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BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

2 Corinthians

A Call to Christian Ministry



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John was born in Corvallis, Oregon, to a pastoral family. He felt the call to pastoral ministry early in life, following in the footsteps of his father, Ken, and older brother, Bill. While still in college, he served as youth pastor in Des Moines, Iowa. He ministered in the Georgia-Cumberland Conference before coming to California.

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A guide for

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HANDBOOK

Produced by the General Conference Sabbath
School/Personal Ministries Department

2 Corinthians

A Call to Christian Ministry

As we glance back at our study during the first quarter of this year, we recall that 1 Corinthians gives us access to the ground floor of Christianity. We see Christianity as it grows, thrives, and spreads. We see the gospel making inroads into one of the great cities of the ancient world. In 1 Corinthians, Paul tries to equip early Christian disciples to live the gospel in the sophisticated culture of Corinth. He longs for his correspondents to establish a firm self-identity as Christians, one that will stand the onslaught of social pressure.

As we study 2 Corinthians this quarter, we see also Paul's reasoned arguments and enthusiasm for the gospel. All these things are present in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians. But we also find something more. We find what is perhaps Paul's most personal letter. Here we see him not only courageous and triumphant but deeply concerned and personally threatened. In 1 Corinthians we learn about conditions in Corinth; in 2 Corinthians we learn about conditions in Paul.

While reading this letter, it is tempting to feel disconnected from it. After all, Paul's disagreements with the Corinthians and discussions about the legitimacy of his apostleship are hardly front-page news today.

On second thought, though, the letter is all about ministry. And if we as Seventh-day Adventists are to fulfill the commission to take "this gospel of the kingdom" into "all the world," we surely need to study it with care.

From Paul's experiences as he records them in his second letter to the church in Corinth, we may learn the following about how to improve each of our own personal ministries:

1. What it means to minister on Christ's behalf;
2. How to create a personal ministry based on the Cross of Christ and His resurrection;
3. What the true qualities of an effective ministry are; and
4. How our weaknesses can become the genius of our ministry.

To outline 2 Corinthians in such a way may seem to miss much of the excitement that pulses through its pages. But as you study and learn from this outline, Paul and his emotions will become real and meaningful. You will begin to sense his drive and relate to his mission. You will, indeed, find yourself enlisting on Paul's missionary team, eager for the joys and sorrows of the most exciting and demanding challenge ever to face a human being—Christian ministry.

2 Corinthians: A Ministry Manual



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Cor. 1:1–2:4. Also read all of 2 Corinthians through in one sitting. As you do, look for its major themes.

MEMORY TEXT: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: God does not give us His Spirit for selfish use. We are not to enjoy this blessing privately. We are to pass it along to others.

GOD WANTS TO EQUIP US TO MINISTER TO OTHERS. Are the things that happen to us—good and bad—meaningless? In this week's lesson, Paul describes a crisis and how God made use of it in his experience. We learn from Paul's experience that each of us is gifted and anointed for ministry. Through the wonders of God's grace, the trials that come our way may become part of our training for service. Pain and hardship may be worked into the school of God's grace. Crises that Satan designs for our undoing become part of our retooling so we may become better equipped to minister to others. As you study this week's lesson, ask yourself how the difficulties you are dealing with can help you lead others to Jesus.

DIVINE CONSOLATION, DIVINE COMMISSION (2 Cor. 1:1-7).

Who joins Paul in writing 2 Corinthians? To whom do they address the letter? 2 Cor. 1:1.

Just as Paul had someone join with him in sending 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:1), so he has someone join with him in sending the letter of 2 Corinthians. While the letter is addressed to the church in Corinth, Paul has a wider audience in view—"all the saints throughout Achaia," NIV. Achaia was a province of the Roman Empire. Corinth was its capital. Much of the letter focuses on the relationship between Paul and the Corinthian believers. But including this wider audience invites us to think about its significance for our own time.

Describe the relationship between suffering and consolation in the Christian's life. 2 Cor. 1:3-7.

Paul gives us one of the best pictures of God in all Scripture when he calls Him "the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation" (2 Cor. 1:3, NRSV). This picture is of a God who carefully tends the lives of His saints, making sure their affliction is met with consolation. Such attention on God's part is for a purpose—to help us share God's consolation with others who suffer (verse 4).

"Not only does Christ know every soul, and the peculiar needs and trials of that soul, but He knows all the circumstances that chafe and perplex the spirit. His hand is outstretched in pitying tenderness to every suffering child."—*Ministry of Healing*, p. 249.

What hope does the passage offer when we feel we are experiencing more affliction than consolation? 2 Cor. 1:7.

Paul gives an example of unshaken hope in those times when affliction seems greater than consolation. We also may learn something from the attitude of this introduction. Rather than presenting a mournful request, Paul praises God for a generous supply of comfort. How would it affect our Christian experience if we adopted Paul's attitude of praise?

Think of someone you know who needs to experience the comfort of God. Today or tomorrow, share with that person a time when God was for you "the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation."

CRISIS IN ASIA (2 Cor. 1:8-11).

What divine purpose did Paul come to understand in the crisis he describes in 2 Corinthians 1:8-11?

Paul refers to events that occurred in the Roman province of Asia. Because Paul spent three years of his third missionary journey in Ephesus, the capital and most important city of the province, the events most likely happened there. It is difficult to say exactly what happened. But we can be sure his readers knew. Some Bible scholars think the crisis may have been a grave illness, an unrecorded imprisonment, or the persecution caused by the silversmiths (Acts 19:23-41).

List three elements Paul mentions about this crisis.

2 Cor. 1:8, 9 _____

verse 10, first half _____

verse 10, second half _____

Now list some of the emotions Paul must have felt during this crisis.

Reviewing the major events in the relationship between Paul and the Corinthian Christians helps to show how 2 Corinthians contributes to that relationship:

1. Paul establishes the church in Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-17).
2. Paul sends a "previous" letter to Corinth from Ephesus (1 Cor. 5:9-11).
3. The Corinthians reply with more questions for Paul to help them with practical issues confronting them (7:1).
4. Paul writes 1 Corinthians from Ephesus telling them about the opportunities and obstacles before him (16:8).

This list is completed in Tuesday's lesson.

Remember a time you sensed your dependence upon God. Did you feel any of the emotions Paul must have felt? Take a moment now to thank God for His guidance and to recommit your life to Him.

A PAINFUL VISIT (2 Cor. 1:12–2:4).

How and why had Paul's travel plans changed? 2 Cor. 1:12–2:4.

In Monday's lesson, we began to list major events in the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians. The next events help us put Paul's changed plans in their context:

5. Paul pays the Corinthians a brief and "painful" visit (2 Cor. 2:1) during which someone attacks him (2:5; 7:12) and he fails to receive support from the believers in Corinth (2:3). In reporting his changed travel plans, Paul refers to this uncomfortable encounter (1:12–2:4).
6. In view of the events of the "painful" visit, Paul writes a "severe" letter of reprimand to the Corinthians from Ephesus (2:3, 4, 9; 7:8).
7. After receiving word from Titus of the positive response of the Corinthians to his "severe" letter, Paul writes 2 Corinthians, a letter of reconciliation that shows his untiring love to them and great hope for them (2:13; 7:5-16).
8. Paul pays a third and final visit to Corinth, where he winters before going on to Jerusalem via Macedonia with the collection for the church there (Acts 20:2, 3).

Meditate on 2 Corinthians 1:12-14. How may we apply these verses to our lives today? Think of specific things that bring rejoicing to your heart. How can things which uplift you become a source of inspiration to draw others to Christ?

Among the ways we may apply these verses are the following:

1. They help to develop a hunger in our lives for spiritual "simplicity" (or "holiness") and "godly sincerity."
2. They invite self-examination. Paul's "boast" consisted of the Corinthian believers in whose lives he had invested. What is your "boast"? What achievements of the past year do you include in your Christmas letters, for instance? Business success? Advanced degrees? Vacations in exotic places? What percent of your life really focuses on some sort of ministry to people? Is their spiritual advancement of utmost importance to you?

Paul was motivated by the desire to see Jesus return and by a longing to prepare as many as possible to meet Him. In what ways do you share Paul's motivations?

WE ARE THE LORD'S ANOINTED (2 Cor. 1:12-2:4).

What charges seem to have been made against Paul because of his changed travel plans? Why do you think Paul felt the need to give such a detailed explanation? 2 Cor. 1:12-2:4.

Paul's adjusted schedule caused someone to accuse him of wavering. On the surface, it did appear that he was speaking inconsistently (verse 17). Paul argues strongly, though, that instead of human indecision, his experience had been marked by God's anointing (verses 21, 22). He also includes the Corinthian believers as "anointed ones" when he says, "It is God who establishes us *with you* in Christ and has anointed us [that is, all believers]. . . ." (verse 21, NRSV, italics supplied).

Compare the description of the Spirit's role in the Christian life in 2 Corinthians 1:21, 22, with the descriptions in 2 Corinthians 5:5 and Ephesians 1:13, 14; 4:30. Is "the sealing" in these verses something past, present, or future? Be able to explain your answer.

Paul repeatedly describes the Holy Spirit as God's "down payment" and "seal" of acknowledgment that we are His children. The Greek term for "earnest" (KJV), "first installment" (NRSV), or "deposit" (NIV) is a commercial term describing the first installment of a payment or gift put down as a way of guaranteeing that the rest will follow. Imagine that someone offers you \$5,000 for a car you are selling. You request \$500.00 down to hold the car while the buyer arranges to borrow the rest. How would the buyer feel if, on his or her return, you demanded the full price. *You see, the "earnest money" is part of the purchase price.* "As the Holy Spirit imparts grace and power to overcome sin, the Christian experiences an 'earnest' of the complete triumph and victory that will be his upon admission to heaven."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 834.

Paul wants us to understand that the Spirit is God's guarantee of more to come. We can gauge the glories of the age to come by the Spirit's present work with us.

"We are 'the Lord's anointed'! United with Christ by the Spirit, we are saved by him to be his instruments of salvation."—G. R. Beasley-Murray, "2 Corinthians," in *The Broadman Bible Commentary* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1971), vol. 11, p. 13. As an instrument of God's salvation, how will you relate to others differently than you are relating to them now?

2 CORINTHIANS—A GUIDE FOR MINISTRY.

What is true of the early part of 2 Corinthians is true of the entire letter—it focuses on Paul's relationship to the Corinthian believers and his role as apostle. As founding pastor of the Corinthian church, Paul had a special function to fulfill in nurturing the church there.

Considering that the letter focuses so much attention on Paul's relationship as missionary pastor to the church in Corinth, how can it apply to us?

"Paul's pastoral position was probably unique, but all Christians are in some kind of a pastoral situation in relation to others, as parents, teachers, administrators, executives, supervisors, as working alongside others and in constant contact with them. All are the keepers of their brothers and sisters. How then should they care for them? All Christians are also subject to some kind of pastoral responsibility exercised over them by others. What should their attitude be to those who exercise that responsibility?"—Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians* (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1987), p. 4.

We can view 2 Corinthians as a ministry manual. Each of us is a minister of the gospel to those whom God has placed within our care.

Refer back to your reading assignment of 2 Corinthians given at the beginning of this lesson. In the space provided, jot down ideas that you consider helpful in your service to others.

How does Paul remind the Corinthians that God has given each believer a ministry? 1 Cor. 12:4-11; 2 Cor. 5:15.

"What an admirable Epistle is the second to the *Corinthians*! How full of affections! He [Paul] joys, and he is sorry, he grieves, and he glories, never was there such care of a flock expressed, save in the great Shepherd of the fold, who first shed tears over *Jerusalem*, and afterwards blood."—George Herbert, *The Country Parson* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), p. 63.

What are you doing to fulfill the ministry God has given to you?

FURTHER STUDY: “Consolation” or “comfort” (Greek, *parakale* [verb]; *paraklisis* [noun]) is an important word group in 2 Corinthians. Check the uses in: 2 Cor. 2:8; 5:20; 6:1; 7:4; 8:4, 6, 17; 9:5; 10:1; 12:8, 18. In 2 Corinthians, “consolation” points to “God’s fruitful presence and support in situations of human crisis.”—J. Thomas, “*parakale*,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 26.

“It was through suffering that Jesus obtained the ministry of consolation. In all the affliction of humanity He is afflicted; and ‘in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted.’ Isaiah 63:9; Hebrews 2:18. In this ministry every soul that has entered into the fellowship of His sufferings is privileged to share. ‘As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.’ 2 Corinthians 1:5. The Lord has special grace for the mourner, and its power is to melt hearts, to win souls. His love opens a channel into the wounded and bruised soul, and becomes a healing balsam to those who sorrow. ‘The Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort . . . 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.’ 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 13.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. **A true story:** A young woman, active in her local church, discovers she has acquired AIDS through the use of intravenous drugs several years ago. Many people in the church responded by “blaming the victim” and distancing themselves from her. How might they have become active in a “ministry of consolation” instead? Be specific.
2. On a scale of 1-10, how active is your local congregation or Sabbath School class in “consoling the afflicted”? List some of the “afflicted” ones in your community/church whom you may have ignored. Draw up a plan to minister to two of these people on a continuing basis.
3. How would you react if some members of your church began challenging the authority of your pastor? Why?

SUMMARY: In times of difficulty, God brings into our lives the blessings of His grace. The Spirit comes with divine consolation to minister hope in the midst of distress *and* to anoint us for ministry. Since we have ourselves experienced God’s presence in crisis, we are better able to console others.



Sharing the Hope

J. H. Zachary

When Viktor Bechtereve lost his wife in 1992, he was devastated. His atheistic upbringing offered no comfort. In his grief he reached out for God. He started reading the Bible and, after a difficult beginning, he found comfort from his reading. As he continued reading the Bible, he felt a strong need to know God better.

He saw a notice for a Revelation Seminar and decided to attend. During the seminar he accepted Jesus as his Saviour. Elevantina Kazak, a widow, also attended the seminar in search of God. The two decided to begin their new lives in Christ together.

The couple wanted to share their new faith with others. They attended a lay training seminar for Global Mission Pioneers, conducted by The Quiet Hour. During the training sessions, they committed one year of their lives to establish a church in an unentered city in the Russian Federation. Their assignment was Neftekamsk, a city in the oil-rich region of the Ural Mountains. The city's residents were mostly Muslims.

Viktor and Elevantina arrived in Neftekamsk, eager to work for God. They met strong resistance; few wanted Bible studies; and five times they were asked to move from their living quarters. But they kept praying and visiting. Viktor visited factories, schools, nursing homes, and kindergartens, offering to present lectures on health and family life. They continued visitation, and contacted more than 900 persons. Slowly friendships developed, and God opened the way for Bible studies. What joy was theirs when they saw eight new friends become brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ!

A factory where Viktor had lectured offered to let them use an auditorium for church services. Eight months after Viktor and Elevantina arrived, a Quiet Hour/Global Mission evangelistic team conducted a harvest meeting, and 30 persons were baptized.

Viktor and Elevantina have stayed beyond their one-year commitment to study with 140 interested persons and to nurture the new believers. When the new believers are sufficiently grounded in their faith, these two pioneers plan to move to another unentered city.

Viktor and Elevantina rejoice as they share the hope they found in Jesus Christ with other lonely, discouraged wanderers. Pray for them, and for other Global Mission Pioneers working around the world.

J. H. Zachary is director of evangelism for The Quiet Hour in Redlands, California.

The Ministry of Forgiveness



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Cor. 2:5-17.

MEMORY TEXT: "For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:11, 12, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: When we extend and receive forgiveness, we play a major part in the plan of redemption. When we extend and receive forgiveness, we live daily in a way that shows we stand in God's presence.

FORGIVENESS IS A STRATEGIC ISSUE. We have tamed the words "forgiveness" and "forgiving" by making use of them in a variety of routine ways. All too often, forgiveness becomes ordinary and optional, something we extend or withhold at will or refuse to accept because we would rather be bitter.

For Paul, however, forgiveness is more a term for the battlefield of the great controversy. In the battle between good and evil, forgiveness is a major part of God's strategic battle plan. If Christians fail to forgive one another, they divide the army of Christ and hand Satan an advantage. In 2 Corinthians 2:5-17, Paul invites us to recapture the importance, power, and pathos of "forgiveness." As you study the lesson this week, decide whether there is anyone you need to forgive. Then take specific steps to do so.

A TIME TO FORGIVE (2 Cor. 2:5-11).

What counsel does Paul give the believers concerning the discipline of one of its members? 2 Cor. 2:5-11.

Paul does not address his letters to make-believe situations. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, he has discussed the theme of “consolation” or “comfort.” Then in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, he discusses a particular situation where “consolation” is needed (verse 7). A member of the church in Corinth had caused his fellow church members and Paul much pain. Paul had, in his “severe letter” (2 Cor. 2:3, 4), recommended “punishment” (verse 6), which the church had carried out. The outcome reveals that the discipline was not vengeful but loving and redemptive, leading to repentance and restoration. In Paul’s view, the discipline had done its work. He is now concerned that the erring member may be “overwhelmed by excessive sorrow” (verse 7, NIV, NRSV).

This member is sometimes thought to be the offender of 1 Corinthians, chapter 5. Do you think they are the same person? Why or why not?

Paul goes out of his way to help the Corinthian Christians avoid blaming one individual while withdrawing from any further involvement with the problem. First, the pain inflicted on the victim (in this instance, Paul) is, in reality, something everyone shares. In the attack on Paul, all have been wronged. The victim is not to be blamed as somehow deserving of the ill treatment.

Second, when discipline has been administered, the results should be carefully watched. The congregation cannot “wash its hands” of the situation. Instead, we must be alert to the fresh work of the Spirit in that person’s life, always ready to reaffirm our love for that individual (verse 8). Forgiveness is never an end in itself. It must lead us to be kind, supportive, and consoling of the one forgiven.

“What this man [Paul] preached he practiced, and he was the living embodiment of the gospel of a forgiving Father who seeks and saves the lost.”—Ralph Martin, *1, 2 Corinthians* (Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1988), p. 51.

As a Christian parent, pastor, or teacher administering discipline, how do you know when “enough [discipline] is enough”? As you contemplate Paul’s wise counsel, in what specific ways can you follow his example in applying discipline redemptively?

FORGIVE . . . AS WE FORGIVE (2 Cor. 2:5-10).**Define forgiveness.**

Forgiveness is one of those common words we use on a daily basis. As Christians, we usually think of it in two distinct categories:

1. Either it is human in the sense that one person is forgiving another,
2. Or it is divine in that we ask forgiveness from God. But are these two categories really that distinct?

How are divine and human forgiveness related in each of the following passages?

2 Cor. 2:5-10 _____

Matt. 6:9-15 _____

Matt. 18:15-20 _____

John 20:19-23 _____

Some time ago, Lewis Smedes wrote an article titled "Forgiveness: The Power to Change the Past." In it, Smedes writes, "When you forgive someone, you slice away the wrong from the person who did it. You disengage that person from his hurtful act. You recreate him. At one moment you identify him ineradicably as the person who did you wrong. The next moment you change that identity. He is remade in your memory.

"You think of him now not as the person who hurt you, but as a person who needs you. You feel him now not as the person who alienated you, but as the person who belongs to you. Once you branded him as a person powerful in evil, but now you see him as a person weak in his needs. You recreated your past by recreating the person whose wrong made your past painful."—*Christianity Today*, January 7, 1983, p. 24.

