its object, if possible, according to the truth of that affection. There is a grief of heart which consumes it, but a heart that feels godly sorrow is on the way to repentance.*

[* Greatness of heart does not readily talk about feelings, because it thinks of others, not of itself. But it is not afraid, when occasion arises, to do so; because it thinks of others, and has a depth of purpose in its affections, which is behind all this movement of them. And Christianity gives greatness of heart. And besides, from its nature, it is confiding, and this wins, and gives unsought, influence this greatness of heart does not seek, for it is unselfish. His true relationship for their good the apostle did maintain.]

The apostle then sets forth the fruits of this godly sorrow, the zeal against sin it had produced, the heart's holy rejection of all association with sin. Now also that they had morally separated themselves, he separates those who were not guilty from those who were so. He will no longer confound them together. They had confounded themselves together morally by

walking at ease with those who were in sin. By putting away the sin they were now outside the evil: and the apostle shows that it was with a view to their good, because he was devoted to them, that he had written to testify the loving occupation of his thoughts about them, and to put to the test their love for him before God. Sad as their walk had been, he had assured Titus, when encouraging him to go to Corinth, that he would certainly find hearts there that would respond to this appeal of apostolic affection. He had not been disappointed, and as he had declared the truth among them, that which he had said of them to Titus was found true also, and the affections of Titus himself were strongly awakened when he saw it.

In the next chapter the apostle (being on his way to Judea) exhorts the Corinthians to prepare relief for the poor of Israel; sending Titus that all might be ready as of a willing mind — a disposition of which he had spoken on his journey as existing among these Christians, so that others had been stirred up to give likewise. And now, while reckoning upon their goodwill, and knowing that they had begun a year before, he would run no risk of finding that facts gave the lie to what he had said of them. Not that he would burden the Corinthians and ease those of Judea, but that the rich should provide for the need of the poor brethren, in order that none should be in want. Every one, if his will were in it, should be accepted of God according to his ability. He loved a cheerful giver. Only they should reap according as they sowed. Titus, happy at the result of his first visit, and attached to the Corinthians, was ready to go again and gather this fruit also for their own blessing. With him went the messengers of the other churches, charged with the collection made among them for the same purpose — a brother known to all the churches, and another of approved diligence, stimulated by Paul's confidence in the Corinthians. The apostle would not take charge of the money without having companions whose charge it should also be, avoiding all possibility of reproach in affairs of this kind, taking care that everything should be honest before men as well as before God. Nevertheless he did not speak by commandment in all this, but on account of the zeal of other churches, and to prove the sincerity of their love.

It will be remembered that it was this collection which occasioned all that happened to Paul at Jerusalem — that which put an end to his ministry,

stopped him on his way into Spain, and perhaps other places; and which, on the other hand, gave occasion to write the epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and, it may be, to the Hebrews. How little we know the bearing of the circumstances we enter upon, happy that we are led by Him who knows the end from the beginning, and who makes all things work for good to those who love Him!

In closing those exhortations to give according to their ability, he commends them to the rich goodness of God, who was able to make them abound in all things, so that they should be in circumstances to multiply their good works, enriched to all bountifulness, so as to produce in others (by means of the apostle's services in this respect) thanksgiving unto God. For, he adds, the happy effect of your practical charity, exercised in the name of Christ, would not only supply the want of the saints (through his administration of the collection made at Corinth) but abound also in thanksgiving to God; for, those who received it blessed God that their benefactors had been brought to confess the name of Christ, and to act with this practical liberality to them and to all. And this thought stirred them up to pray with fervent desire for those who provided in this way for their need, because of the grace of God manifested in them. Thus the bonds of eternal charity were strengthened on both sides, and glory redounded to God. Thanks be to God, says the apostle, for His unspeakable gift; for whatsoever may be the fruits of grace, we have the proof and the power in that which God has given. Here ends the matter of the epistle properly so called.

The apostle returns to the subject which pre-occupied him — his connections with the Corinthians, and the truth of his apostleship, which was questioned by those who seduced them, throwing contempt on his person. He was weak, they said, when present, and his speech contemptible, though bold when absent (his letters being boastful, but his bodily presence contemptible). "I beseech you," says the apostle, "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ showing thus the true character of his own meekness and humility when among them], not to compel me to be bold among you, as I think of being with regard to some who pretend that I walk after the flesh." The strength of the war that he waged against evil was founded on spiritual weapons, with which he brought down all that exalted itself against the knowledge of God. This is the principle on which

he acted, to seek to bring to obedience all who hearkened to God, and then severity to all disobedience, when once obedience should be fully established, and those who would hearken were restored to order. Precious principle! the power and the guidance of the Spirit acting in full, and with all patience, to restore to order, and to a walk worthy of God; carrying the remonstrances of grace to the utmost, until all those who would hearken to them and willingly obey God were restored; and then to assert divine authority in judgment and discipline, with the weight which was added to the apostolic action by the conscience and common action of all those who had been brought back to obedience.

Observe, that the apostle refers to his personal authority as an apostle; but that he uses it in patience (for he possessed it for the purpose of edification and not for destruction) in order to bring back to obedience and uprightness all those who would hearken; and thus, preserving christian unity in holiness, he clothes the apostolic authority with the power of the universal conscience of the assembly, guided by the Spirit, so far as there was a conscience at work.

He then declares that such as he is in his letters, such shall they find him when he is present; and he contrasts the conduct of those who took advantage of his labors, beguiling a people who had already become Christians, in order to stir them up against him, with his own conduct in going where Christ had not yet been known, seeking to bring souls to the knowledge of a Savior of whom they were ignorant. Also he hoped that, when he visited the Corinthians, his ministry would be enlarged among them by their increase of faith, in order that he might go on beyond them to evangelise regions that still lay in darkness. But he who gloried, let him glory in the Lord.

In **CHAPTER 11**, jealous with regard to his beloved Corinthians with a godly jealousy, he carries yet further his arguments relating to false teachers. He asks the faithful in Corinth to bear with him a little, while he acts like a fool in speaking of himself. He had espoused them as a chaste virgin to Christ, and he feared lest any should corrupt their minds, leading them away from the simplicity that is in Him. If the Corinthians had received another Christ from the teachers lately come among them, or another Spirit, or another gospel, they might well bear with what these teachers

did. But certainly the apostle had not been a whit behind in his instructions, even if they compared him with the most renowned of the apostles. Had he wronged them by receiving nothing at their hands (as these new teachers boasted of doing), and in taking money from other assemblies, and never being a burden to them? — a subject for boasting, of which no one should deprive him in the regions of Achaia. Had he refused to take anything from them because he loved them not? God knew — No; it was to deprive the false teachers of a means of commending themselves to them by laboring gratuitously among them, while the apostle received money. He would deprive them of this boast, for they were false apostles. As Satan transformed himself into an angel of light, so his instruments made themselves ministers of righteousness. But again let them bear with him while he spoke as a fool in speaking of himself. If these ministers of Satan accredited themselves as Jews, as of the ancient religion of God, consecrated by its antiquity and its traditions, he could do as much, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and possessing all the titles to glory of which they boasted. And if it was a question of christian service — to speak as a fool — certainly the comparison would not fail to show where the devotedness had been. Here in fact God has allowed this invasion of the apostle's work by these wretched judaizing men (calling themselves Christians) to be the means of acquainting us with something of the indefatigable labors of the apostle, carried on in a thousand circumstances of which we have no account. In the Acts God has given us the history of the establishment of the assembly in the great principles on which it was founded, and the phases through which it passed on coming out of Judaism. The apostle will have his own reward in the kingdom of glory, not by speaking of it among men. Nevertheless it is profitable for our faith to have some knowledge of christian devotedness, as it was manifested in the life of the apostle. The folly of the Corinthians has been the means of furnishing us with a little glimpse of it.

Troubles and dangers without, incessant anxieties within, a courage that quailed before no peril, a love for poor sinners and for the assembly that nothing chilled — these few lines sketch the picture of a life of such absolute devotedness that it touches the coldest heart; it makes us fee] all our selfishness, and bend the knee before Him who was the living source of the blessed apostle's devotedness, before Him whose glory inspired it.

Nevertheless, though forced to speak of himself, the apostle would glory only in his infirmities. But he is, as it were, outside his natural work. His past life unfolds before his eyes. The Corinthians obliged him to think of things which he had left behind. After having ended his account, and declared that he would glory in his infirmities alone, there was one circumstance that recurred to him. Nothing can be more natural, more simple, than all these communications. Must he glory? It is but unprofitable. He would come to that of which a man — as in the flesh — could not glory. It was the sovereign power of God, in which the man had no part. It was a man in Christ of whom he spoke — such a one had been caught up to the third heaven, to paradise; in the body, or out of the body, he knew not. The body had no part in it. Of such a one he would glory.