Have you ever given or received such forgiveness? This week, why not let Christ's spirit of forgiveness lead you to forgive someone who wronged you in this manner. Remember, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:31, 32, KJV).

OUR SCHEMING FOE (2 Cor. 2:11).

Compare the description of Satan in 2 Corinthians 2:11 with the descriptions in Ephesians 6:11 and 1 Peter 5:8. What is he determined to do?

If the church members in Corinth now forgive the once-offending member, they may avoid being “taken advantage of” by Satan. In mistreating one another, we allow Satan a strategic edge, for he uses our unforgiving spirit to drive offending persons to despair. However, this need not be, for Paul adds, “We are not unaware of his schemes” (NIV). In 2 Corinthians, the Greek word translated “schemes” usually means “mind,” “thoughts,” or “intentions.” (Compare the uses in 2 Cor. 3:14; 4:4; 11:3.) It is always helpful to be able to understand the thinking of your opponent! And Paul claims that Christians have the ability to do just that!

How is Satan referred to elsewhere in 2 Corinthians? What do we learn of his schemes?

2 Cor. 4:4 _____

2 Cor. 6:15 _____

2 Cor. 11:3, 12-15 _____

“There is active engagement between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan. If Satan strives to maintain humans in his thrall, he also attempts to regain those who have been lost to Christ and he resists Paul, a leading opponent in the battle for human lives.”—D. G. Reid, “Satan,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 865.

Second Corinthians 2:11 alerts us to the fact that Satan seeks to destroy not only our individual Christian experiences but also our Christian unity. To Paul’s list of the divine armor, he adds these words: “Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints” (Eph. 6:18, NRSV).

How might Satan be attempting to destroy unity in your church through unforgiving attitudes? In what specific ways do you plan to counter his subtle attempts? Make this an ongoing subject of your prayers.

LED IN TRIUMPH (2 Cor. 2:12-17).

How do you explain the conflict Paul faced between the door being open to evangelism in Troas and the restlessness in his spirit? How can both exist at the same time? What does this experience tell us about Paul? 2 Cor. 2:12, 13.

Having conducted his “painful” visit and sent his “severe” letter, Paul leaves Ephesus and goes to Troas, where he has an “open door” in evangelism but no freedom of spirit. Troubled by his relationship with the Corinthian Christians, he hopes Titus will join him in Troas. When he does not, Paul goes to Macedonia to meet him there.

How does Paul respond to Titus’s good news from Corinth? 2 Cor. 2:14-17; 7:5-7.

Paul has portrayed the harsh realities of his ministry in Asia, his troubled relations with the Corinthians, and his distracted mission in Troas. He now gives us an image of the joy of being a true ambassador for Christ. He compares the victory parade of a Roman general to the victory of Christ over Satan. We, as soldiers of the Cross, are captured by Christ’s love, as trophies of His grace. Then we are appointed to spread the fragrance of His good news of salvation and proclaim victory over Satan the enemy.

What spiritual importance does Paul’s use of “always” “in every place,” “in Christ,” and “through us” have in spreading the fragrance of Christ’s knowledge? 2 Cor. 2:14. How can you spread the fragrance of Christ in your home, church, and neighborhood?

The clouds of sweet-smelling incense announced the Roman general’s victory. As we devote ourselves to Christ and march in His victory procession, He fills us and our environment with the fragrance of His love and knowledge. Such spiritual fragrance becomes so much a part of our experience that others will know we march with Him. Even our enemies will take notice of the close relationship that exists between us and Christ, just as the Jewish rulers and elders reacted to the witness of Peter and John when they marveled and “realized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13, NKJV).

How does the sweet aroma of life to some become the aroma of death to others? 2 Cor. 2:15, 16. How does accepting or rejecting the gospel relate to this?

LIVING IN GOD'S PRESENCE (2 Cor. 2:10, 17).

There is an important theme in 2 Corinthians 2 that can be easy to miss. It is the idea of being in the presence of Christ (verse 10) or of standing before God (verse 17).

As you read 2 Corinthians 2:5-17, try to decide what Paul means by the idea of Christ's or God's "presence."

In verse 10, Paul's concern is for the church at Corinth to exercise forgiveness toward the disciplined and repentant member. To motivate them, Paul tells them he has already done so on their behalf and "in the sight of Christ" (NIV).

In verse 17, Paul contrasts the ministry of his missionary group to that of "so many" whom he regards as "peddlers of God's word" (NRSV). False charges may have been spreading about Paul's management of church funds, especially of money intended for poor members in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 12:14-18). But Paul reassures his readers that he is not seeking to enrich himself. He and his co-workers will not be tempted to mold their message or dampen their enthusiasm for personal or financial gain. Instead, they are persons who are both "sent from God" and "standing in his presence."

What changes would you make in your life today if you were to live standing in God's presence?

We often ask God to be present in our lives. Perhaps we should ask not so much for God to be present with us but to make us "present" with Him. "The presence of God is guaranteed to the Christian. This Rock of faith is the living presence of God. The weakest may depend upon it. Those who think themselves the strongest may become the weakest unless they depend on Christ as their efficiency, their worthiness. This is the Rock upon which we may build successfully. God is near in Christ's atoning sacrifice, in His intercession, His loving, tender ruling power over the church. Seated by the eternal throne, He watches them with intense interest."—*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 77.

Risen Lord, carry me above the cares of the world today. Bring me into Your very presence. Bow my mortal form before Your eternal throne. Raise me up to join in the angelic songs of praise, to stand in Your presence. Allow me to remain there in adoration even as You send me forth to minister in Your name.

FURTHER STUDY: How important is the preaching of forgiveness to the Christian message? Acts 3:17-21; 5:27-32; Matt. 6:12, 14, 15; 18:20-35; Mark 10:25.

Read *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 323-326.

“In dealing with the erring, harsh measures should not be resorted to; milder means will effect far more. Make use of the milder means most perseveringly, and even if they do not succeed, wait patiently; never hurry the matter of cutting off a member from the church. Pray for him, and see if God will not move upon the heart of the erring. Discipline has been largely perverted. . . . Passion, prejudice, and partiality, I am sorry to say, have had abundant room for exhibition, and proper discipline has been strangely neglected. If those who deal with the erring had hearts full of the milk of human kindness, what a different spirit would prevail in our churches. May the Lord open the eyes and soften the hearts of those who have a harsh, unforgiving, unrelenting spirit toward those whom they think in error. Such men dishonor their office and dishonor God. They grieve the hearts of His children, and compel them to cry unto God in their distress. The Lord will surely hear their cry, and will judge for these things.”—*Review and Herald*, May 14, 1895.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Gordon D. Marino questions the common notion of “self-forgiveness.” He believes forgiveness “belongs to the injured,” that it is “a relational act and as such cannot be carried out alone.” He asks, “Whence comes this notion that we can forgive ourselves our own trespasses?”—“The Epidemic of Forgiveness,” *Commonweal*, vol. 122, no. 6 (March 24, 1995), pp. 9-11. In view of this week’s lesson, do you agree with Marino’s perspectives? Why or why not?
2. A true story: A church treasurer confessed to embezzling a large amount of church funds. After he is disciplined, how should he be forgiven and reaffirmed? Let 2 Corinthians 2:6-8 guide your answer.

SUMMARY: Satan seeks to use every situation to bring conflict into the church. Now that the Corinthian believers have followed Paul’s counsel to discipline an erring member, they may be open to Satan’s tricks by failing to forgive the repentant member. Paul encourages them (and us) to practice the ministry of forgiveness.



The Young Soldier, Part 1

Simon Vieira Morase Neto

I stepped off the bus in suburban Sao Luis, Brazil, and started toward my home. I had gone to the church office to pick up two Bibles to take to the evangelistic meeting that night. As I walked along the street, I sensed that someone was following me. I glanced behind me and saw a young man who had been on the same bus as I. I walked a little faster, but the young man walked faster as well. Soon he caught up with me.

“Excuse me,” he said. “Are you an Adventist?”

Surprised, I stammered, “Yes. Why?”

“When I saw you in the bus, I noticed you had a Bible,” he said. “I thought you must be an Adventist. I am looking for a Seventh-day Adventist church.”

“How do you know about Adventists?” I questioned, still amazed at our encounter.

“My father is in the military. He has studied the Bible faithfully. He found verses in the Bible that commanded people to worship on the Sabbath. There were no Sabbath keepers in our area, so Father sometimes held meetings in our home on the Sabbath. When I learned that I would come to Sao Luis to attend military school, Father challenged me to find an Adventist church and learn more about what they believe.”

It started to rain, so we stepped under a shelter to continue our discussion.

“How does your father know about Adventists if there are none where you live?” I asked, now intensely curious.

“My aunt and my father often discussed religion, and once she told him, ‘You’re always talking about the Sabbath. You sound like a Seventh-day Adventist!’ This is how we knew the Adventist church believed in the Sabbath. I also like to study the Bible, but as I saw what other churches teach, I began to wonder if there is any church that practices all that the Bible teaches.”

I invited the young man, Sidraque, to the evangelistic meeting at the church that night, and he eagerly accepted. I gave him the church address and took his address, so I could visit him if he did not come that night. Then we parted. As I hurried on home, I had a strong feeling that the Lord wanted this young man to be a soldier, but not in the Brazilian army.

(continued next week)

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How to Have a Life-giving Ministry



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Cor. 3:1-18.

MEMORY TEXT: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18, KJV).

KEY THOUGHT: Our relationships with others should mirror God's gracious, transforming covenant with His people.

WHO CARES? After the editor of a famous news magazine climbed a 23,000-foot peak in the Andes, he commented that the mountain could have cared less about his accomplishments in life. (James M. Wall, "A Graduation Speech: Failure and Forgiveness," *The Christian Century*, June 1, 1994, pp. 555, 556.) But some who stand before the mountain of the Lord love to brag about their achievements. And what is true of the Andes is true also of Sinai. It could care less.

Paul wishes his readers to know that his work involves a "new covenant" ministry of life in the Spirit. He does not come waving his credentials. His work is not a ministry of death and condemnation but of life and salvation. Paul invites us to contemplate the ministry God has entrusted to each one of us. As you study this week's lesson, ask yourself, How am I allowing God to minister His life in the Spirit through me? How am I allowing Him to help me lead others from a life of condemnation to a ministry of salvation?

LIVING LETTERS (2 Cor. 3:1-3).

Recall a time when you wrote a letter of recommendation or had one written on your behalf. What was its purpose? Was it honest? Did it accomplish its goal?

Letters of recommendation played an important part in early Christianity. Philemon and 3 John are two such letters. (You may wish to read one of them to get a feel for this type of letter.) Though today they may be sent by electronic mail or fax machine rather than written on papyrus, letters of recommendation continue to play an important role in our lives.

How does Paul use the custom of writing letters of recommendation to discuss his relationship to the Corinthians? 2 Cor. 3:1-3.

Demetrius, an ancient author who describes how to write letters, provides a model letter of recommendation: "So and so, who is conveying this letter to you, has been tested by us and is loved on account of his trustworthiness. You will do well if you deem him worthy of hospitality both for my sake and his, and indeed for your own. For you will not be sorry if you entrust to him, in any matter you wish, either words or deeds of a confidential nature. Indeed, you, too, will praise him to others when you see how useful he can be in everything."—As translated in Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), p. 154.

In an age of traveling teachers, there was a need to carry letters to prove one's character. Paul, who established the church at Corinth and knows its members well, suggests, tongue-in-cheek, the idea that he bring them such letters of reference on his next visit. This idea gives Paul a chance to make his point—the Corinthian Christians are themselves all the letter of recommendation he needs. They are a "letter of Christ" that Paul and his companions have helped to compose.

"The world has need of more legible Christians. The language of a Christlike life is intended for all mankind. Only thus can men comprehend what Christianity means, understand its great truths, and learn to love and obey God's law."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 843, 844.

How well can others "read" Christ in you? Examine your own life to determine whether you are a "letter from Christ." In what specific ways can you invite Christ to write His letter on your heart?

THE OLDEST COVENANT OF ALL (2 Cor. 3:4-18).

What are the characteristics of the “new” covenant? How old is it? 2 Cor. 3:4-18; Jer. 31:31-34; Eph. 1:3-6; Deut. 9:1-6.

God has always invited His people to accept a covenant based on grace. Such a covenant, prepared by the Godhead before Creation, was offered to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15), to Noah (Gen. 6:18; 9:8-17), to Abraham (Gen. 15:7, 18-21), and to the children of Israel at Sinai (Exod. 19, 20). The covenant at Sinai “is of just as much force today as it was when the Lord made it with ancient Israel.”—Ellen G. White, *The Southern Watchman*, March 1, 1904, p. 142. From God’s point of view, the covenant at Sinai was an expression of His eternal covenant of grace offered to humankind.

“From the perspective of the New Testament, the covenant that God initiates in the ministry of Jesus is “new” because: (1) Christ’s death ratified it; (2) Israel so lost sight of God’s everlasting covenant of grace that His work in Christ appears “new”; (3) God’s revelation in Christ helps us to understand God better”.—Adapted from Edward Heppenstall, “The Covenants and the Law,” in *Our Firm Foundation*, vol. 1, pp. 455-457.

List and define the characteristics of the “old” covenant. 2 Cor. 3:4-18.

From the human side, the Sinai covenant became marked by fruitless attempts at external obedience, a dependence on man’s unaided “works of law” rather than the response of faith. From this human side, then, the covenant at Sinai may be called the “old covenant.”

“Seventh-day Adventists have held that the law of God has been at the heart of the controversy from the very beginning; that the Christian Era is pre-eminently the age when the law of God . . . is to be kept as never before, not as the means of salvation, but as the fruit of a life that is hid with Christ in God. We further believe that there never was a time when men were saved by law; that the covenant of grace was established from before the foundation of the world; that all men are saved by grace alone.”—Heppenstall, p. 438.

What kind of covenant relationship are you experiencing with God? What difference does it make in your life? What specific things do you plan to do, by His grace, to strengthen this covenant relationship?

NEW COVENANT MINISTRY (2 Cor. 3:4-11).

In 2 Corinthians 3:4-11, Paul compares the “new covenant” ministry, which he and his companions exercise, to “old covenant” ministry. The chart below illustrates this contrast. Fill in the missing sections.

| Old Covenant Ministry | New Covenant Ministry |
|---|--|
| Of the letter that kills (verse 6) | _____ |
| _____ | Ministry of the Spirit (verse 8) |
| Ministry that brings condemnation (verse 9) | Ministry that brings righteousness (verse 9) |
| Had glory that has been lost (verses 7, 9-11) | _____ |
| _____ | Lasts, is permanent (verse 11) |

Apparently, Paul had in mind some people whose “old covenant” ministry contrasted with his “new covenant” approach. Later, Paul will refer to these opponents as “false apostles” who are actually Satan’s partners (2 Cor. 11:5, 13-15). They boasted of their Jewish credentials (11:22) and compared their possession of letters of recommendation (perhaps from the church in Jerusalem) to Paul’s lack of such credentials (3:1-3).

We must keep in mind that when Paul refers to the “old covenant,” he is considering its misapplication by the Jewish nation and the Judaizers of his day. There is nothing wrong with the letter of the law, for God Himself wrote it on tablets of stone. However, it must not only remain in stone but it must also be inscribed in the human heart. Otherwise it becomes a set of lifeless rules and regulations to secure external conformity.

God intended that the ministry of the letter of the law and its spirit go hand in hand. He did not intend one to exclude the other. The law contains the record of His revealed will, which must be realized in the life of believers by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus what is recorded in Jeremiah becomes a living reality: “I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts” (31:33). Even Jesus’ teaching can become lifeless unless we allow the Holy Spirit to make it a transforming experience. Our spiritual life must always be anchored in “thus says the Lord” and “it is written.”

How has your ministry brought life and glory to those in your care? What might you be doing that stifles others’ spiritual life and wilts their courage?

THE UNVEILING (2 Cor. 3:12-18).

Why did Moses put a veil over his face? Exod. 34:29-35. How does Paul interpret this event? 2 Cor. 3:7-16.

Paul sees this same veil as still dimming the sight of most of his fellow Jews. They neither find Christ in the Old Testament nor accept the message that He is the Messiah. Paul may well be suggesting that the veil has not fully slipped from the minds of some Jewish Christians, especially from the minds of those who oppose him at Corinth.

How did the Old Testament become a “new” book for some early converts to Christianity? Luke 24:27, 32, 44-49; Acts 9:17-22.

Paul’s statement that “when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed” (2 Cor. 3:16, NRSV) refers to Exodus 34:34: “But whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off.” Paul sees the experience of Moses in the life of the Christian convert. In turning to “the Lord” Jesus Christ, the veil is lifted, and the very words once read as excluding Christian claims become testimony to them.

This truth had been active in Paul’s own conversion: “During the long hours when Saul was shut in with God alone, he recalled many of the passages of Scripture referring to the first advent of Christ. Carefully he traced down the prophecies, with a memory sharpened by the conviction that had taken possession of his mind. As he reflected on the meaning of these prophecies, he was astonished at his former blindness of understanding and at the blindness of the Jews in general, which had led to the rejection of Jesus as the promised Messiah. To his enlightened vision, all now seemed plain. He knew that his former prejudice and unbelief had clouded his spiritual perception and had prevented him from discerning in Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah of prophecy.

“As Saul yielded himself fully to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, he saw the mistakes of his life and recognized the far-reaching claims of the law of God. He who had been a proud Pharisee, . . . now bowed before God with the humility and simplicity of a little child.”
—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 119.

List friends or acquaintances whose minds seem darkened beyond hope of enlightenment. Write a prayer that the miracle described in this passage will be true for them.

CHANGED INTO HIS LIKENESS (2 Cor. 3:18).

Read Paul's hopeful conclusion to this paragraph, verse 18, in different translations. What does it say to you?

Second Corinthians 3:18 says that Christians are transformed into the "image" of Christ. How does Paul express similar thoughts in Colossian 3:9, 10 and Romans 8:29, 30?

Paul's description of the Christian's privileges could strike us as bad news. Because the reality of our individual Christian experience sometimes differs noticeably from Paul's joyful account of the Christian walk, we might tend to reject his enthusiasm. We should note that his sketch of Christian privileges includes these thoughts:

1. Paul clearly regards this to be good news. His conclusion is a positive, upbeat promise. "The power of the Spirit is the power that raised Jesus from the dead and will give us newness of life in the present as well as in the future. For Paul this is the most important reality of Christian experience, and he would not subscribe to the melancholy view that Spirit and flesh are two almost equal contestants within the believer's life."—David Wenham in *Pauline Studies* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 89.
2. The Christian's reflection of Christ is to be a progressive experience. Paul's emphasis is on growth and continued discovery—the thrill of moving from one breathtaking scene of Christ's glory to the next.
3. This positive, progressive reflection of Christ is not something we create on our own. It has a divine source—"the Lord, the Spirit."

"Look to Christ, behold the attractive loveliness of His character, and by beholding you will become changed into His likeness. The mist that intervenes between Christ and the soul will be rolled back as we by faith look past the hellish shadow of Satan and see God's glory in His law, and the righteousness of Christ."—Ellen White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1097.

FURTHER STUDY: Read through Paul's letter to the Galatians. Though Paul does not use the specific language in the letter, how does he contrast the old and the new covenant?