That which exalted him on the earth he would put aside. That which took him up to heaven — that which gave him a portion there — that which he was “in Christ” — was his glory, the joy of his heart, the portion in which he readily would glory. Happy being! whose portion in Christ was such that, in thinking of it, he is content to forget all that could exalt him as man; as he says elsewhere as to his hope, “that I may win Christ.” The man, the body, had no share in a power, to taste of which he had to be caught up into heaven; but of such a one he would glory. There, where God and His glory are everything, separated from his body as to any consciousness of being in it, he heard things which men in the body were not capable of entering into, and which it was not fitting that a mortal man should declare, which the mode of being of a man in the body could not admit. These things had made the deepest impression on the apostle; they strengthened him for the ministry; but he could not introduce them into the manner of understanding and communicating which belongs to man’s condition here below.

But many practical lessons are connected with this marvelous favor shown to the apostle. I say, marvelous; for in truth one feels what a ministry must his have been, whose strength, and whose way of seeing and judging, were drawn from such a position. What an extraordinary mission was that of this apostle! But he had it in an earthen vessel. Nothing amends the flesh. Once come back into the consciousness of his human existence on earth, the apostle’s flesh would have taken advantage of the favor he had enjoyed to exalt him in his own eyes, to say, ‘None have been in the third

heaven but thou, Paul.' To be near God in the glory, as out of the body, does not puff up. All is Christ, and Christ is all: self is forgotten. To have been there is another thing. The presence of God makes us feel our nothingness. The flesh can avail itself of our having been in it, when we are no longer there. Alas! what is man? But God is watchful; in His grace He provided for the danger of His poor servant. To have taken him up to a fourth heaven — so to speak — would only have increased the danger. There is no way of amending the flesh; the presence of God silences it. It will boast of it as soon as it is no longer there. To walk safely, it must be held in check, such as it is. We have to reckon it dead; but it often requires to be bridled, that the heart be not drawn away from God by its means, and that it may neither impede our walk nor spoil our testimony. Paul received a thorn in the flesh, lest he should be puffed up on account of the abundant revelations which he had received. We know, by the epistle to the Galatians, that it was something which tended to make him contemptible in his preaching: a very intelligible counterpoise to these remarkable revelations.

God left this task to Satan, as He used him for the humiliation of Job. Whatever graces may be bestowed on us, we must go through the ordinary exercises of personal faith, in which the heart only walks safely when the flesh is bridled, and so practically nullified, that we are not conscious of it as active in us when we wish to be wholly given to God, and to think of Him and with Him according to our measure.

Three times (like the Lord with reference to the cup He was to drink) the apostle asks Him that the thorn may be taken away; but the divine life is fashioned in the putting off of self, and — imperfect as we are — this putting off as to practice that which, as to truth, if we look at our standing in Christ, we have put off, is wrought by our being made conscious of the humiliating unsuitableness of this flesh, which we like to gratify, to the presence of God and the service to which we are called. Happy for us when it is by way of prevention, and not by the humiliation of a fall, as was the case with Peter! The difference is plain. There it was self-confidence mingled with self-will in spite of the Lord's warnings. Here, though still the flesh, the occasion was the revelations which had been made to Paul. If we learn the tendency of the flesh in the presence of God, we come out of it humble, and we escape humiliation. But in general

(and we may say in some respects with all) we have to experience the revelations that lift us up to God, whatever their measure may be, and we have to experience what the vessel is in which it is contained, by the pain it gives us through the sense of what it is — I do not say through falls.

God, in His government, knows how to unite suffering for Christ, and the discipline in the flesh, in the same circumstance; and this explains Hebrews 12:1-11. The apostle preached: if he was despised in his preaching it was truly for the Lord that he suffered; nevertheless the same thing disciplined the flesh, and prevented the apostle priding himself on the revelations he enjoyed, and the consequent power with which he unfolded the truth. In the presence of God, in the third heaven, he truly felt that man was nothing, and Christ everything. He must acquire the practical experience of the same thing below. The flesh must be annulled, where it is not a nullity, by the experimental sense of the evil which is in it, and must thus become consciously a nullity in the personal experience of that which it is. For what was the flesh of Paul — which only hindered him morally in his work, by drawing him away from God — except a troublesome companion in his work? The suppression of the flesh felt and judged was a most profitable exercise of the heart.