"Professed Christians keep altogether too near the lowlands of earth. Their eyes are trained to see only commonplace things, and their minds dwell upon the things their eyes behold. Their religious experience is often shallow and unsatisfying, and their words are light and valueless. How can such reflect the image of Christ? How can they send forth the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness into all the dark places of the earth? To be a Christian is to be Christlike."

"Satan is seeking to veil Jesus from our sight, to eclipse His light; for when we get even a glimpse of His glory, we are attracted to Him. Sin hides from our view the matchless charms of Jesus; prejudice, selfishness, self-righteousness, and passion blind our eyes, so that we do not discern the Saviour. Oh, if we would by faith draw nigh to God, He would reveal to us His glory, which is His character, and the praise of God would flow forth from human hearts and be sounded by human voices. Then we would forever cease to give glory to Satan by sinning against God and talking doubt and unbelief. We should no longer stumble along, grumbling and mourning, and covering the altar of God with our tears."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1097.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. One contrast Paul draws between old-covenant and new-covenant ministries is that the first is timid, while the second is marked by "boldness" (See especially 2 Cor. 3:12, 13). In what ways should we be "very bold" (NIV) where now we are timid?
2. Do you see Paul's optimism about the Christian life as being a bit naive? How is it possible to live the promise of verse 18 despite the trials, temptations, and pressures of life?
3. Paul states that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17, KJV). Explain the dynamic relationship between "Spirit" and "liberty." How does this relate to our obedience?

SUMMARY: Like Paul, we are to practice a Spirit-filled, life-giving, new-covenant ministry that nurtures the work of Christ in human hearts. Such ministry finds its source and inspiration in ever clearer visions of our Lord.



The Young Soldier, Part 2

Simon Vieira Morase Neto

I met Sidraque on the way home from town one afternoon. The earnest young man was looking for an Adventist church, so I invited him to evangelistic meetings that evening.

I arrived at the meeting hall early, and found Sidraque already waiting. We sat together during the meeting, and afterward I invited him to study the Bible with me and see for himself if the Adventist church taught the truth. He readily agreed. I gave him some Bible study guides and invited him to come again the next night.

The following evening he brought three cousins with him to the evangelistic meeting. After the meeting all four young men stayed to review the Bible lesson I had given Sidraque the night before. It took a long time to cover each lesson, for Sidraque had many questions. He wanted to understand everything!

When we studied the lessons on the Ten Commandments and the Sabbath, Sidraque hesitated. He was convinced that the Sabbath was God's holy day, but some of his classes at the military school met on Saturdays, and he could not let his family down. They expected him to do well, become a professional soldier, and bring honor to the family. And even though his father knew Sabbath was special, he did not know how to keep it. Sidraque was not sure what to do; he was not ready to give up his dream of becoming a soldier.

Not long after this he asked me if an Adventist could become a soldier. I told him, "I know Adventists who are soldiers in the army, but they have difficulties keeping the Sabbath."

After one Bible study Sidraque asked me how he could learn to tell others what he was learning from the Bible. He paused, then asked, "What do I do to become a preacher?" I explained that he would have to study theology for four years to become a minister.

Not long after that, Sidraque announced, "I have decided to quit my military studies. I want to be baptized and study to become a minister."

"Finish your classwork and take your exams," I advised him. "If you pass the exams, you can feel confident that the Lord wants you to continue your military training. And if you fail, then you will know that God wants you to become a minister. Then you will not regret your decision to quit the military."

Sidraque agreed to put the matter in God's hands.

(continued next week)

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Principles for Ministry



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Corinthians 4:1-18.

MEMORY TEXT: "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: When we minister on behalf of Christ, we sometimes expect recognition for the work we do. Instead, Paul reminds us that ministry often brings pain and hardship, plus a deeper reward than we ever could have imagined.

COULD THIS BECOME YOUR STORY? Jim and Carol saw a need. And they set about to fill it. Their creative, energetic leadership brought fresh life to an old idea—small-group Bible-study groups in neighborhoods. This ministry brought them much fulfillment until a fateful meeting when Jim and Carol felt that a few people did not appreciate their efforts. What happened next is all too familiar. They became discouraged and resigned from the outreach they had begun and became irregular in their church attendance. Within a few months they were gone.

This week's lesson provides safeguards against just such crises. If you dare to use your gifts to minister to others, you will want to reflect on these principles for ministry and put them to work for you. You will need to reflect on the difference between God's approval and others' approval.

MERCY-BASED MINISTRY (2 Cor. 4:1-6).

List the principles of Christian ministry found in 2 Corinthians 4:1-6.

Paul builds his discussion on an important concept: The opportunity to minister is not a privilege we earn. It is given “by the mercy of God” (verse 1, RSV). Like the blessings of the gospel itself, it is granted by God, not on the basis of our merit, but on the basis of His grace. We do not claim some privileged ministry. Instead, God claims us for ministry. Saul, the persecutor of Christians, hardly merited consideration for the position of leading Christian evangelist! True ministry, then, is not based on the declaration, “I can!” but on God’s “You can!” For Paul, this truth is central to how we should conduct our ministry:

1. *We should declare the truth openly.* Since he was not commissioned for ministry based on merit, Paul did not “lose heart” when people questioned his reputation or capabilities. He was free to express the gospel truthfully and openly. God’s graciousness is best reflected in our openness.
2. *Our message should be Christ-centered.* It would be ridiculous for a ministry granted in mercy to focus on the merits of the person ministering! “For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake” (verse 5, NRSV).

The situation in Corinth demanded that Paul discuss and defend his own ministry. As he defended his reputation and reviewed his credentials, he was concerned that he not neglect this important principle (see 2 Cor. 11:16-18). We should model this concern of Paul’s that his message be Christ-centered. How often self gets in the way in our attempt to proclaim God’s saving message to others. Jesus Himself in His earthly ministry “emptied Himself, and in all that He did, self did not appear. He subordinated all things to the will of His Father.” —*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 14.

How does Paul define the work of “the god of this world”? 2 Cor. 4:3, 4, NIV.

Whether we preach a sermon, teach a Sabbath School class, chair a committee, or lead an outreach ministry, our egos tend to get in the way. How can we separate our reputations and egos from the service we perform? How do we help others whose egos and service are often entangled?

THE MINISTRY OF SLAVES (2 Cor. 4:1-6).

Paul and his companions are active in “ministry” (verse 1) and are “slaves” (verse 5, NRSV). What meanings do these words have today?

Paul borrows from two important word groups to describe his role and the role of his evangelistic team. First, Paul sees themselves involved in “ministry.” The Greek word is related to the verb “serve” and the noun “servant.” This word group originally referred to “table service,” or what we might call “waiting on tables” (see Mark 1:31). These terms have “‘the special quality of indicating very personally the service rendered to another.’”—Beyer quoted in Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, p. 302.

Second, Paul says he and his companions “proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your *slaves* for Jesus’ sake” (verse 5, NRSV; italics supplied). The emphasis of the word *slave* is on the subordinate relationship of the slave to the master. In the Greek world, the word had a humiliating, scornful ring to it. In the Old Testament, with its understanding of God as Lord, to be His slave is both honorable and desirable. For Paul, Jesus is His “Lord” or “Master,” who has assigned him and his co-workers to serve the Corinthian believers. Far from dictating to the Corinthians (as some likely charged), he served them on behalf of his Master. A true Christian leader is a servant of others. Far from showing a dictatorial spirit, she or he imitates the servant-leader model Jesus lived.

How did Paul, as “servant,” reflect his Master’s ministry? Mark 10:41-45; Phil. 2:5-8.

Think about it: “In the gospel the lordship of Christ is proclaimed and people are called to give their allegiance to him, but the one to whom they are thus called to submit is also the crucified one, the one who died for them. These two basic elements of the gospel need to be held together, for if they are not the gospel itself is distorted.”—Colin Kruse, *2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: InterVarsity Press, 1987), pp. 104, 105.

Consider the above two basic elements of the gospel, and then reflect on the following two questions: In what specific ways can you uphold the gospel when these elements are held together? In what specific ways can you distort the gospel when you separate them from each other?

HIS WONDERFUL FACE (2 Cor. 4:4, 6).

What divine act motivates Paul's ministry? 2 Cor. 4:6. (Compare John 1:14, 18.)

Ellen White begins *The Desire of Ages* this way: "His name shall be called Immanuel, . . . God with us" (Matt. 1:23; Isa. 7:14) and "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God' is seen 'in the face of Jesus Christ,'" page 19; 2 Cor. 4:6. This last verse is a major point of Christian faith: The clearest representation of God comes to us in the incarnation Jesus Christ.

What does the New Testament mean when it calls Jesus the "image" of God? 2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3.

To describe Jesus as "the image of God," or God's "express image" means that He is the true and perfect representation of the very nature of God in every sense of the word. They are one in outward likeness, as well as inward character, nature, and purpose. That is why Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9, NIV). The One through whom the light was created in the beginning became the Redeemer revealing in His face "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" (2 Cor. 4:6).

"Our little world is the lesson book of the universe. God's wonderful purpose of grace, the mystery of redeeming love, is the theme into which 'angels desire to look,' and it will be their study throughout endless ages. Both the redeemed and the unfallen beings will find in the cross of Christ their science and their song. It will be seen that the glory shining in the face of Jesus is the glory of self-sacrificing love. In the light from Calvary it will be seen that the law of self-renouncing love is the law of life for earth and heaven; that the love which 'seeketh not her own' has its source in the heart of God; and that in the meek and lowly One is manifested the character of Him who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto. . . .

"But turning from all lesser representations, we behold God in Jesus. Looking unto Jesus we see that it is the glory of our God to give."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 19–21.

Paul declares that the new covenant reflects a permanent glory (2 Cor. 3:7-18). Indeed, the glory of God's revelation in Christ is both for time and for eternity. Meditate upon your favorite New Testament story involving Jesus. What does it teach you about God and His desire to save you?

TREASURE IN CLAY POTS (2 Cor. 4:7-15).

How does Paul continue to show the relationship between his evangelistic team and the message they preach? 2 Cor. 4:7-12. List the striking contrasts he employs that give hope and confidence in God's power at work in our lives.

Imagine going to a fine department store and buying an expensive vase. The clerk wraps the article carefully, places it in a bag, and sends you on your way. When you arrive home, you throw away the wrapping and bag, then find the perfect place for your new treasure.

Paul is suggesting that he and his partners are disposable, like the packaging around a treasure. Their purpose is not to draw attention to themselves but to help others appreciate the treasure they bear—"the glory of God in the face of Jesus" (verse 6, NRSV). If they are always being thrown aside, it is so Jesus' life may be displayed (verse 10).

True ministry is often exhausting. Those who participate in it (as we all should) often will feel rejected. However grand its moments, it is bound to have times of emotional and physical stress. Ministry costs something. Sometimes it costs everything.

Such knowledge should not surprise those who know the story of Jesus. In fact, those who are ministering on behalf of Jesus will discover they are reflecting His story. "We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body" (verse 10, NIV).

In spite of his difficult situation, what hope does Paul express for the future? 2 Cor. 4:13-15.

Because God has a splendid future for those who display His glory, it does not matter how often Paul and his friends are "thrown away." They serve One who has been resurrected. That One has a common destiny for His servants and the people they serve. One day, they will be led "into his presence" (verse 14, NRSV).

What gives you hope during stressful times? What difference does such hope make in your life? In what ways can you impart hope to those facing trying circumstances?

HARD PRESSED BUT NOT CRUSHED (2 Cor. 4:7-12).

Compare the summary of Paul's afflictions in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 with lists he provides elsewhere:

1 Cor. 4:9-13 _____

2 Cor. 6:4, 5 _____

2 Cor. 11:23-29 _____

2 Cor. 12:10 _____

Think of two or three of your friends who minister on behalf of Jesus. What types of affliction do they experience as a result of their efforts? How have you suffered as a result of your witness?

Paul adds to our understanding of the role of suffering in Christian life and ministry. He sees God at work in the trials he experiences. The fact that Paul is "afflicted in every way" (2 Cor. 4:8, NRSV) allows us to understand that he is the bearer of a divine treasure. And while Paul experiences "death," it brings "life" to others (verse 12). Also, Paul sees God's hand at work in limiting his suffering. He and his friends are "hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed" (verses 8, 9, NIV; compare 1 Cor. 10:13). Most inspiring of all, Paul comes to understand that suffering hardships to bring life to others is a reflection of his Lord's work (2 Cor. 4:10-12).

If the treasure in our earthen vessels is what is so precious, why do we concern ourselves so much with the vessels? 2 Cor. 2:7.

"Our weakness is no barrier to the purposes of God. Self-reliance is the barrier. Whatever you do, don't make the mistake of focusing on the container, either in awe or in criticism. Look to the treasure. As someone put it years ago, 'It is impossible to impress people with your own cleverness and at the same time to impress them with the wonder of Jesus Christ.'"—Louis Venden in the Richards Lectureship Series, October 22 and 23, 1995, Andrews University.

What can you do today to develop the endurance and loyalty to the gospel in the face of hardship that Paul consistently showed?

FURTHER STUDY: In Romans 5:1-5, what attitude toward suffering does Paul view as a result of justification by faith? Review Paul's understanding of the benefits of suffering in 2 Corinthians 1:3-11.

“Let us then put away all self-exaltation. As long as the cross of Calvary stands as a monument of the cost of our salvation, as a reminder of the amazing love and humiliation of the King of glory, let us walk in its shadow, and seek to reflect the character of our Redeemer. Go to him as a perfect Saviour, for He has said, ‘Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.’ There is no reason why we should seek to exalt ourselves, for we are full of weakness. As you realize this, trust in Him whose grace is sufficient for you, for ‘we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.’”—*The Signs of the Times*, March 9, 1888.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Design two or three questions that could help determine whether or not one is practicing servant ministry. Share your list with others. Use the best of them to make a set of questions you can use in prayerful self-examination.
2. In conducting evangelistic outreach, we sometimes hide our identity by holding meetings in neutral locations and by not placing the name *Seventh-day Adventist* on advertisements. In view of Paul's call to openness, would he approve of such strategies? Why or why not?
3. How might the following quotations help us to understand our ministry as Christians?

“The world is changed not by the self-regarding, but by men and women prepared to make fools of themselves.”
—P. D. James.

“Learn the lesson that, if you are to do the work of a prophet, what you need is not a scepter but a hoe.”
—Bernard of Clairvaux.

SUMMARY: In His mercy, God commissions Christians to share “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” In fulfilling this commission, we may experience all types of trouble. But no trouble can dim the privilege of bearing the treasure of the gospel to a destitute world.



The Young Soldier, Part 3

Simon Vieira Morase Neto

After studying the Bible with me for two months, Sidraque decided to be baptized. He was concerned about what his family's response would be, so I agreed to pray with him that God would soften their hearts.

He contacted them and told them that he had found the Seventh-day Adventist church in Sao Luis and had been studying the Bible with an Adventist. Then he told them of his decision to be baptized as a Seventh-day Adventist. His mother had heard that some religious sects were kidnapping and brainwashing young people. She feared that Sidraque had fallen into the hands of one of these groups, and reacted strongly. "If you join this church, forget that I am your mother!"

However, Sidraque's father, who was quite ill at the time, told his son, "If it is your desire, and if it is for your good, you may be baptized."

Sidraque wanted me to visit his father. He told me, "I don't want my father to die without knowing what I have learned. And if he should die before I am 18, my mother won't let me get baptized."

But Sidraque's family lived a long distance from Sao Luis, and I would not be able to go for several months. Because Sidraque wanted his parents' blessing on his baptism, he decided to wait. However, just after Sidraque turned 18, his father died. A few weeks later Sidraque and his three cousins, who had been studying with him, set the date for their baptism. I urged him to invite his family. His mother and brothers, who had objected to his baptism, agreed to come.

As he had promised, Sidraque completed his classes and prepared for his exams. When he did not pass, he accepted this as an answer to prayer. Now he attends the theological seminary in Brazil to prepare for the ministry. During his vacations he colporteurs to earn his school tuition. His brothers, who had initially objected to his joining the church, are helping him with his tuition.

"I always wanted to become a soldier in Brazil's army," Sidraque says. "But now I am training to be a soldier in God's army, not to win wars for a country, but to win souls for God's kingdom; not to receive medals as a hero, but to receive trophies from the King of Kings; not to kill, but to bring life through Jesus Christ."

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Ministry in Focus



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Cor. 4:16–5:21.

MEMORY TEXT: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:17, 18, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: Accepting Christ's work on our behalf changes our outlook on everything. God's plan for us will guide the choices we make. And we will learn to value ourselves and others at the foot of an old, rugged cross.

TO MINISTER FOR CHRIST REQUIRES FOCUS. Have you ever watched a slide show that is slightly out of focus? The temptation is to shout, “Focus, please!” And when at last the blurred images clear—what a great relief.

Unlike a slide show, ministry is not a spectator activity. We must invest every fiber of our being to serve others on behalf of Jesus. But ministry does require focus. For each of us, the focus of our service for Christ, the “Why?” of our ministry, may slowly blur. In 2 Corinthians 4:16–5:10, Paul invites us to sharpen our focus on ministry. In view of God's reconciliation worked out in Christ's ministry on our behalf, we receive clearer vision of ourselves and others, plus the present and the future. We gain focus for reflecting God's own ministry in our lives.

FOCUS ON OURSELVES (2 Cor. 4:16–5:5).

Paul's success in ministry does not depend on how others evaluate him but on how God views things. If one applies the usual measures of success, one may fault him for his physical appearance or his lack of confidence and eloquence (see 1 Cor. 2:3, 4; 2 Cor. 10:10). Also, one may think there must be something wrong with a person who experiences so many trials! But fortunately "The Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7, RSV).

Paul viewed himself and his ministry from God's point of view. How are you viewing yourself and your ministry? 2 Cor. 4:16–5:10. What difference does it make to see things from God's perspective instead of our own?

Paul seems to be saying, "If you wish to pass judgment on me and my ministry, you must not do so on the basis of this poor, battered frame. Instead, your judgment must be in agreement with that final and eternal opinion coming from the court of Christ" (verse 10). His judgment will not be based on the visible and temporary but on the invisible and eternal. "I have nothing to fear from such an investigation, for I have not based my life and ministry on short-lived values, but on eternal ones."

This passage is good news for all of us who gaze into the mirror and find fresh evidence of our mortality. Our true significance and worth is not reflected in deepening wrinkles and receding hairlines. Disease and disability may afflict our mortal bodies. But God has a far greater reality in store for us! What really matters ultimately is how God views us and the blessed hope awaiting us. These are the eternal realities that we need to focus on during our earthly pilgrimage.

To discover what that greater reality is, read 2 Corinthians 1:22; 4:16; 5:5; and Ephesians 1:14.

What do the following verses mean to you? "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy." "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa. 35:5, 6, 10, NRSV).

FOCUS ON THE FUTURE (2 Cor. 5:1-9).

Many believe that 2 Cor. 5:1-9 proves we will go immediately to heaven when we die. How would you explain the passage?

In verses 1-5, Paul describes three human conditions. He does not focus on *when* the change will occur from one condition to the next. To discover Paul's description of these conditions, complete the following chart:

| Earthly Life | Death | Heavenly Life |
|-----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| "the earthly tent" (verse 1, NIV) | "when we have taken it [this tent] off" (verse 3, NRSV) | |
| "this tent" (verses 2, 4, NIV) | | "our heavenly dwelling" (verse 2) |
| | "unclothed" (verse 4, NIV) | |

Does Paul look forward to the "nakedness" of death as a time when he will be with the Lord? When will believers be "at home with the Lord"? 2 Cor. 5:2-9, NIV (compare John 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:51-57).

In 2 Cor. 5:6-9, Paul, employing the contrast of being at home or away from home, discusses the present and future conditions. While thinking that Paul is emphasizing what happens at death, we can continue the chart above as follows.

| Earthly Life | Death | Heavenly Life |
|--|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| "at home in the body . . . away from the Lord" (verse 6) | [verses 6-9 do not discuss death] | |
| "we walk by faith" (verse 7, KJV) | | walking by "sight" (verse 7) |
| | | "at home" (verse 9) |

First Corinthians 15:51-57 is clear about *when* the dramatic change occurs. So Paul's readers already know that the blessed state of "at home with the Lord" begins at Christ's return.

As you read 1 Corinthians 15:51-57, meditate upon what this moment will mean to you, your friends, and your family.

FOCUS ON THE PRESENT (2 Cor. 4:16-18; 5:10).

How should we evaluate the afflictions and trials we experience? 2 Cor. 4:16-18.

While Paul wants his readers to view clearly the future, he does not ask them to forget the present. To understand the present, they and we need to start looking through the wide-angle lens of the plan of redemption.

Paul refers to the present life as “the earthly tent” or “this tent” (2 Cor. 5:1, 2, 4, NIV). Our bodies are fragile and temporal. Paul agrees with the prayer “Lord, let me know my end, and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is” (Ps. 39:4, NRSV; compare Ps. 90:12). But God has in store for us a resurrection body—a “house.” A tent is a temporary structure. But God’s “house” is heavenly, permanent, and eternal.

What future event should guide our lives now? 2 Cor. 5:9, 10; Rom. 14:10. Do we view such an event with anxiety and fear or with joyous anticipation? Why?

Paul stresses the aim of the Christian life—to please the Lord. Later, he will urge, “Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord” (Eph. 5:10, NRSV). To emphasize the importance of doing so, he points to our appointment before “the judgment seat of Christ.” “Judgment seat” translates from a Greek term used for public seats of judgment and especially for the official seat higher-ranking Roman officials used when issuing their judgments. Paul had made an appearance before such a seat of the Roman proconsul Gallio in Corinth (Acts 18:12-17). Towering far above all human courts is the judgment seat of Christ.

“He [Christ] is particularly fitted for this task. He is the world’s Creator and its Redeemer. It is a most awesome thought that our Saviour is to be our judge. He took upon Him the nature of those who will come before His bar of justice (Phil. 2:6-8), those whose destiny He will decide. He suffered every temptation to which they have been subjected (Heb. 2:14-17; 4:15). He stood in man’s place. In Christ divine wisdom is combined with human experience.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 864.

In view of Paul’s counsel, how might you evaluate (1) the daily challenges of seeking to be a good parent, spouse, or friend; (2) the priority of squeezing time for ministry into an already stretched schedule.

FOCUS ON PEOPLE (2 Cor. 5:11-17).

If we need to evaluate others, what attitudes should we have? On what basis should a Christian evaluate others? 2 Cor. 5:11-17.

All too often we characterize people by their weaknesses or the traumas they have experienced. We refer to someone as “the blind man” or “the crippled woman” or “the one who just got divorced.” Our human eyes focus on a person’s flaws. But God invites us to see people from His point of view.

The Corinthians were tempted to view Paul from a human point of view, to discredit him because of his weaknesses and trials. Paul, however, learned a different outlook—not his own but his Lord’s. “From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view” (verse 16, NRSV).

What was wrong with the way Paul once viewed Christ? 2 Cor. 5:16.

Paul once viewed Christ from only a human viewpoint. Jesus was simply a misguided would-be messiah whose erring followers must be disciplined. But Paul learned to worship as Lord the One he had scorned. And with this transformation, he found that his view of all people changed drastically. He came to see Jesus as the Son of God. And he came to see all people as potential daughters and sons of God. Such vision motivates Paul’s plea, “Be reconciled to God” (verse 20).

Francis Schaeffer once reflected upon the self-understanding of many Christians: “‘It is wonderful to be a Christian, but I am such a small person, so limited in talents—or energy or psychological strength or knowledge—that what I do is not really important.’” Schaeffer provided a corrective: “The Bible, however, has quite a different emphasis: With God there are no little people.”—*No Little People* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1974), p. 13. Paul invites us to measure both ourselves and others in the light of Calvary (2 Cor. 5:14, 15).

Often people need to evaluate other people. For example, teachers grade pupils, and employers evaluate employees. How could our evaluating procedures reflect the values of 2 Corinthians 5:11–17? How could this passage affect our desire to “evaluate” (judge) people such as church officers, fellow members, a young member expelled from church school. . . ?

FOCUS ON GOD IN CHRIST (2 Cor. 5:14-21).

As you read verses 14, 15, 18-21 out loud, try to recapture Paul's joy for God's work of reconciliation.

These verses include at least three summaries of God's work for us. Each summary is an attempt to describe the indescribable—God's grace. With each is an explanation of the change God's work brings to our lives. Fill in the missing sections of the chart.

God's Work for Us

Our Response to God's Work

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Christ died for all (verses 14, 15). | 1. We no longer live for ourselves but for Christ (verse 15). |
| 2. God, in Christ, reconciled us to himself (verse 18). | 2. |
| 3. | 3. In Christ we become the righteousness of God (verse 21). |

Of all the descriptions of the gospel in 2 Corinthians 5:14-21, which do you find the most inspiring? Why?

“When men and women can more fully comprehend the magnitude of the great sacrifice which was made by the Majesty of heaven in dying in man's stead, then will the plan of salvation be magnified, and reflections of Calvary will awaken tender, sacred, and lively emotions in the Christians's heart. . . . This world will appear of but little value to those who appreciate the great price of man's redemption, the precious blood of God's dear Son. All the riches of the world are not of sufficient value to redeem one perishing soul. Who can measure the love Christ felt for a lost world as He hung upon the cross, suffering for the sins of guilty men? . . . ”

“Upon this theme it is a sin to be calm and unimpassioned.”
—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 212, 213.

How have I allowed the gospel to transform me? Am I living for Christ? In what specific ways am I a minister of reconciliation?

FURTHER STUDY: Two additional points may prove helpful in sharing your views of 2 Corinthians 5:1-10. (1) In 2 Corinthians 4:13, 14, Paul states his belief in the resurrection and indicates that being brought into “his [Christ’s] presence” follows rather than comes before that event. (2) Second Timothy 4:6-8 indicates that Paul expected to receive his “crown” at Christ’s return.

Philippians 1:18-26 is another of Paul’s passages about death that many people misunderstand. Take time to reflect on it in light of our study on 2 Corinthians 5:1-10. Do some of the same insights apply? Note that Paul reflects elsewhere in Philippians his belief in the resurrection (or transformation) at Christ’s return (Phil. 3:10, 11, 20, 21).

Read Ellen White’s vision of “The Judgment” in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 384-387. What should be our attitude toward the judgment?

“Today, in the spirit and power of Elias and of John the Baptist, messengers of God’s appointment are calling the attention of a judgment-bound world to the solemn events soon to take place in connection with the closing hours of probation and the appearance of Christ Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. Soon every man is to be judged for the deeds done in the body. The hour of God’s judgment has come, and upon the members of His church on earth rests the solemn responsibility of giving warning to those who are standing as it were on the very brink of eternal ruin.”—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 716.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Paul wrote whole letters dedicated to the theme that salvation is available to all on the basis of faith in Christ (Romans; Galatians). How, then, can he describe a judgment based on works “done in the body, whether good or evil”? (2 Cor. 5:10, NRSV).
2. How can we help people who have heard the story of Calvary again and again recapture the wonder of God’s work in Christ?

SUMMARY: Just as Paul’s perspectives were drastically transformed on the road to Damascus, our views will likewise be altered by a clear vision of Christ’s work for us. Then we will learn to evaluate everything from the eternal perspective of God’s plan of salvation.



Treasure in a Trunk

J. H. Zachary

“If you speak any more about this Jesus or the Bible, you will be fired!” Rosa’s boss threatened.

Rosa Faracova grew up in a Muslim home in the Russian Federation. In the face of Communist oppression, many people either set aside their religious practices or gave up their faith completely.

But in 1995, while sorting through her mother’s things, Rosa discovered an old book hidden in a trunk. She thought it was a prayer book, but as she began reading, she discovered that it was an aging Bible that her mother had read in secret during the years of spiritual drought. As she read, she found stories of men and women who faced problems in life that were similar to her own. She thrilled to learn how God helped them. She began reading the Bible daily.

A year later Rosa saw an advertisement for a Bible class. She joined the class, and as she studied, she found new peace and hope. Six months later she and seven others were baptized and became the first Sabbath keepers in her city.

Rosa was eager to share her discoveries with her friends and fellow workers, all nominal Muslims. She wanted them to experience the joy she had found. But witnessing was hard. Some called her a traitor to her religion; others coldly refused to listen to her; then her boss told her not to speak of religion on the job.

Rosa, a single mother with a 7-year-old son, could not afford to risk losing her job. But she *had* to tell others what Jesus has done for her. “I long for my friends to come to know my Jesus as their Friend,” she told me at a seminar where she was learning how to share her faith with her Muslim friends and relatives.

A new set of Bible study guides is being written and translated for believers like Rosa. Using the Muslim Quran and the Bible, these lessons highlight the points common to Adventism and Islam: faith in Jesus, the Sabbath, the Second Advent, healthful lifestyle, and the judgment, as well as others.

Pray for Rosa and hundreds like her as they share Jesus with others in the Russian Federation.



James H. Zachary (left) is director of evangelism for The Quiet Hour in Redlands, California.

The Ministry of Reconciliation



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Cor. 5:18–6:13.

MEMORY TEXT: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: In God's reconciling work through Christ, we hear a call to extend the message of reconciliation in the home, the church, and the world.

IN CHRIST, WE ARE RECONCILED WITH GOD. Some of the words Paul uses to explain God's work of salvation are difficult to understand. “Justification” comes from the law courts. And “redemption” reflects the practice of freeing slaves on payment of a price. “Reconciliation,” though, is easily understood by all who have experienced the healing of a relationship. We need only reflect on a time when shoulders gave way to warm embraces or when words of accusation changed to forgiveness. God “reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18, NIV). Reconciliation with a human companion is blessed indeed. This, however, is the greatest wonder—through Christ we have been reconciled to God!

As you study this week's lesson, remember that Christ wants to share with you His ministry of reconciliation as you reach others for Him. By God's grace, determine to be a minister of such reconciliation.

PAUL: MINISTER OF RECONCILIATION (2 Cor. 5:18-21).

On what basis does God offer reconciliation to the human family? 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Rom. 5:6-11.

Philip Hughes says of 2 Corinthians 5:21, "There is no sentence more profound in the whole of Scripture."—*Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Atlanta, Ga.: Presbyterian Church U.S.A. Executive Committee for Home Missions) p. 211. 2 Cor. 5:18-21 discloses a profound truth: God not only initiates reconciliation. He is its goal. "Through Christ every obstruction is removed, and access to God is secured. Man is urged and welcomed to the pardoning love of God. By His love for fallen men, God is honored and glorified and magnified through Jesus Christ. God can be just, and yet pardon the transgressor. Oh, what love, what matchless love!"—Ellen G. White, *The Home Missionary*, Nov. 1, 1897.

What impact does Christ's death have on our relationship with God and with one another? What is the extent of the reconciliation Christ won? 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Eph. 2:11-22; Col. 1:19, 20; Gal. 3:26, 20.

Paul's focus in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 is on reconciliation between humans and God. This is "vertical" reconciliation. However, God's reconciling work in Christ also affects our relationships with others. This is "horizontal" reconciliation. That Paul also is interested in reconciliation among Christians is obvious for at least two reasons: (1) Paul remains concerned about his relationship with the Corinthian believers. When he pleads, "Be reconciled to God" (verse 20, NIV), he also is asking them to open their hearts to him (2 Cor. 6:11); (2) In chapters 8 and 9, we see the deep commitment Paul has to reconciliation between Jewish and Gentile Christians. "The collection" discussed there is likely his way of nurturing such reconciliation.

Review the following incidents where Paul served as a "minister of reconciliation" in order to bring Christians together. What can you learn from them that will help you to become reconciled to someone? 1 Cor. 1:10-12; Phil. 4:2, 3; Philemon.

Can you recall an incident when God used you as a "minister of reconciliation"? What plans do you have to be a reconciler in your family, church, and place of work? How would you go about implementing such plans?

RECONCILIATION GOES TO CHURCH (2 Cor. 5:18-21; Matt. 5:23, 24; 18:15-20; John 13:12-17).

Jesus provided strategies for reconciliation among church members. Describe each strategy after the appropriate verse. How useful are these strategies today?

Matt. 5:23, 24.

“When our duty is so plainly marked out, why do so many church members go contrary to a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ and speak of their difficulties to those who know nothing in regard to them or in regard to those whom these difficulties concern? Jesus the great Teacher, has told us what our duty is. Our gifts, our prayers are not acceptable to God while we leave this duty undone, and let the poison of envy, evil-surmising, and jealousy, take possession of our souls, and spoil our union and happiness. Oh, how much unhappiness would be spared, and how many evil thoughts would be quenched, if believers would take up the work that Christ has said must be done to prevent evil thinking and evil speaking.”—*This Day With God*, p. 19.

Matt. 18:15-20.

A person who has been wronged is not the only one who can initiate reconciliation. “If we have in any way grieved or wounded others, it is our duty to confess our fault and seek for reconciliation. This is an essential preparation that we may come before God in faith, to ask His blessing.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 144.

John 13:12-17.

“Reconciliation one with another is the work for which the ordinance of feet washing was instituted.

“As Christ celebrated this ordinance with His disciples, conviction came to the hearts of all save Judas. So we shall be convicted as Christ speaks to our hearts. The fountains of the soul will be broken up. The mind will be energized, and, springing into activity and life, will break down every barrier that has caused dissension and alienation.”—*Evangelism*, p. 275.

As you read Ephesians 4:31, 32, ask yourself: How well does my life reflect this passage? If there is one characteristic in these verses on which God has been wanting to get your attention, spend some time now in thoughtful prayer and reflection.

RECONCILIATION COMES HOME (2 Cor. 5:18-21; Eph. 5:21-33).

How might family members reflect the reconciling work of God in Christ? 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Eph. 5:21-33.

God's work in Christ is designed to be practical to our daily lives. God longs to make us "ministers of reconciliation." And He invites us to reflect His reconciling love in our relationships with family members. Christians, then, have a marvelous privilege—we, the recipients of God's reconciliation, may actually help to widen the circle of reconciliation. Nowhere is such a witness more needed than within the home.

What are some of your favorite words of counsel that would help support reconciliation in the home? Possibilities might include Prov. 12:18; 14:29; 15:1, 28; 17:9, 14; and Eph. 4:26.

Tourists on Tokyo's subway sometimes find it difficult to determine the correct fare. Some clever travelers discover that each station has a "fare adjustment" window. When someone cannot determine a fare, one can pay the highest rate, then receive the appropriate refund at the end of the trip! In the home, there also is a "fare adjustment" window. It is the two words "I'm sorry." We must often step up to the window and speak these words. They allow us to make adjustments for those difficult parts of the journey where we have misjudged the effects of our words and actions. Also, they trigger the work of reconciliation.

"Love's agencies have wonderful power, for they are divine. The soft answer that 'turneth away wrath,' the love that 'suffereth long, and is kind,' the charity that 'covereth a multitude of sins' (Proverbs 15:1; 1 Corinthians 13:4, R.V.; 1 Peter 4:8, R.V.)—would we learn the lesson, with what power for healing would our lives be gifted! How life would be transformed, and the earth become a very likeness and foretaste of heaven!"—*Education*, p. 114.

What do you see as a job description of a "minister of reconciliation"? How much of a reconciler have you been in the last month? What specific telephone calls could you place, letters could you write, or visits could you make that would help to rebuild some bridges in your family, work place, church, neighborhood, or community?

CHURCH MISSION AND RECONCILIATION (Rev. 14:6, 7; Matt. 28:16-20).

How does our mission imply the need for reconciliation among races? Rev. 14:6, 7; Matt. 28:16-20. How do the results of that message reflect the same need? Rev. 7:9, 10.

In a world where “ethnic cleansing” is a present evil, the church needs to witness to another set of values—values that “rate” people, not on the basis of prejudice, but on the basis of eternal worth. We are to regard no one from merely “a human point of view” (2 Cor. 5:16, NRSV). We are called to a global mission that is promised success in winning a reconciled and redeemed community drawn from everywhere on earth.

“Jesus is not going to save Greeks and Jews, or Blacks and Whites, or Hispanics and Asians, or Italians and Germans, or Irish and English, or West Indians and Africans, or Americans and Russians, or Armenians and Azerbaijanis, or Israelis and Palestinians, or Pakistanis and Indians, or Iraqis and Iranians, or Japanese and Chinese. He is going to save a ‘new humanity’ who have risen by God’s grace above ethnocentric world views, prejudicial attitudes, political ideologies, and racist actions, to become the ‘new men’ and ‘new women’—the new humanity—in Christ.”—Caleb Rosado, *Broken Walls* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1990), p. 87. (See Eph. 2:11-22.)

Scripture links our mission to the world with reconciliation. What does this tell us about God?

We may be tempted to feel that reconciliation between and among ethnic groups or tribes is something that should be accomplished in an afternoon or two. But Paul’s experience tells us the task is far more involved than that. He spent his entire ministry trying to reconcile Jewish and Gentile Christians. We must listen carefully to one another until we have a fresh degree of understanding. Then we must listen again and again. We must not be discouraged but work persistently to reconcile and to be reconciled, ever measuring our reactions to others by God’s own reconciling work toward us.

How great do you think is the need for reconciliation among ethnic groups in our church today? In your congregation? What role do you think God might wish you to play where you live? Where you work?

HEARTS OPEN TO RECONCILIATION (2 Cor. 6:1-13).

If you had been one of the Corinthian Christians, what do you think your response might have been to Paul's appeals in 2 Corinthians 6:1, 2, 11-13? Why?

Paul has just issued one of the most heartfelt invitations in the Bible: "We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20, NIV). To this he adds another invitation. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2, KJV). Since Paul is addressing Christians, we may each hear a call to accept afresh God's reconciling work. Have you accepted Christ *today* as your Saviour and Lord?

Why is the life we live important to the success of the gospel? 2 Cor. 6:1-13.

In 2 Corinthians 6:1-13, Paul returns to the relationship of the Corinthians between God, Paul himself, and his companions. Paul's opening appeal invites them to respond to God's grace by accepting it immediately. His closing appeal invites them to "open wide" their hearts toward him. "In all his dealings with them . . . Paul has been out of the abundance of his heart . . . His heart has always been full of love for them, and even now he yearns for them and for their loving response. He has met all their criticisms in the spirit of Christ, with largeness of heart."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 876.

Between these two appeals, Paul once again defends his ministry. He states again that the hardships he has endured are a badge of honor. In these afflictions, Paul and company have, through God's power, modeled the great Christian virtues (verses 6, 7). They have ministered consistently through shifting tides of public opinion and unfair treatment (verses 8-10).