Observe here the blessed position of the apostle, as caught up into the third heaven. He could glory in such a one, because self was entirely lost in the things with which he was in relation. He did not merely glory in the things, neither does he say “in myself.” Self was completely lost sight of in the enjoyment of things that were unutterable by the man when he returned into the consciousness of self. He would glory in such a one; but in himself, looked at in flesh, he would not glory, save in his infirmities. On the other hand, is it not humiliating to think that he who had enjoyed such exaltation should have to go through the painful experience of what the flesh is, wicked, despicable, and selfish?

Observe also the difference between Christ and any man whatsoever. Christ could be on the mount in glory with Moses, and be owned as His Son by the Father Himself; and He can be on the plain in the presence of Satan and of the multitude; but, although the scenes are different, He is alike perfect in each. We find admirable affections in the apostles, and especially in Paul; we find works, as Jesus said, greater than His own; we

find exercises of heart, and astonishing heights by grace; in a word we see a marvelous power developed by the Holy Ghost in this extraordinary servant of the Lord; but we do not find the evenness that was in Christ. He was the Son of man who was in heaven. Such as Paul are chords on which God strikes and on which He produces a wondrous music; but Christ is all the music itself.

Finally, observe that the humiliation needed to reduce the rebellious flesh to its nothingness is used by Christ to display His power in it. Thus humbled, we learn our dependence. All that is of us, all that constitutes self, is a hindrance; the infirmity is that in which it is put down, laid low, in which weakness is realised. The power of Christ is perfected in it. It is a general principle; humanly speaking, the cross was weakness. Death is the opposite of the strength of man. Nevertheless it is in it that the strength of Christ revealed itself. In it He accomplished His glorious work of salvation.

It is not sin in the flesh that is the subject here when infirmity is spoken of, but what is contrary to the strength of man. Christ never leant on human strength for a moment; He lived by the Father, who had sent Him. The power of the Holy Ghost alone was displayed in Him. Paul needed to have the flesh reduced to weakness, in order that there might not be in it the motion of sin which was natural to it. When the flesh was reduced to its true nothingness as far as good is concerned, and in a manifest way, then Christ could display His strength in it. That strength had its true character. Remark it well: that is always its character — strength made perfect in infirmity. The blessed apostle could glory in a man in Christ above, enjoying all this beatitude, these marvelous things which shut out self, so much were they above all we are. While enjoying them, he was not conscious of the existence of his body. When he was again conscious of it, that which he had heard could not be translated into those communications which had the body for their instrument, and human ears as the means of intelligence. He gloried in that man in Christ above. Here below he only gloried in Christ Himself, and in that infirmity which gave occasion for the power of Christ to rest on him, and which was the demonstration that this power was that of Christ, that Christ made him the vessel of its manifestation. But this nevertheless was realised by painful experiences. The first was the man in Christ, the second the power of Christ resting on

the man. For the first the man as to flesh is nothing; as to the second it is judged and put downturned to weakness, that we may learn, and Christ's power may be manifested. There is an impulse, an ineffable source of ministry on high. Strength comes in, on the humiliation of man as he is in this world, when the man is reduced to nothingness — his true value in divine things — and Christ unfolds in him that strength which could not associate itself with the strength of man, nor depend on it in any way whatsoever. If the instrument was weak, as they alleged, the power which had wrought must have been — not its power, but that of Christ.

Thus, as at the beginning of the epistle we had the true characteristics of the ministry in connection with the objects that gave it that character, so we have here its practical strength, and the source of that strength, in connection with the vessel in which the testimony was deposited, the way in which this ministry was exercised by bringing a mortal man into connection with the ineffable sources from which it flowed, and with the living, present, active energy of Christ, so that the man should be capable of it, and yet that he should not accomplish it in his own carnal strength — a thing moreover impossible in itself.*

[* This chapter is altogether a striking one. We have Christians in the highest and lowest conditions; in the third heaven, and in actual low sin. In the first, a man in Christ (true in position, if not in vision, of us all), the apostle glories, and we are right to glory — that is a man in Christ. As to what he is in himself he has to be brought to utter nothingness. But neither the glorying in the man in Christ, nor his being made nothing of in flesh, is power: the latter is the path to it; but then, being nothing, Christ's power is with him, rests on him, and here he has power in service, the man in Christ his own place — Christ in, or His power on, the man, his strength to serve. So that we have the highest apprehension of the Spirit, the lowest failure in flesh, and the way of power in making nothing of the latter, Christ's power being thereon with us, practical power while in the body. But there will be the sense of weakness, the want of proportion between what we are as to the earthen vessel, and what is ministered and enjoyed. It is not merely what is evil but the earthen vessel in which the treasure is.]