Among the contradictions of his ministry that Paul lists is that he and his helpers are "unknown, and yet are well known" (verse 9, NRSV). They have earned no grand reputation among humans. But in God's sight, they are well known. Interestingly, Paul's sacrificial ministry has made him, in our own day, one of the best-known figures of history!

If we could ask you, O Creator, for one gift, it would be for the gift of open hearts—hearts that are wide open to You, and hearts that are wide open to every one of Your children. We ask in the name of the great Reconciler, Amen.

FURTHER STUDY: Study Genesis 32, 33, and Luke 15:11-31. What do these stories teach us about reconciliation?

“No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple, that every soul may have free access to God. . . . In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free. All are brought nigh by His precious blood”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 386.

“Caste is hateful to God. . . . Without distinction of age, or rank, or nationality, or religious privilege, all are invited to come unto Him and live.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 403.

“When the Holy Spirit moves upon human minds, all petty complaints and accusations between man and his fellow man will be put away. The bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness will shine into the chambers of the mind and heart. In our worship of God there will be not distinction between rich and poor, white and black. All prejudice will be melted away. When we approach God, it will be as one brotherhood. We are pilgrims and strangers, bound for a better country, even a heavenly. There all pride, all accusation, all self-deception, will forever have an end.”—*Review and Herald*, Oct. 24, 1899, p. 677.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Can you think of biblical stories of reconciliation? (For example, the truce between Jacob and Esau, Genesis 33, or of Christ’s parable of the prodigal son, Luke 15). What lessons of reconciliation can we learn from these stories?
2. What are some problems we face that alienate and separate people today? What can you do personally to help bring about healing in your church and your community?
3. How does our attitude toward reconciliation with others affect our relationship with God? If we cling to prejudices and refuse to reconcile with others, how do we put at risk our reconciliation with God?

SUMMARY: The gospel proclamation of God’s reconciling work in Christ commissions us to take part in the “ministry of reconciliation.” To a world in desperate need of reconciliation, Paul calls us to be a reconciled community.



Haunted House Helps Open Work

Samuel Ada

The three young missionaries from the 1000 Missionary Movement arrived in Masalisi, a large community in the Philippines, and began looking for a place to live. They soon found a house that seemed to meet their needs. It had not been occupied for years, and the rent was surprisingly cheap. "It belongs to a well-to-do family who has moved closer to town," the agent explained. They rented the house and moved in, thanking God for providing for their needs so quickly and cheaply.

As the young men began meeting their new neighbors, it seemed that everyone was interested in where they lived. Then they learned that the house was "haunted."

"How did you drive away the devil?" one neighbor asked.

"We cannot get close to the house! Surely God is with you!" another remarked.

The young missionaries' fame spread quickly, and they found ready welcome in the homes. People listened eagerly to their testimony, because they had overcome the spirits in the haunted house. After only four months of visitation, the young people were ready to hold evangelistic meetings.

Some 65 people attended the two-week series of meetings. They listened carefully and seemed to understand the Bible truths. But when the call was given to follow Jesus in baptism, only one brave soul came forward. The missionaries were puzzled by the lack of response from the people.

They visited the people, and asked what had held them back from taking their stand for Jesus. "I believe," they heard repeatedly, "but I am waiting for others to step forward before I take my stand." The missionaries prayed that God would touch their hearts.

Little by little the people took their stand for God and prepared for baptism. Soon 15 were baptized, and others were studying for baptism.

The new believers worshiped in an old tent and prayed for means to provide a church for themselves and those who would follow. One of the new members provided a small piece of land in the center of the community for a church building. The newly organized company is now working toward its dream to have a simple church in which to worship.

Samuel Ada is associate director for missionary training at the 1000 Missionary Movement campus outside Manila in the Philippines.

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*Seeds planted in
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here at home!*



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Gospel Workers, 465

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Commitment for Ministry



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Cor. 6:14-7:16.

MEMORY TEXT: “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14, KJV).

KEY THOUGHT: The Lordship of Jesus should dominate our lives rather than just be one influence among many.

DOUBLE AGENTS NEED NOT APPLY. Aldrich Ames is the most famous double agent of our times. Ames, who now occupies a cell in a maximum security prison, worked in the United States Central Intelligence Agency for more than thirty years. For at least the last nine years of his career, he worked as a double agent, selling state secrets. In exchange for \$2.5 million, he exposed more than one hundred intelligence operations. No one seemed to notice that, on a modest salary, he paid cash for a \$500,000 home and the art work it contained. Eventually though, a carelessly discarded document testified to his divided loyalties.

Paul worries that Christians might be recruited as double agents. So he commands, “Do not be mismatched with unbelievers” (2 Cor. 6:14, NRSV). He is concerned that our loyalty to Christ may be at risk. Ministry for Christ will admit no double agents nor will it allow double lives. Ours is not an undercover mission. We are to acknowledge openly our absolute allegiance to the kingdom of Christ.

BE SEPARATE! (2 Cor. 6:14–7:1).

What command opens 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1? (Compare Deut. 22:10; Lev. 19:19.)

Five questions follow this command, each expecting in response a definite, “None!” The contrasts of righteousness/lawlessness, light/darkness, Christ/Belial (or “Belial,” a Jewish name for Satan), and believer/unbeliever end in the final contrast, “What agreement has the temple of God with idols?” (2 Cor. 6:16, NRSV). The claim, “We are the temple of the living God,” is followed by quotations from the Old Testament. Within these, three strong commands, “Come out!,” “be separate!” and “touch nothing unclean!” (verse 17) stand between two “promises” (verse 16; verses 17, 18). Looking back to these promises, the section closes with a call for holiness (2 Cor. 7:1).

How is holiness before God related to separation from the world? What kind of separation is Paul talking about? 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1.

When we read 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 in light of his earlier counsel, Paul is not suggesting that we do not have any contact with unbelievers. After all, how could unbelievers ever have access to the gospel? Paul, the great Christian missionary, does not want to dampen the witness of believers. What, then, does he speak against? He speaks against “all alliances that give undue influence to those who do not love God.” Any alliance with an unbeliever that risks the believer’s exclusive loyalty to God “must be strictly avoided.”—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 8, p. 107. So Paul’s call to separation in 2 Corinthians is much the same as his earlier calls to “flee from sexual immorality” (1 Cor. 6:18, NIV) and idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14).

“It is all right for the church to be in the world provided the world is not in the church. The ship does not sink when it is launched in the water; it sinks when the water gets into the ship . . . The rescue work of the church declines in direct proportion to how much the world invades the church.”—Roy J. Fish and J. E. Conant, *Every-Member Evangelism*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p. 48.

The word *Pharisees* means “separated ones.” How do we avoid the extreme forms of separation practiced by the Pharisees while preserving our devotion to God? How can we be in the world but not of the world?

CHOOSING ONE'S YOKEFELLOWS (2 Cor. 6:14–7:1).

To what situations should we apply the counsel not to be “mismatched with unbelievers”? (2 Cor. 6:14, NRSV).

Christians often have repeated Paul’s words to those thinking about marriage with unbelievers. Ellen White agrees: “Men and women professing godliness should tremble at the thought of entering into a marriage covenant with those who do not respect and obey the commandments of God. It was this that opened the flood-gates of sin to the antediluvians. Such a connection with the world is a direct departure from God’s express requirements—‘Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.’”—*The Signs of the Times*, Dec. 30, 1880.

However, Paul does not address his advice only to marriage. “The apostle Paul declares that it is impossible for the children of God to unite with worldlings. . . . This does not refer to marriage alone; any intimate relation of confidence and copartnership with those who have no love for God or the truth is a snare.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 13.

Other applications we might consider are:

1. Membership in secret societies (*Evangelism*, p. 617);
2. Inappropriate business relations (*Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists*, p. 215);
3. Inappropriate involvement in politics (*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 476);
4. Improper education of our children (*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 195);
5. Institutional collaboration with the world. “Let not God’s people in any of our institutions sign a truce with the enemy of God and man. The duty of the church to the world is not to come down to their ideas and accept their opinions, their suggestions, but to heed the words of Christ through his servant Paul, ‘Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?’”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 271.

Compare Paul’s advice on marriage in 1 Corinthians 7:12-14 with his advice in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16. Is he contradicting himself? Why or why not?

Are you in danger of establishing any relationship that could put at risk your allegiance to Christ? If yes, what should you do to correct the situation?

PROMISES, PROMISES (2 Cor. 6:16–7:1).

God has called us to develop an appropriate distance with unbelievers in matters that could threaten our Christian identity (2 Cor. 6:14–16). For Paul, motivation to obey this call is found in God's promises. God can fulfill these promises only if we remain fully loyal to Him.

Reflect on the first promise Paul gives us. What should this promise mean to us today? 2 Cor. 6:16.

God's original plan, reflected in Eden, was for intimate fellowship with His newly created human companions. But when God comes, "walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze" (Gen. 3:8, NRSV), His search for fellowship is frustrated by sin. Later, the tabernacle pitched amidst the camp of Israel testified to God's desire to dwell with His people. The incarnation of Jesus provides even greater testimony to God's longing for human fellowship. Jesus Christ became "Immanuel, . . . God with us" (Matt. 1:23). In the closing chapters of Revelation, we see the grand, end-time fulfillment of that divine longing. John sees "a new heaven and a new earth" and watches as the new Jerusalem descends. Then he hears "a loud voice from the throne" with its joyous announcement, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God" (Rev. 21:3, NIV).

What comfort and assurance does God's promise in 2 Cor. 6:18 bring to you as you resolve to put Him first and foremost in your life?

Reflecting on this theme of God's desire to be with His people, Paul invites us to claim the promise *now*. This promise is not to be fulfilled only in the new earth. It may be fulfilled to us in the present. As we separate ourselves, sometimes painfully, from compromising relationships, we have the promise of God's presence with us.

Between the "promises" is the command, "Come out!" (2 Cor. 6:17). Review other scriptures that repeat this command: Gen. 15:14; Ezra 10:11; Rev. 18:4. Think of areas in your life from which you need to "come out." In what specific ways will you do that?

I WILL BE YOUR FATHER (2 Cor. 6:17–7:16).

At what points in your Christian experience would the promise of 2 Corinthians 6:17, 18 have been most meaningful to you? (Compare Rev. 21:7.) Why?

The second promise Paul provides makes fellowship with God even more personal. “. . . then I will welcome you, and I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:17, 18, NRSV).

In order to follow Paul’s advice not to be unequally yoked and to “come out,” perhaps some of his converts thought it best to break off relationships with family members (see Matt. 10:37; Ps. 27:10). If so, this promise would be especially meaningful. Whenever we give up something we treasure because it stands in the way of our fellowship with God, He is there to welcome us with open arms. Paul himself knew this type of loss. He could say that, because of his devotion to Christ, he had “lost all things.” He came to understand that it was a small price to pay for “the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:7-9, NIV).

One inviting feature of this promise is found in Paul’s use of the word *daughters*. The Old Testament passage he bases his thoughts on mentions only a “son” (2 Sam. 7:14). Paul wants women to know they are full partners with God.

In what specific ways does the Holy Spirit impress your heart to apply the promises in 2 Corinthians 7:1 and 2 Peter 1:3, 4? What difference would such application make in your life? What import would this have on your witness for Christ?

“The Lord Almighty” (NIV) Himself gives us these promises. “Almighty” translates the Greek word that means “All-Powerful” or “Omnipotent” and is used only of God in Jewish and Christian literature. Aside from several uses in Revelation (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6, 15; 21:22), this is the only other use of the term in the New Testament. Would you expect empty and pointless promises from “the Lord Almighty”?

Explain how you have found rest in the arms of the One who is almighty. Think of two of your favorite Bible promises. When were they particularly helpful? What troubling areas of your life do you still need to give to the Lord? Can you think of any hindrance that may keep you from doing that?

GODLY GRIEF (2 Cor. 7:2-16).

What things make you the happiest? Why? Compare the sources of Paul's joy in 2 Corinthians 7:2-16. Why does Paul repeatedly exclaim, "I rejoice"?

On the heels of the "painful visit," Paul had written to the Corinthians a "painful letter" that he worried about (verse 8). Paul had initially planned to meet Titus at Troas (2 Cor. 2:12, 13). Not finding him there, Paul went to Macedonia, where he experienced inner turmoil as a result of worrying over his relationship with the Corinthians (verse 5). The encouraging report Titus brought when he finally arrived in Macedonia did much to calm Paul. The Corinthians had welcomed Titus "with fear and trembling" (verse 15) and true repentance. So thorough was their heart work that Paul wrote, "I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you."

In applauding the Corinthian believers for displaying "godly grief," Paul mentions "worldly grief." How do the two compare? 2 Cor. 7:5-16, NRSV.

"Repentance always brings a person to the point of saying, 'I have sinned.' The surest sign that God is at work in his life is when he says that and means it. Anything less is simply sorrow for having made foolish mistakes—a reflex action caused by self-disgust.

"The entrance into the kingdom of God is through the sharp, sudden pains of repentance colliding with man's respectable 'goodness.' Then the Holy Spirit, who produces these struggles, begins the formation of the Son of God in the person's life (see Galations 4:19). This new life will reveal itself in conscious repentance followed by unconscious holiness, never the other way around., The foundation of Christianity in repentance. Strictly speaking, a person cannot repent when he chooses—repentance is a gift of God. The old Puritans used to pray for 'the gift of tears.' If you ever cease to understand the value of repentance, you allow yourself to remain in sin. Examine yourself to see if you have forgotten how to be truly repentant."—Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, "Repentance," New York, Dodd, Mead & company © 1935—December 7th.

Reflect: "The love and suffering and death of the Son of God all testify to the terrible enormity of sin and declare that there is no escape from its power, no hope of the higher life, but through the submission of the soul to Christ."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 31.

FURTHER STUDY: To learn more about “godly grief” and true repentance, study Matt. 3:7-10; Luke 5:29-32; Acts 11:15-18 (the conclusion of Peter’s report to the Jerusalem Council and the reaction to it); and Rom. 2:4.

Read *Steps to Christ*, “Repentance,” pp. 23-36.

The following statement deals with Paul’s counsel on marriage in 1 Cor. 7:12-14 and 2 Cor. 6:14-16:

“He who has entered the marriage relation while unconverted is by his conversion placed under stronger obligation to be faithful to his companion, however widely they may differ in regard to religious faith; yet the claims of God should be placed above every earthly relationship, even though trials and persecution may be the result. With the spirit of love and meekness, this fidelity may have an influence to win the unbelieving one. But the marriage of Christians with the ungodly is forbidden in the Bible. The Lord’s direction is ‘Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.’”—*Messages to Young People*, p. 464.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Does “separateness” always mean “separation”? Explain. How can isolation from nonbelievers damage our true “separateness”?
2. Paul says to avoid being “unequally yoked” with unbelievers. We have taken Paul’s counsel to include that a Seventh-day Adventist should marry only a Seventh-day Adventist. What is the wisdom of this counsel as it affects the marriage, family, and spiritual growth?
3. In 2 Cor. 6:15, NRSV, Paul refers to Satan as “Beliar.” Paul mentions Satan often in the Corinthian letters (1 Cor. 5:5; 7:5; 2 Cor. 2:11; 6:15; 11:14; 12:7) and in the letters he wrote from Corinth (Rom. 16:20; 1 Thess. 2:18; 2 Thess. 2:9). Do we, today, speak too much or too little about God’s great enemy? Explain.

SUMMARY: Paul urges Christians to be totally committed to Christ. Supported by the promises of the Almighty, we may free ourselves from compromising relationships and accept God’s gift of true repentance from sin, just as the Corinthians did.



Come and Meet Jesus

John M. Fowler

Kandy is a predominantly Buddhist city in the central highlands of Sri Lanka. Members of the Adventist church there had not held an evangelistic series in several years. But under the leadership of a dynamic young pastor, they caught a vision of the needs and potential around them, and decided to hold an evangelistic series in their neighborhood. The congregation had little more than their eagerness to share their talents for God. They laid plans to invite their neighbors to “come and meet Jesus.”

The Adventist hospital and school worked with church members to publicize the meetings and create a strong witness in the neighborhood where they operate. With minimal advertising other than word of mouth, the meetings drew an average attendance of 400 each day. The messages were presented in three languages: Singhalese, Tamil, and English.

One Buddhist woman attended the meetings against her husband's wishes. One evening as she was about to leave for the meetings, her husband again objected. Instead of arguing with him, she invited him to join her at the meeting and see for himself the joy she had found there. He went, but in the middle of the meeting he began to feel ill. Some volunteers took him to a nearby hospital. Doctors quickly diagnosed his illness as a heart attack, and their quick intervention saved his life.

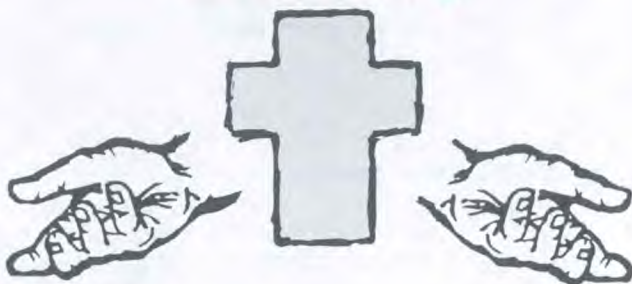
The next day he told his wife that it must have been God's will that he attend the meetings, for if he had stayed at home alone, there would have been no one to help him. He likely would have died. This faithful Buddhist wife took her stand for Christ—with her husband's permission—and was baptized at the end of the effort.

In all, 17 new believers were baptized, and 50 others are preparing for baptism in the near future. Of the 17 baptized, 8 were Buddhists. They all live within one mile of the church. Neighborhood witnessing that focuses on the invitation to friends and neighbors “to come and see Jesus” still works.



John M. Fowler (left) is associate director of the General Conference Department of Education.

The Ministry of Generosity



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Cor. 8:1-15.

MEMORY TEXT: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: True fulfillment is found in meeting the needs of others.

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE AN EAGERLY GIVEN GIFT. Tony Campolo tells the story of Teddy Stallard and his teacher, Miss Thompson. She found Teddy difficult to love even though his records told of his mother's recent death and his father's lack of attention. Teddy's Christmas gift for her came wrapped in brown paper and a maze of Scotch tape. Miss Thompson opened it to find a partly used bottle of cheap perfume. She silenced the giggles of the other children by putting some of it on and asking, "Doesn't it smell lovely?" Teddy lingered after school that day to say softly, "Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother." Miss Thompson's heart broke. She became more committed to her students, especially the slower ones and most especially Teddy Stallard. By the end of the year, his performance had improved dramatically. And years later, when Teddy Stallard, M.D., married, Miss Thompson sat in his mother's place.

As Paul urges the Corinthians to be generous, he shares important concepts with us. Among them is the thought that the size of a gift is not nearly as important as the eagerness in the heart that gives it.

“THE COLLECTION FOR THE SAINTS” (2 Cor. 8:1–9:15).

Early in his missionary career, what did the Jerusalem church leaders ask of Paul? Gal. 2:10.

“The Collection for the Saints,” which is the focus of 2 Corinthians 8, 9, is an overlooked feature of Paul’s ministry. On his visit to Jerusalem, reflected in Galatians 2, Paul is asked to “remember the poor,” something he was “eager to do” (Gal. 2:10, NRSV). So eager was he to fulfill the request that “the collection” may be described as “Paul’s *obsession* for nearly two decades.”—S. McKnight, “Collection for the Saints,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, editors, Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, Ill. & Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 143.

Paul deals with “the collection” in two other passages, one written before and the other after 2 Corinthians 8, 9. What does each passage add concerning this project?

1 Cor. 16:1-4 _____

Rom. 15:22-33 _____

In Acts, we discover that Paul’s final trip to Jerusalem was to deliver “the collection.” After his arrest, Paul told Felix he had come to Jerusalem “to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings” (Acts 24:17, NIV). Paul seems to have collected funds for the project from all of his churches. And the sum of money was probably quite large. Aside from Corinth, donations came from Derbe and Lystra (Acts 20:4), Berea, Thessalonica and Philippi in Macedonia (2 Cor. 8:1-5; Acts 20:4, 6), Ephesus, Troas, and probably other cities, as well. This was an international effort, directed by Paul, to relieve the needs of poor Christians in Jerusalem.

It also provided an opportunity for Paul to exercise his “ministry of reconciliation.” He hoped the collection would testify to the unity of the church, made up as it was of both Jews and Gentiles. He hoped, too, it would show that Gentile Christians recognized the debt of gratitude they owed to Jewish Christians. “For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings” (Rom. 15:27, NIV).

To whom do you “owe” spiritual and material blessings, and what do you plan to do about it? To what projects can I dedicate some of my time/money/talents so the gospel of Christ may be concretely illustrated?

**AN EXAMPLE OF GENEROSITY: THE MACEDONIANS
(2 Cor. 8:1-7).**

In 2 Corinthians 8:1-7, Paul points out the example of generosity provided by believers in Macedonia. Macedonia was not a wealthy province. The Christians there were probably worse off than others because they had been persecuted for their faith (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14; 3:1-5; Phil. 1:29, 30).

Study the following principles of generosity identified in 2 Corinthians 8:1-7. What other principles can you find here? Which is most important for our own time and why?

1. Generosity is a divine gift. We cannot generate it ourselves (verse 1).
2. The poor and afflicted as well as the rich and famous can be generous (verse 2).
3. Generosity is voluntary, not forced. It looks for opportunities to give (verses 3, 4).
4. Christian generosity is based on totally giving oneself to God. It is not only gifts of money that may serve to soothe a selfish spirit. True generosity flows from a committed life (verse 5).
5. Just as they strive to excel in other virtues and gifts, Christians should seek excellence in generosity (verse 7).

How can we recapture the spirit of generosity and sacrificial giving so evident in the lives of the Macedonian Christians? On a scale of 1-10, how sacrificial would you say your giving habits have been during the past six months?

Why not try one of the following? (1) Have your family choose a person or family who has an obvious material need and begin a "collection" to fill it. (2) Lead your Sabbath School class in adopting an ADRA project that would stretch the class's resources.

Lord, the pull toward materialism and self-centeredness is strong. We never seem to acquire quite enough for our own "needs." We imagine ourselves contributing our time, talents, and money someday. Please grant us the gift of generosity today.

THE EXAMPLE OF GENEROSITY: JESUS (2 Cor. 8:8, 9).

In sharing with them the example of the Macedonian Christians' sacrificial giving, Paul has challenged the Corinthians to be generous. Before turning to the grandest Example of generosity, Paul shares his strategy in verse 8.

Reflect on the incarnation of Jesus in light of 2 Corinthians 8:9. Compare Philippians 2:5-8. How did Christ make Himself poor for you? How does your own generosity meet the "test" of Christ's sacrifice?

Philip Yancey writes, "I learned about incarnation when I kept a salt-water aquarium. Management of a marine aquarium, I discovered, is no easy task. I had to run a portable chemical laboratory to monitor the nitrate levels and the ammonia content. I pumped in vitamins and antibiotics and sulfa drugs and enough enzymes to make a rock grow. I filtered the water through glass fibers and charcoal, and exposed it to ultraviolet light. You would think, in view of all the energy expended on their behalf, that my fish would at least be grateful. Not so. Every time my shadow loomed above the tank they dove for cover into the nearest shell. They showed me one 'emotion' only: fear. Although I opened the lid and dropped in food on a regular schedule, three times a day, they responded to each visit as a sure sign of my designs to torture them. I could not convince them of my true concern.

"To my fish I was deity. I was too large for them, my actions too incomprehensible. My acts of mercy they saw as cruelty; my attempts at healing they viewed as destruction. To change their perceptions, I began to see, would require a form of incarnation. I would have to become a fish and 'speak' to them in a language they could understand.

"A human being becoming a fish is nothing compared to God becoming a baby. And yet according to the Gospels that is what happened at Bethlehem. The God who created matter took shape within it, as an artist might become a spot on a painting or a playwright a character within his own play. God wrote a story, only using real characters, on the pages of real history. The Word became flesh." —*The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1995), pp. 38, 39.

Have you laid claim to the vast wealth that is yours as a gift from Christ, the One who was willingly impoverished? If not, why not?

THE WIDOW'S MIGHTY MITE (2 Cor. 8:12; Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4).

How does God judge a gift? 2 Cor. 8:12. Consider the stories in Mark 12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4. How do they illustrate Paul's principle?

Aside from the incomparable gift of God in Christ, the widow's memorable act is the case study of generosity in the Bible. During the last week before His crucifixion, Jesus is tangled in controversies in the temple. But somehow He manages to slip away from the strife and sit opposite the temple treasury. It contains a group of thirteen collection boxes called "The Trumpets" because each is shaped like a ram's-horn trumpet. Each of the thirteen is labeled with an "account" name. Worshipers put an offering into the account, or container, of their choice.

After a while, *she* slips in, an island of poverty in a sea of pride. She slinks along the wall, fearing someone will notice her. Except for shy glances to this offering container, then that one, her eyes are glued to the floor. She is alone. Her clothes are worn, betraying the miserable status of an impoverished widow. Her face is scarred with hardship and scored with misfortune. With no time or resources for luxuries, she is hardly an example of personal hygiene. She is a lament for a system gone astray.

She finds the container. What was its label? Perhaps thinking of someone even more destitute, she chooses the one marked "Poor Fund." She slips a shaking hand into a bare-threaded robe. Jesus leans forward. The glint of two copper coins reaches His eye—two *lepta*—the smallest coin minted. The name means "thin one." Jesus knows this woman has only two "thin ones" to her name. Her hand still quivers. But her will is firm. With reckless generosity and astounding faith, she casts, not one, but both coins into the temple treasury. Jesus is so moved, He calls to His disciples. He points out to them this special woman, and says, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on" (Mark 12:43, 44, NRSV).

Compare and contrast your giving style with that of the widow's. What does her spirit of generosity teach you about your own experience? Do you give out of your abundance or out of your necessity? Do you give expecting some benefit in return or out of love to God and others?

GOD'S GIFT OF GENEROSITY (2 Cor. 8:10-15).

What do we learn about “generosity” or “liberality” from Romans 12:3-8?

In Romans 8, Paul regards generosity as a spiritual gift. He implies the same view in 2 Corinthians, as well: “Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking” (verse 7, NRSV).

Paul does not want his readers to think that the generosity he talks about is merely a humane quality, a feature of civilized life. He wants, instead, to challenge them with the thought that generosity must itself be a gift from God.

What additional principles of generosity may be found in 2 Corinthians 8:10-15?

[Continuing the list from Monday’s lesson]

6. If we make a pledge (either formally or in our hearts) to contribute our resources (money, time, talents, etc.) to God’s cause, we should follow through (verses 10, 11). The Corinthians had, at an earlier point (“last year,” verse 10, NIV), agreed in principle to contribute to “the collection for the saints.” And they had, apparently, begun to raise the promised funds. Paul now encourages them to renew their interest in the project and fulfill their earlier pledge.
7. God does not require of us what we do not possess. He invites us to contribute what He has first given to us. It is not the size of the gift that is the essential element. Our “eagerness” or “willingness” (verses 11, 12) is the standard by which our generosity is measured.
8. Paul uses Exodus 16:18 to underline another principle of generosity—its goal—that is, a “fair balance.” If we are experiencing “abundance,” we should be prepared to minister to those in “need” (verses 13-15, NRSV). That God gave the manna in a way that supplied the needs of all is a model for our own generosity.

If others knew the level of your giving, would you provide a model for them to follow? If not, how can God help you in this area?

FURTHER STUDY: God's Word promises that if we dare to follow heaven's rules of generosity, we will prosper. Study Proverbs 3:9, 10, 27, 28; 11:24, 25; 28:8.

Read *The Acts of the Apostles*, chapter 32, "A Liberal Church," pp. 335-345.

"The Lord has claims upon every living soul, and those whom He blesses with means should help those who are not thus blessed. 'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes, he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.' The followers of Jesus are required to practice self-denial, to cultivate the same beneficent spirit that characterized our Lord. They are to remember the poor, and be kind and sympathetic to the sorrowing, and thus show that they are following in the footsteps of Jesus."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, June 26, 1894.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

1. A relatively small portion of the earth's population consumes the greatest percentage of its natural resources. That is why we hear calls from Christian circles to adopt a "global lifestyle." How does the principle of equality (2 Cor. 8:13-15) support this call?
2. How should we relate to the needs of others when their poverty is the result of laziness or bad management?
3. "The principle illustrated in the lives of worldlings is to get, get." How can we find the inspiration to model and the wisdom to pass on the principle illustrated in Christ's sacrifice, "to give, give"?—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 339.
4. There is more need in the world than any one person or denomination can fulfill. How should that fact influence our giving?
5. Think beyond the financial aspect of giving. What else do you have that you could give?

SUMMARY: The eagerness of the Macedonians to give despite their extreme poverty—and the willingness of Jesus to exchange divine splendor for human poverty—should inspire us to seek after God's gift of generosity.



Blessing in Blindness, Part 1

Charlotte Ishkanian

Four-year-old Yi Yuen peeked shyly from behind her mother's skirt and whispered, *an xi ri kuai le* [ahn shee ri KWEYE luh], "happy day of rest," the Chinese believers' Sabbath greeting. Chen did not see her daughter's smile. Chen is blind.

"I was seven years old when my eyes began bothering me," Chen recounted. "My parents took me to many doctors, but they all said my disease was incurable; I would gradually lose my eyesight."

At first Chen tried to pretend that nothing was wrong. But at night, alone in her dark room, it was easy to imagine what blindness was like. Often she hid her face in her blanket and wept.

Chen's eyesight gradually grew weaker. By age 13, she could no longer see what the teacher wrote on the board; she was legally blind. She enrolled in a school for the blind to learn Braille.

Chen's growing blindness frustrated her. She poured her heartache into music, sometimes practicing 10 hours a day. She mastered several musical instruments. She allowed herself to dream of a musical career, but her blindness prevented her from enrolling in a music conservatory.

One door after another closed for Chen. Eventually she was forced to quit school and take work in a factory for blind workers. Frustrated and lonely, she yearned for happiness and fulfillment.

Chen's mother became a Christian and shared her faith with Chen. The two attended the official Three-Self Church together. There Chen accepted Jesus as her Saviour. Then she met a kind young man and fell in love. The two were married, and Chen felt that at last she was happy. A year later their daughter was born, and Chen could almost forget the pain blindness had caused her.

Chen's mother left China, and Chen began visiting other Three-Self churches. But with her quick mind, Chen was bored by shallow preaching. Chen began searching for greater spiritual fulfillment.

One day Chen met Li, a friend of her mother. When Chen expressed her disappointment in the churches she had attended, Li invited her to attend a Bible study group at her church. But Chen felt she already knew more than most ministers. Li challenged her friend to answer the questions on a Bible study form. Chen realized that she could not answer any of the questions. "What church teaches the Bible in this much detail?" Chen asked.

(continued next week)

Chen and her family live in Shanghai, China. Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of the *Mission* quarterlies.

“The Ministry to the Saints”



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Cor. 8:16-9:15.

MEMORY TEXT: “God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, have an abundance for every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: We are called to contribute our resources to the cause of God, not to make ourselves poor, but so we might experience God's blessings.

HAVE YOU EVER GIVEN A GIFT FROM MIXED MOTIVES? “Dear Jim,” the letter began. “Last week I knelt at the prayer altar to pray for every member in the prayer book, and I wanted to pray for you. But your name was not there.” The letter continued, its message implying, “All manner of good things can happen to you if you will only put your name back in the book. A few dollars in the envelope is little enough to pay for that!” All too many “Christian” ministries use such doubtful motivations coupled with the hype of television programming and the so-called personalization of mass mailing.

If Paul were to direct a fund-raising campaign, how would he organize it? What would motivate him? What efforts would he invest to make sure the event was above criticism? Second Corinthians 8:16-9:15 gives us the chance to watch Paul the fund-raiser at work and to grow in our understanding of what it means to use our money in “the ministry to the saints” (2 Cor. 9:1, NRSV).

THE DELEGATION (2 Cor. 8:16-24).

No sooner have the Corinthian Christians renewed their loyalty to Paul than he asks them to give generously to the "collection for the saints." The project is obviously important to Paul, because we see him doing all he can to persuade the Corinthians. Among the strategies Paul uses is to send a delegation of three people to gather the funds.

For what is the first "brother" who is mentioned known? 2 Cor. 8:18, 19.

For what is the second "brother" who is mentioned known? 2 Cor. 8:22.

Healthy church organization and finances are based on the hints found in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Paul is interested that, in a joint project, local congregations be represented. So he lays the groundwork for representative church organization.

Also, the integrity of church finances must be carefully guarded. Between the introduction of the two "brothers," Paul states his motivation in assembling the delegation: "We intend that no one should blame us about this generous gift that we are administering, for we intend to do what is right not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of others" (verses 20, 21, NRSV). Each of the three delegates was a capable person of noble character. Paul did not send three because each was a questionable individual or because the safety of the gift needed to be assured. Any one of the three would have carried out the duties honestly and efficiently. Any one of the three would have done what was right "in the Lord's sight." However, this project was so important, its success so closely tied to the advancement of the church itself, it was deserving of every safeguard. It must not only be right before God; others must see it to be so.

"Strict honesty may not always be sufficient in money matters, where the least carelessness may become the occasion for criticism. The Christian minister, especially, must exercise scrupulous care in handling money matters."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 893.

How can the following quote help to change any part of your behavior? "Everything God's people do should be as transparent as sunlight. Escaping detection does not justify crime, and make it honesty and righteousness."—*Review and Herald*, Nov. 18, 1890. What does it mean to be "as transparent as sunlight" in your relationship with God and others around you?

TITUS: A CHARACTER STUDY (2 Cor. 7:2-16; 8:16-24).

Describe the mission of Titus to the Corinthians. What was its goal? Did he accomplish it? 2 Cor. 7:2-16.

What role was Titus to play in conjunction with “The collection”? 2 Cor. 8:6, 16-24. What high words of praise does Paul write of Titus in 2 Corinthians 8:16, 23?

The book of Acts and Paul’s letters mention some one hundred individuals as associated with him in ministry. Some assisted with his preaching, teaching, or writing. Others provided housing or helped to pay for Paul’s mission. That so many were involved with Paul’s work shows his commitment to teamwork and the ministry of all believers. Within this large group of co-workers, Titus held an important place.

What role had Titus played as one of Paul’s companions on an earlier trip to Jerusalem? Gal. 2:1-3.

On what later travels did Paul send Titus? What ministry did he perform? Titus 1:1-5; 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:9, 10.

Titus was with Paul from an early point in the apostle’s ministry (Galatians 2) to the end of it (2 Tim. 4:10). Paul called Titus his “brother” (2 Cor. 2:13, NIV), “partner” and “co-worker” (2 Cor. 8:23, NRSV). He addressed a letter “To Titus, my true son in our common faith” (Titus 1:4, NIV). Paul placed great confidence in Titus and felt certain of his love for Christ and loyalty to himself and the gospel he proclaimed.

The apostle “recognized in his trusted associate a forceful, diplomatic, yet winsome and tactful personality.”—Frank Holbrook, “To Titus, My Son,” *Adventist Review*, Jan. 10, 1985, p. 9. The opposition to Paul at Corinth required the exercise of just such skill. And Titus proved equal to the challenge. His success may be due in large part to the personal interest he took in the Corinthians and the genuine love he showed toward them (2 Cor. 8:16, 17).

Have you, as did Titus, dedicated your talents and capabilities to God? What is the mission God wishes to accomplish through you? How are you responding to such mission?

REASONS TO GIVE (2 Cor. 9:1-5).

How does Paul explain his reasons for sending the three men to Corinth? 2 Cor. 9:1-5.

Paul has just boasted to the Corinthians about the voluntary generosity of the Macedonians (2 Cor. 8:1-5). Now we learn that he has been boasting to the Macedonians about the charity of the Corinthian Christians. In fact, the Corinthians' eagerness helped to motivate the Macedonians (2 Cor. 9:2). Paul has become fearful that the reality may not live up to his praise. He worries about the embarrassment that would result if he were to arrive in Corinth with some Macedonians only to find that his boasts of them were empty ones.

Paul wants the gift of the Corinthians to be voluntary. Yet his own appeal is strong. How would you distinguish between appropriate Christian persuasion and inappropriate pressure?

Listed in the order in which they appear in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, the motivations for giving could be summarized as follows:

1. That their generosity might be as "excellent" as their spiritual accomplishments in other areas (8:7);
2. As an appropriate response of thanksgiving for the gospel (8:9; 9:11-13, 15);
3. That their earlier eagerness might be matched by eagerly completing the gift (8:10, 11);
4. To advance a "fair balance" within the Christian family (8:13-15, NRSV);
5. To relieve the needs of poor Christians in Jerusalem (9:1, 12);
6. To avoid embarrassment in the face of a visit by Paul and representatives from Macedonia (9:1-5);
7. To participate in the blessings of generosity (9:6-11);
8. To bring a new level of community to the church (9:14).

Using the above list, which motivations would you regard as the most significant? Which would you regard as the least important? Why? What motivates you to give?

How does the following text motivate you to give generously? "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32, KJV).

GOD IS A CHEERFUL GIVER (2 Cor. 9:6-12).

What spiritual principle is active in the lives of those who give cheerfully and generously? 2 Cor. 9:6-12.

Christian liberality is rooted in God's generosity. That God treasures the cheerful giver should not be a surprise—He Himself is *the* cheerful Giver (2 Cor. 9:15).

How can we determine whether we are being truly cheerful and generous in our giving?

A Christian journal recently published a list of questions for self-examination. The list, titled, "Am I Greedy?" included the following questions:

1. *If I fantasize about winning a magazine sweepstakes, what most comes to mind is:* (a) what I could do for others with all that money; (b) what I could buy, the vacations I could take, and the freedom to do what I want.
2. *When I hear of someone with about the same talents and energy and education as I have who earns \$20,000 a year more than I do, I think:* (a) how nice that he or she can earn that much money; (b) it's not fair. . . .
3. *When I give money to the church or other charitable organization, I typically:* (a) think with pleasure about the good that may be done with my money; (b) think of the things I could have done with the money if I hadn't given it away.
4. *If I lend \$15 to someone I meet at a retreat:* (a) I don't mind much if I never see the money again; (b) I get pretty upset if the person doesn't repay me.
5. *When I give money to the church, I do so because:* (a) I like to see the church doing well; (b) I feel it wouldn't be right to not give.
—*Christianity Today*, April 8, 1996, p. 33.