Thus the apostle gloried in his sufferings and his infirmities. He had been obliged to speak as a fool; they who ought themselves to have proclaimed the excellence of his ministry had forced him to do it. It was among them that all the most striking proofs of an apostolic ministry had been given. If in anything they had been behind other churches with regard to proofs of his apostleship, it was in their not having contributed anything to his

maintenance. He was coming again. This proof would still be wanting. He would spend himself for them, as a kind father; even although the more he loved, the less he should be loved. Would they say that he had kept up appearances by taking nothing himself, but that he knew how to indemnify himself by using Titus in order to receive from them? It was no such thing. They well knew that Titus had walked among them in the same spirit as the apostle. Sad work, when one who is above these wretched motives and ways of judging and estimating things, and full of these divine and glorious motives of Christ, is obliged to come down to those which occupy the selfish hearts of the people with whom he has to do — hearts that are on a level with the motives which animate and govern the world that surrounds them! But love must bear all things and must think for others, if one cannot think with them, not they with oneself.

Is it then that the apostle took the Corinthians for judges of his conduct? He spoke before God in Christ; and only feared lest, when he came, he should find many of those who professed the name of Christ like the world of iniquity that surrounded them; and that he should be humbled amongst them, and have to bewail many who had already sinned and had not repented of their misdeeds.

For the third time he was coming. Everything should be proved by the testimony of two or three witnesses; and this time he would not spare. The apostle says, "This is the third time I am coming"; yet he adds, "as if I were present the second time, and being absent now." This is, because he had been there once, was to have gone there on his way to Macedonia, was coming a second time, but did not on account of the state the Corinthians were in; but this third time he was coming, and he had told them beforehand; and he said beforehand, as if he had gone the second time, although now absent, that if he came again he would not spare.

He then puts an end to the question about his ministry by presenting an idea which ought to confound them utterly. If Christ had not spoken by him, Christ did not dwell in them. If Christ was in them, He must have spoken by the apostle, for he had been the means of their conversion. "Since," he says, "ye seek a proof that Christ speaketh in me, examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith. Do ye not know yourselves, that Christ dwelleth in you, unless ye be reprobates?" and that they did not at

all think. This was quite upsetting them, and turning their foolish and stupid opposition, their unbecoming contempt of the apostle, to their own confusion. What folly to allow themselves to be led away by a thought which, no doubt, exalted them in their own eyes; but which, by calling in question the apostleship of Paul, necessarily overturned, at the same time, their own Christianity!

From “which to you-ward is not weak” to the end of verse 4 is a parenthesis, referring to the character of his ministry, according to the principles brought forward in the previous chapter: weakness, and that which tended to contempt, on the side of man; power on God’s part: even as Christ was crucified in weakness and was raised again by divine power. If the apostle himself was weak, it was in Christ; and he lived in Him, by the power of God, towards the Corinthians. Whatever might be the case with them, he trusted they should know that he was not reprobate; and he only prayed to God that they should do no evil, not in order that he should not be reprobate (that is, worthless in his ministry, for here he is speaking of ministry), but that they might do good even if he were reprobate. For he could do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. He was not master of the Corinthians for his own interest, but was content to be weak that they might be strong; for what he desired was their perfection. But he wrote, being absent, as he had said, in order that when present he might not be obliged to act with severity, according to the authority which the Lord had given him for edification, and not for destruction.

He had written what his heart, filled and guided by the Holy Ghost, impelled him to say; he had poured it all out; and now, wearied, so to speak, with the effort, he closes the epistle with a few brief sentences: — “Rejoice, be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace.” Happen what might, it was this which he desired for them; and that the God of love and of peace should be with them. He rests in this wish, exhorting them to salute one another with affection, as all the saints, including himself, saluted them; praying that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, might be with them all.