"It were better not to give at all than to give grudgingly; for if we impart of our means when we have not the spirit to give freely, we mock God. Let us bear in mind that we are dealing with One upon whom we depend for every blessing, One who reads every thought of the heart, every purpose of the mind."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1105.

Think about it: "As regularly as the resources of the cheerful giver are taxed by his generous giving, they are replenished by divine grace."—Murray J. Harris, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976), p. 376.

FOOD FOR THE HUNGRY (2 Cor. 9:6-15).

What is God's attitude toward the poor? Ps. 146:5-9; Isa. 3:13-15.

In our study of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, it would be possible for us to focus on the need for contributing eagerly to God's cause and the importance of integrity in church finance yet still miss a major point. Paul's enthusiasm for his relief project invites us to consider our treatment of the poor.

What does God expect from His people whom He has blessed with financial means? 2 Cor. 9:6-15; Ps. 112 (note that Paul quotes verse 9); 1 Tim. 6:17-19.

"God never meant that the widespread misery in the world should exist. . . . The means over and above the actual necessities of life are entrusted to man to do good, to bless humanity.

"The Lord says, 'Sell that ye have, and give alms.' Luke 12:33. Be 'ready to distribute, willing to communicate.' 1 Tim. 6:18. 'When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.' Luke 14:13. 'Loose the bands of wickedness,' 'undo the heavy burdens,' 'let the oppressed go free,' 'break every yoke.' 'Deal thy bread to the hungry,' 'bring the poor that are cast out to thy house.' 'When thou seest the naked . . . cover him.' 'Satisfy the afflicted soul.' Isa. 58:6, 7, 10. 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.' Mark 16:15. These are the Lord's commands. Are the great body of professed Christians doing this work?"—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 370, 371.

Who should be the special focus of our concern when sharing with the poor? Acts 4:32-35; 6:4; Gal. 6:10.

Imagine a family in the church whose lack of skill and discipline in their personal finances is obvious. At this point, they are having difficulty putting food on the table. Which of the following strategies should the local congregation use? Can you think of others? (1) Provide emergency assistance until the family can apply for government aid; (2) Set up a mentoring relationship with a church family who exemplifies both dedication and success in managing personal finances; (3) Provide training in personal finances, counseling with a Christian finance counselor, etc.

FURTHER STUDY: Using a concordance, look up the word *poor* to find more biblical counsel regarding that topic.

The collection, drawn from Ellen White's writings in *Welfare Ministry*, deals with our ministry to the poor. Note section VII of that volume, "The Poor," pp. 169-208.

"Money is a needed treasure. Do not lavish it upon those who need it not. Someone needs your willing gifts. There are those in the world who are hungry, starving. You may say, I cannot feed them all. But by practicing Christ's lessons of economy, you can feed one. 'Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost' [John 6:12]. These words were spoken by Him whose power wrought a miracle to supply the needs of a hungry multitude."—*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 37.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How successful was Paul's offering appeal (2 Cor. 8, 9) according to Rom. 15:25-27?
2. We sometimes put our giving on hold because we do not have quite "enough." In light of the following proverb, think about the question "How much is enough?"
"The foolish person wants more money, and more of the things that money can buy. The wise person wants *enough* money, and more of the things money *can't* buy—like health, happiness, love, and peace of mind."—Quoted by Deborah Bihler, "The Real American Dream," *Business Ethics*, July–August 1992, p. 46.
3. Jesus said, "You have the poor with you always" (Matt. 26:11). Is it right to use this passage to downplay ministry to the poor? Why or why not?
4. How could we use the principles of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 to guide our giving? What should be our attitude, for instance, toward those organizations that lack clear lines of accountability and a careful system of audits?

SUMMARY: With joy in our hearts for "God's unspeakable gift," in Christ, Paul invites us to (1) reflect God's own generosity as we support the ministry of His church; (2) urge one another to meet the highest standards of integrity in financial affairs; and (3) minister to those in need.



Blessing in Blindness, Part 2

Charlotte Ishkanian

Chen's blindness had left her sad and lonely. She sought comfort in God and attended several Three-Self churches in China. But she found the teachings shallow. Then Li, a friend of her mother, invited Chen to a Bible study group in her church. When Chen hesitated, Li challenged her to answer the questions on a Bible lesson. When Chen could not answer the questions, she agreed to go. She soon discovered that there was much she did not know about God.

Some of the questions on the Bible lessons puzzled Chen. "If God commanded that His followers worship Him on a special day, why do most Christians not worship on that day?" As Li and Chen studied together, Chen found answers to these questions and many others. She also found a closer walk with God.

Chen began attending Sabbath services at Li's church. Because she was blind, her husband, Hua, took her to the meetings and waited outside for her. But Chen shared what she was learning with Hua, and in time he began to join her in studying the lessons and attending worship services.

Hua became convicted of his sinfulness and accepted Jesus as his Saviour too. Chen and Hua studied the Bible with Li and the pastor, and were baptized together just a few months ago.

Now Chen feels truly happy and fulfilled. Her husband, Hua, feels peace in his heart that he never knew was possible. This young couple has pledged to make Jesus the Lord of their home. Chen no longer cries over her blindness. She can look back on her life and see that God turned a tragedy into a blessing.

"Had I not been blind," she said, "I might never have felt the need for God that led me to attend church. And perhaps Hua would not have taken me to the church, where he found God too."

Chen and Hua know that all things, even seemingly bad things, can work for good to bring people to Jesus. Chen is willing to wait until Jesus comes to see again. For now, she only wants to live in the center of God's will. And for that she does not need physical sight.



Hua, Chen, and their daughter, Yi Yuen (left), live in Shanghai, China. Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of the *Mission* quarterlies.

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Armed for Ministry



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Cor. 10:1-18.

MEMORY TEXT: "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: In the use of spiritual weapons to spread the gospel, Paul gives us an example to follow.

GOD OFFERS US HIS OWN RESOURCES IN OUR MINISTRY FOR HIM. In Paul's world, the Roman military controlled warfare with its well-trained soldiers and siegeworks. Machines called *tormenta* launched javelins, arrows, and rocks. In 1902, Kaiser Wilhelm II built working reproductions of some of these machines. An arrow shot from one hit the center of a target at 50 meters (160 ft.) and a second arrow split the first!

Faced with fresh opposition at Corinth, Paul responded strongly (2 Cor. 10–13). In doing so, he lays claim to the stockpile of God's own defense. However powerful the weapons of Rome, Paul knows of still mightier ones. Military strategists would mock this stockpile, which features "weapons" like truth, faith, and prayer. But Paul knows their real force. In an age of Stealth bombers, space-based lasers, and guided missiles, Paul's point is still true. God arms us for His ministry, not with the weak weapons of the world, but with His own powerful weapons. As you study this week's lesson, ask yourself, How well-armed am I?

LETTING THE ARROWS FLY: STRONG WORDS FROM PAUL (2 Cor. 10–13).

Read 2 Corinthians 10–13 through quickly in one sitting. How does the tone of this section contrast with 2 Corinthians 1–9? How do you explain the difference?

These chapters have been called the saddest and the sorest chapters Paul ever wrote. Recently they have been referred to as “a passionate, almost brutal defense” of Paul’s authority and “a masterpiece of savage irony.”—Stephen L. Harris, *The New Testament: A Student’s Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Mountain View, Calif.: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1995), p. 260.

Marking chapters 1–9 is a sense of reconciliation and rejoicing over the response of the Corinthian believers to Paul’s efforts to correct their waywardness. But in chapters 10–13, Paul is sometimes on the defensive regarding his own reputation and sometimes on the offensive regarding his opponents. These chapters contain some of the strongest language in all of Paul’s writings as he draws on a variety of devices to make his point.

Second Corinthians 10–13 may be outlined as follows:

- I. Paul Appeals for Obedience (10:1-18)
 - A. Paul’s divinely issued weapons (10:1-6)
 - B. Paul’s authority questioned (10:7-11)
 - C. Paul’s jurisdiction threatened (10:12-18)
- II. Paul’s “Fool’s Speech” (11:1-12:13)
 - A. The “fool’s speech” introduced (11:1)
 - B. A digression: the church at Corinth as engaged bride and the “super-apostles” (11:2-15)
 - C. Boasting as a “fool” (11:16-21a)
 - D. Boasting of heritage and trials (11:21b-33)
 - E. Boasting of visions and weaknesses (12:1-10)
 - F. Summary (12:11-13)
- III. Paul Answers Further Charges and Issues More Warnings (12:14–13:10)
 - A. Paul is *not* practicing fraud (12:14-18)
 - B. Paul *does* love the Corinthians (12:19-21)
 - C. Paul warns of his third visit (13:1-4)
 - D. Exhortation to practice self-examination and conclusion (13:5-14)

Under what circumstances might it be appropriate to use strong rhetoric? How would you react to strong words spoken to you? How willing are you to use strong words when you need to?

ARE YOUR WEAPONS FROM GOD'S ARSENAL? (2 Cor. 10:1-6).

What is the setting of Paul's remarks on spiritual warfare? 2 Cor. 10:1-6.

In 2 Corinthians 10:1-6, Paul warns he may show "boldness" on his next visit and "punish every disobedience." In between such warnings (verses 1, 2, 6) is a description of the spiritual battle that he and his associates are fighting (verses 3-5). On the one hand, Paul's work reflects "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (verse 1, NIV). But on the other, he engages in spiritual warfare with weapons of "divine power." With such weapons, Paul declares victory—"We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ" (verses 4, 5, NRSV).

If what Paul says about the divine arsenal is true, why does it so often seem that "truth is forever on the scaffold and wrong forever on the throne"?

We may view 2 Corinthians 10:4-6 as following the progress of a victorious army. As the army tightens its siege of a city, it conquers the "strongholds" (verse 4, NIV). Then the invading army is free to overrun the walls. No "obstacle" can resist (verse 5, NRSV). After the army breaches the walls, they capture the citizens (verse 5). When the leaders of the rebellion are punished, victory is complete (verse 6).

Paul's converts in Corinth have personally experienced his use of spiritual weapons. Believing a variety of ideas, they found Paul besieging their own intellectual strongholds with the message of a risen and returning Lord Jesus. That experience should have made them think when Paul warned he would use God's weapons again!

"When the gospel endeavours to penetrate the human heart it meets with earthworks of prejudice, which men have cast up to screen their minds from the force of the truth. . . . Let but the gospel come with power, and all these citadels are laid low. Away they go, like Jericho's old bulwarks, rocking and reeling, till in a cloud of dust they thunder to their fall."—Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of the Bible*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, n.d.), pp. 267-269.

How have your prejudices and opinions fallen before the power of the gospel? Which ones may still need to fall?

THE CHURCH MILITANT (2 Cor. 10:1-6).

Paul uses military imagery as a way of explaining Christian life and ministry. Reflect on the following passages. Then respond to the questions that follow: 1 Thess. 5:8; 2 Cor. 6:3-7; 10:1-6; Rom. 6:13; Eph. 6:10-20.

How can we know we are divinely equipped for the battle?

How can we fight a spiritual battle and still express “the meekness and gentleness of Christ”? (2 Cor. 10:1, NRSV).

“Spiritual warfare” is presently a popular phrase in Christian circles. According to Paul, what exactly is it? What are some misunderstandings about this subject, and how can we deal with them?

How should we respond when the battle appears lost and someone turns away from God?

The context of Paul’s remarks have to do with his response to his opponents at Corinth. However, Paul’s description of his spiritual combat can guide our own struggle against evil. His words invite us to arm for spiritual combat and to reflect on the nature of the battle.

First, there is a sense in which this battle knows no human foe. Paul does confront his opponents. But the targets of the divine weapons are not so much people as “strongholds,” “arguments,” “proud obstacles,” and “thoughts.” If we target the people who support harmful concepts instead of the concepts themselves, we risk fighting “according to human standards” (verse 3, NRSV).

Second, Paul’s victorious tone is worth some reflection. As we engage in ministry on behalf of Christ, we too often become discouraged about the outcome. We would do well to focus less upon what we march against and more on the weapons God provides.

How can you begin doing so today? What are some of the “strongholds” you have been confronting? In what ways have you experienced God’s mighty weapons pull down such “strongholds”?

PAUL'S BUILDING PERMIT (2 Cor. 10:7-11).**What new charges do Paul's opponents make? 2 Cor. 10:7-11.**

Paul is careful to make a distinction between his opponents at Corinth, who are visiting from elsewhere, and the Corinthian believers themselves. For his opponents, Paul seems to have little hope (2 Cor. 11:13-15). For the Corinthian believers, he hopes there will come a time when their "obedience is complete" (2 Cor. 10:6, NIV).

This distinction is clear when he writes, "For they [his opponents] say, 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible'" (verse 10, NRSV; compare 10:1; 13:10). That the first point (Paul's letters are "weighty and strong") is a backhanded compliment is evident from the second point, that Paul's "'bodily presence is weak.'" That he is strong at a safe distance away from them, but weak when he is with them. The word for "weak" may be translated "sickly" and likely has Paul's infirmities in mind, as well as a retiring approach to opposition. One element of his weak personal presence is his lack of style. They rebuke Paul's speech as "'contemptible,'" a criticism that is reflected in Paul's later admission that he is "untrained in speech" (2 Cor. 11:6, NRSV; compare 1 Cor. 2:1-5).

What is the source and purpose of Paul's "authority"? 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10 (compare 1 Cor. 3:10-17).

Paul makes two important claims. First, he claims an authority of divine origin. Second, he argues he has exercised that authority in a way that builds up the church. Anyone can claim to minister on the basis of divine authority. Isn't it appropriate to judge the source of someone's ministry by the results it brings in the church? That is, if a person, claiming God's gifts of ministry, actually "tears down" rather than "builds up," isn't it appropriate to question the divine origin of that person's calling?

"He [Satan] excites criticism, or insinuates doubts and unbelief. The speaker's [preacher's] choice of language or his manner may not please the hearers, and they dwell upon these defects. Thus the truth they need, and which God has graciously sent them, makes no lasting impressions."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 44, 45.

How can we distinguish between constructive and destructive criticism? What kind of criticism do you tend to give?

THE LORD'S COMMENDATION (2 Cor. 10:12-18).

On what basis should we evaluate ourselves and others? 2 Cor. 10:12-18, especially verses 12, 18.

Many of us spend a lot of time and energy either evaluating others or being evaluated. From our first day in school, the teacher compares our performance with that of others. Employers are constantly assessing employees. Loan officers spend their days evaluating the financial soundness of would-be borrowers. However necessary such evaluations may be in business and education, Paul argues that when we assess the spirituality of others and ourselves, we must be extremely careful. On what basis do we measure ourselves and others? If we try to boost our spiritual standing by comparing ourselves with others, we are foolish indeed! There is only one source for true commendation—"For it is not those who commend themselves that are approved, but those whom the Lord commends" (2 Cor. 10:18, NRSV).

What missionary desire does Paul express? 2 Cor. 10:12-18 (see also Rom. 15:22-29). How can you foster this missionary spirit?

In describing his own missionary activities, Paul reflects negatively on his opponents who have traveled to Corinth. When he came to Corinth he was a pioneer. He was not trespassing on anyone else's territory as they were on his. Rather than compare himself with other laborers in the same area, Paul wishes to push forward the frontier of Christian mission. Giving in to "righteousness by comparison" is no temptation for a pioneer.

Paul's missionary appetite cannot be satisfied. He seems always on the alert for the next field of service, ever thinking about some unreached shore. Paul's sense of world geography was incomplete—there were entire continents to be won to Christ, of which he was unaware. How well has the dedication to mission expanded with our greater geographical insight?

With the help of a map, choose a country and follow the progress of the Adventist message there. What specific things will you do to help its advancement?

Do you sometimes compare yourself and your accomplishments with others? What impact can God's acceptance and commendation have on this situation?

FURTHER STUDY: Among the issues raised by 2 Corinthians 10–13 is how to employ God’s gift of speech (including both speaking and writing). Study Paul’s counsel in Ephesians 4:25-32. Is 2 Corinthians 10–13 an exception to his rule that speech should always build up? Explain your answer. How do you explain the strong speech in 2 Corinthians 10–13 in light of Ephesians 4:25-32?

“The religion of Christ never degrades the receiver; it never makes him coarse or rough, discourteous or self-important, passionate or hardhearted. On the contrary, it refines the taste, sanctifies the judgment, and purifies and ennobles the thoughts, bringing them into captivity to Christ. God’s ideal for His children is higher than the highest human thought can reach. He has given in His holy law a transcript of His character.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 63.

“When the heart is softened and subdued by the grace of Christ, there is peace and satisfaction in the soul; for the love of Christ rules in the heart, bringing into captivity the secret motives of action. Then the easily aroused temper is soothed by the oil of grace. The tumultuous heart at the word of Christ grows calm. When there is a sense of sins forgiven through the merit of the blood of Christ, and there is a consciousness of union with Christ, we are encouraged to strive more earnestly to correct every wrong habit, and our harsh manner will be refined and cease to work against the sanctifying influences of the truth, against the existence of the union which Christ prayed should be manifested among His disciples.”—*Review and Herald*, Jan. 2, 1894.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What ideas would you judge to be most resistant to the gospel?
2. Which term best describes the position of your Sabbath School class or local congregation? Of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a whole? Your own situation? (a) on the march; (b) in retreat; (c) under siege; (d) AWOL (absent without leave); (e) in active combat; (f) on training maneuvers.

SUMMARY: God longs to arm us for ministry with His powerful weaponry. With Paul, we are always to be on the alert for some heart that Satan has barricaded against the truth. Seeking God’s commendation on our service, we shall become true soldiers of the Cross.



Now I Have Hope

J. H. Zachary

During the 70 years of Communism in Russia, many people stopped smiling. Even today, several years after the power of Communism was broken, one seldom sees a smile on the streets. A sense of gloom and hopelessness pervades the faces.

When Global Mission Pioneers began working in Neftekamsk, an oil-rich city in Russia, they visited people in their homes, schools, and nursing homes. In one nursing home, where elderly soldiers sat idly in wheelchairs or wasted away in dimly lit rooms, they met 17-year-old Anatoli. His mother had died; his alcoholic father had beaten him several times. To save him from further abuse, authorities sent Anatoli to live in this nursing home, because the city did not have an orphanage.

The Global Mission Pioneers invited Anatoli to evangelistic meetings they were holding. The quiet young man accepted the invitation. After the first meeting Anatoli was so excited that he invited several of his school friends to attend. These youth, who had been taught all their lives that there is no God, now heard the Word of God for the first time.

The Holy Spirit spoke to Anatoli's heart, and he responded to the invitation to follow Jesus. Having known so much pain and disappointment, Anatoli was thrilled to learn that God loves him and allowed Jesus to die for him. Anatoli drank in the truth that one day Jesus will come to take His faithful followers to a place called heaven, where there is no suffering or death. With joy he told us through the translator, "Thank you for telling me about Jesus and heaven. Now I have hope."

It was too cold to baptize the new believers in a nearby lake, so Anatoli and 17 others were baptized in the city's bathhouse. Clouds of steam filled the tiny room as the new believers shed an old way of thinking and living, and embraced a new life of hope and joy. The Global Mission Pioneers who introduced them to Christ will stay in the city for six months to nurture the new believers and introduce others to Jesus, who brings hope to sinners.



Anatoli (left); J. H. Zachary is the director of evangelism for The Quiet Hour, located in Redlands, California.

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Engaged in Ministry



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Cor. 11:1-33.

MEMORY TEXT: "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: We, the church, are engaged to the divine Bridegroom. And we live in a time when our loyalty to Him is being tested. Inspired by the thought of the wedding yet to come, we must remain true.

WEDDINGS ARE MARVELOUS OCCASIONS, causing deep emotions. It was no different in ancient times. And Paul draws on the setting of engagement and marriage to present a sensitive subject to the believers in Corinth. Their loyalty to Christ is at risk because of their fascination with the "super-apostles" opposing Paul.

Paul, the friend of the Groom, is "jealous" for Christ, the absentee bridegroom. He worries that other suitors are wooing the Corinthians. At their conversion, Paul had arranged the engagement between the Corinthian believers and Christ. Paul anticipates the wedding, the second coming of Christ, as the time when he will have the honor of presenting the bride, the Corinthian church, to the Bridegroom, the returning Lord.

How are you preparing for your own wedding to Jesus, your Bridegroom?

PROMISED IN MARRIAGE (2 Cor. 11:1-6).

What worries does Paul express regarding the Corinthian believers? 2 Cor. 11:1-6.

At the opening of 2 Corinthians 11, Paul starts his “fool’s speech” (see verse 1). But he begins to stray from this speech (verses 2-15) when he identifies the Corinthian church as the bride-to-be of Christ, the Bridegroom.

If we read the passage with modern weddings in mind, we may miss the full force of Paul’s imagery. In ancient times, both Jews and Gentiles took a marriage engagement far more seriously than people do today in the Western world. Now when two engaged persons decide to end their relationship, they face no legal complications. But in the ancient setting, engagement carried with it a legal status that must be settled in court. Unfaithfulness to an engaged partner was considered adultery. Thus, Paul’s use of the engagement theme in 2 Corinthians 11 “stresses the seriousness and permanency of the Corinthians’ past encounter with God’s elective love.”—Richard Batey, *New Testament Nuptial Imagery* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), p. 13.

With the help of the introduction to this week’s lesson, identify each of the following elements of Paul’s imagery. What does he mean by:

the period of betrothal;

“another Jesus” (verse 4, NRSV);

picturing himself as involved in the marriage arrangements;

the future “presentation” of the bride?

Paul had participated in arranging the betrothal and looked forward to “presenting the bride.” In the context of ancient wedding customs, it may be best to see Paul as identifying himself as the groom’s “best man.” (See John 3:29, 30 where John the Baptist describes himself as the “friend of the bridegroom,” Jesus.) Such a one played a role in the betrothal and presentation and also had a measure of responsibility in guarding the bridegroom’s interests during the period of betrothal. A friend of the Groom, Paul is “jealous” that the affections of the bride be reserved for the Groom to whom he promised her.

In this period of engagement, how loyal are you to the divine Bridegroom? What have you done that could be disloyal? What should you do about this and when?

PRESENTED TO CHRIST (2 Cor. 11:1-6).

Recall a wedding that you attended or in which you took part (perhaps as the bride or as the one who presented her). How did you feel at the moment of “presentation”?

The ancient wedding ceremony began with an evening torchlight procession when the bride left her father’s house to go to the bridegroom’s. The bride proceeded to the groom’s residence on a litter, surrounded by friends, relatives, and musicians. The groom’s procession, including the best man, relatives, friends, and more musicians met them on their way. Imagine when the two groups met!

The wedding blessings and ceremonies took place in the groom’s home for seven days or longer. The end came with the presentation of the bride to the groom by the “best man.”

In identifying the Corinthian church as bride and Christ as bridegroom, Paul refers to the Old Testament. See the following passages: the entire book of Hosea, especially 2:19, 20; Jer. 31:31, 32; Isa. 62:4, 5; and Ezekiel 16, 23. Compare and contrast the characteristics of the bridegroom with those of the bride.

The Corinthian believers are living in an important time—the time between their engagement to Christ (their conversion) and their “presentation” at the Bridegroom’s return (the Second Coming). During this time, Paul’s opponents in Corinth are trying to steal the affections of the Corinthian church members. The members’ main concern (and our own) is to remain loyal to Him.

“Christ has made every provision that His church shall be a transformed body, illumined with the Light of the world, possessing the glory of Emmanuel. It is His purpose that every Christian shall be surrounded with a spiritual atmosphere of light and peace. He desires that we shall reveal His own joy in our lives.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 419.

Meditate upon the following: “And I heard what sounded like a vast throng, like the sound of a mighty torrent or of great peals of thunder, and they cried: ‘Hallelujah! The Lord our God, sovereign over all, has entered on his reign! Let us rejoice and shout for joy and pay homage to him, for the wedding day of the Lamb has come! His bride has made herself ready, and she has been given fine linen, shining and clean, to wear.’” (Rev. 19:6-8, REB).

“NO, THANK YOU” (2 Cor. 11:7-15).

What negative things are Paul’s opponents saying about him? 2 Cor. 11:7-15.

The accusations include the following. Paul:

1. is bold at a distance, but meek “face to face” (10:1, 10, 11; 13:10);
2. lives “by the standards of this world” (10:2, NIV);
3. boasts too much of his own authority (10:8);
4. comes off badly when compared to the “super-apostles” (10:12-18; 11:15, 12-33; 12:11);
5. has overstepped his limits in his ministry at Corinth (10:14);
6. has failed to accept appropriate support from Corinth (11:7; 12:13);
7. is deficient as a public speaker (10:10, 14);
8. does not love the Corinthians (11:11);
9. attempts to take financial advantage of the Corinthian believers (12:14-18).

It seems strange that they accuse Paul of not accepting support from the Corinthians. But perhaps two social expectations may help us understand this. First, manual labor was frowned upon. Cicero (106–43 B.C.) wrote: “Unbecoming to a gentleman . . . and vulgar are the means of livelihood of all hired workmen whom we pay for mere manual labour, not for artistic skill . . .”—*On Duties*, 1:150, 151. So perhaps they attacked Paul for being a “tentmaker.”

Second, the wealthy expressed power by becoming patrons. And refusing such patronage was tactless. “The Corinthians want their apostle to have honor in society and want to share in that honor by supporting him. So they ask whether or not Paul deserves to be honored as a true apostle if he refuses to accept true apostolic support.”—J. M. Everts in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 295.

Does Paul change his practice and begin to accept support from Corinth? Why or why not? 2 Cor. 11:7-12.

Unlike Paul, the “super-apostles” did accept financial support from the Corinthians. But Paul will not allow himself to be like them by adopting their ways. In spite of social customs, he believes his practice of “the gospel for free” is the wisest and most effective. What can we learn from this that will help us in our ministry?

How do you react when accusations are leveled against you in your ministry? What lessons can you learn from Paul?

IN DISGUISE (2 Cor. 11:1-33; especially verses 12-15).

What negative view does Paul give of his opponents' work? 2 Cor. 11:12-15.

Paul argues from the greater, Satan, to the lesser, Satan's workers. If Satan's method is to appear as an angel of light, it should not surprise us that his helpers appear in costume, as well. Paul provides us with a timely reminder that not all things and all people are as they seem. "Deceitful workers" still come packaged as "apostles of Christ" and Satan's assistants as "ministers of righteousness." We must "prove all things" and "hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21, KJV).

Based on your study of 2 Corinthians 10–13 so far, contrast the view of apostleship and Christian ministry held by Paul with the view held by his opponents.

Paul and his opponents clearly disagree on the basis for judging who is a real apostle. The opponents believed a candidate should have excellent qualifications. Such a person should look good, speak well, carry impressive letters of recommendation, be authoritative in dealing with others, have a pure Hebrew heritage, experience many visions and revelations (12:1), and perform signs and wonders (12:11-13).

Paul uses a "fool's speech" because, while he is willing to match qualifications with the "super-apostles," he believes their way of evaluating Christian apostleship is poor. For Paul, an apostle should be judged by a fruitful ministry (3:2, 3) and will glorify the power of Christ even in his weakness and suffering.

"We have here, then, two quite different ways of evaluating authentic ministry. The one is triumphalist and stresses only the manifestations of power and authority without any place for weakness and suffering. The other, while also affirming the importance of power and authority, insists that these do not belong to the apostle himself but depend wholly upon the activity of God who chooses to let his power rest upon his servants in their weakness and to manifest his power through the folly of gospel preaching."—Colin Kruse, *New Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 1191.

Compare Christ's ministry to Paul's criteria, then his opponents' criteria. Which of the two sets of criteria would you really rather believe in and follow?

PAUL'S SUFFERINGS (2 Cor. 11:16-33).

When Paul met Christ on the Damascus road, what warning did he receive regarding his ministry? Acts 9:15, 16. How completely did the warning come true? 2 Cor. 11:21-29.

Paul shares a list of his hardships so people will know he is a better “minister of Christ” (verse 23, NRSV) than the “super-apostles.” For him, his difficulties are a badge of honor. And he often discusses suffering as it relates to ministry. He also lists his traumas elsewhere in the Corinthian letters: 1 Corinthians 4:9-13; 2 Corinthians 4:8-11; 6:4, 5; 12:1. Paul did not believe his afflictions disproved his calling. Rather, they helped to prove it. “For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, and for this reason I suffer as I do” (2 Tim. 1:11, 12, NRSV).

Paul developed a deep spiritual understanding of his suffering. Through his suffering, God was showing the reality of Christ’s death and resurrection. “For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor. 4:11, NRSV).

“In all ages Satan has persecuted the people of God. He has tortured them and put them to death, but in dying they became conquerors. They bore witness to the power of One mightier than Satan. Wicked men may torture and kill the body, but they cannot touch the life that is hid with Christ in God. They can incarcerate men and women in prison walls, but they cannot bind the spirit.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 576.

What insight does 2 Corinthians 11:21-33 provide into Paul’s life? What specific event does Paul mention at the end of the section and why? (Compare Acts 9:19-25.)

Paul’s list reminds us of our limited knowledge of his life. We know of only one imprisonment before the writing of 2 Corinthians (at Philippi, Acts 16:19-40). Yet Paul recalls “far more imprisonments.” Likewise, Acts describes only one shipwreck, which took place after this point in his life. But he mentions three.

How do you look upon a fellow church member who suffers? Have you really adopted Paul’s view of suffering in Christian life and ministry? If not, why not? How can you let the Lord help you in this area?

FURTHER STUDY: We find wedding symbolism used elsewhere in the New Testament to compare the relationship between Christ and His people. Study the following passages: Matthew 22:1-14 (the parable of the wedding banquet; compare Luke 14:15-24); Matt. 25:1-13 (the parable of the ten bridesmaids); Mark 2:18-20 (compare Matt. 9:14, 15; Luke 5:33-35); Eph. 5:21-33; Rev. 19:6-10; 21:2, 9-21.

Read *The Acts of the Apostles*, chapter 33, "Laboring Under Difficulties," pp. 346-358.

"The eleventh chapter of 2 Corinthians contains much instruction. It reveals to us that men who are liable to view matters after human eyesight may make very grave mistakes if they engage in a work that God has not appointed, but condemned. That work is to criticize, to climb upon the judgment seat, and pronounce sentence. How much better would it be for the spiritual advancement of such to look well to their own shortcomings and defects of character through watchful examination of their own hearts, to try to remove from them the beam of faultfinding, of evil surmising, of evil speaking, of bearing false witness, of hatred, and accusing of the brethren."—Ellen G. White, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1105.

Regarding Paul's work in Ephesus, Ellen White writes the following: "Amidst the constant storm of opposition, the clamor of enemies, and the desertion of friends, the intrepid apostle almost lost heart. But he looked back to Calvary, and with new ardor pressed on to spread the knowledge of the Crucified. He was but treading the blood-stained path that Christ had trodden before him. He sought no discharge from the warfare till he should lay off his armor at the feet of his Redeemer."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 297.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Paul's description of the Second Coming as a wedding is an attractive image. What other ways of understanding that event increase your longing for it?
2. Study 2 Corinthians 11:28, 29. If leaders in our local churches adopted this model of ministry, how would it affect our congregations?
3. How would you help a fellow church member who often unkindly criticizes church leadership in your presence?

SUMMARY: If we are genuine in our ministry, we will reflect the life of the One for whom we minister. And we will show the same concern as Paul, who called for Christians to focus their affections on Christ.



With Charcoal and Prayer

Tim Holbrook

Sparks shot skyward as four men, brandishing blazing branches, ran between the fire and the hut. Inside the grass-roofed hut, villagers punched machete knives through cracks in the hut's floor and walls to drive out the evil spirits. In the corner of the hut, an old man waved burning ginger root over the stomach of a woman curled up on a sleeping mat. A rumble of chants filled the night.

Punsoray, lying on her mat, groaned, and the villagers redoubled their efforts to chase away the evil spirits that tormented her. The rising noise awoke student missionary Marisa Miller, sleeping in the far end of the village. She made her way to the hut and examined Punsoray. Then she hurried to our home.

"A woman in Tanoy's house has severe stomach pain," Marisa spoke into the darkness. Dawn Holbrook dressed, grabbed her bag, and followed the narrow path to Tanoy's house. She found Punsoray curled up in a ball, moaning softly. Dawn looked at Tanoy.

"Is it OK to treat her?" Dawn asked, shouting above the noise. Tanoy nodded reluctantly. Dawn mixed some charcoal into a glass of water, then helped Punsoray sit up and drink it. Punsoray made a weak protest at the taste of charcoal, then she lay down again.

"May I pray?" Dawn shouted toward Tanoy. Again he nodded. The spirits had not left; it was time to try something else. Dawn prayed a simple prayer, asking God to heal Punsoray. Then she left the hut, promising to check on her in the morning.

The next morning Dawn walked to Tanoy's house to check on Punsoray. But Punsoray was not there. Fear gripped Dawn. Had the woman died? Had the family taken her somewhere? She began asking, "Where is Punsoray? Have you seen her today?"

"Yes, she is working in her *kiengan* (mountain garden)."

"When did she begin to feel better?" Dawn asked, amazed. The woman shrugged her shoulders and turned to enter her house.

Several weeks later a villager asked Dawn, "Do you remember when Punsoray was sick, and the evil spirits would not leave her? You came and prayed for her." Dawn nodded. "The next day the news was all over the village. Tanoy had been practicing his medicine for two hours without results. But after your medicine and prayer, the pain left her within 15 minutes!"

We serve an awesome God, and we praise Him for answered prayer and the testimony of His healing power.

Dawn and Tim Holbrook are Adventist Frontier Missionaries, working among the Alangon people in the Philippines.

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Strength for Ministry



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Cor. 12:1–13:14.

MEMORY TEXT: “For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you” (2 Corinthians 13:4, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: Even visions and revelations cannot compete with the understanding that God is working in one's weaknesses.

IN OUR WEAKNESSES, GOD GIVES US STRENGTH FOR MINISTRY. Building codes for large structures often call for devices that stop the spread of fire. Such devices include heating ducts that have “fire dampers.” These dampers have chains with a weak, heat-sensitive link. When the temperature rises too high, the link breaks, and the damper falls. The strength of the system is made perfect in its weakness.

Paul understands that, into his life, God has built weak links, which protect against the fires of egotism. “Whenever I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10, NRSV). Jack Kuhatschek puts it this way, “If I really got my wish for absolute strength, unlimited wealth, and total competence, I wouldn't feel any need for God. I would never experience his faithfulness or discover his sufficient grace. I would never learn to live in humble dependence upon him. . . . In fact, my feelings of pride and self-sufficiency would make me believe I was a god myself.”—*The Superman Syndrome* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995).

CAUGHT UP TO PARADISE (2 Cor. 12:1-10).

Paul continues his “fool’s speech.” He has compared his qualifications with those of his opponents in two areas—his Hebrew heritage and his labors and difficulties (2 Cor. 11:22; 11:23-33). Now he turns to the area of visionary experiences. His opponents have apparently praised their own visions as better than Paul’s.

What role should direct revelations play in the Christian life? How do you feel when someone says to you, “The Lord told me . . .”? See 2 Cor. 12:1-10. (Compare 1 Cor. 14:26-33.)

This passage raised a number of questions:

1. Paul says, “I know a person . . .” (2 Cor. 13:2, NRSV). Who is this person? Paul seems to deny he is this person (verse 5). However, in verse 7, he identifies the person who experienced the visions as himself, the one with the “thorn in the flesh.” He uses the word *he*, rather than the *I*, to soften the offensiveness of this “foolish” boasting.
2. Paul describes being caught up to “the third heaven.” What does he mean by this phrase? In ancient times, people thought “the heavens” were divided into spheres above the earth. They believed there were three, five, seven, or even twelve such spheres. Because Paul identifies the “third heaven” with Paradise, he must understand there to be three heavens. The point is this: He was “caught up” into the highest heaven, into the presence of God. Doubtless no one among his opponents can outdo Paul’s experience.
3. What are we to make of Paul’s uncertainty over whether his experience was “in the body or out of the body”? (verses 2, 3, NIV). The experience was so overwhelming that Paul could not decide whether he had been bodily transported to heaven (1 Kings 18:12; Acts 8:39, 40) or whether it had been a vision (Rev. 1:10).

What does the following mean to your Christian experience? “All are not to the Lord in precisely the same way. Human beings are not to define, arbitrarily and narrowly, the characteristics of God’s working on minds. It may be given to one to gain spiritual strength and discernment easily, while another has to contend with ‘a thorn in the flesh’ (2 Cor. 12:7), and at times is ready, apparently, to step off the heights over the precipice. Yet who dare say that God does not still love and regard as His child the one so sorely beset, and that His hand is not still stretched out to save?”—Ellen White, *This Day With God*, p. 67.

PAUL'S "THORN IN THE FLESH" (2 Cor. 12:1-10).

How unusual was Paul's experience? 2 Cor. 12:1-4.

Paul argues for "the exceptional character of the revelations" (verse 7, NRSV). They were exceptional in their *destination*—the "third heaven," "Paradise." And they were exceptional in their *content*—he "heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat" (verse 4, NRSV; We may compare the ban against sharing the revelations to John's experience in Revelation 10:1-4).

What was the relationship between Paul's experience and his "thorn in the flesh"? 2 Cor. 12:7-10.

Another question this passage raises is: *What was Paul's "thorn in the flesh"?* Over the years, there has been quite a bit of speculation about this. Some have thought of it as a type of spiritual harassment or some form of persecution. Since it is a thorn "in the flesh," most have believed it to be some physical or mental disability. On the basis of Galatians 4:12-15, eye trouble is often suggested. Though the Bible does not clearly identify "the thorn," Paul's point *is* clear. God used "the thorn" to keep him from being too proud of his vision.

How often do we crave direct access to heaven? How often do we long to hear the unhearable and know the unknowable? Paul could respond that he had experienced these things. Yet he had come to treasure God's presence in his weakness more than his own presence in the "third heaven." He came to treasure God's negative response to his thrice-offered plea more than the thrill of his trip to Paradise!

In the midst of what crisis or sickness have you come to know the unequalled comfort of God's presence? Would you trade the experience for a visionary one? Explain.

The greatest joy of the Christian life is not to be caught up to God in vision. The greatest joy is when God comes down to us and makes His presence known in the midst of our weaknesses. Our exaltation is no match for God's condescension.

What would you say has been your "thorn in the flesh" to keep you humble and dependent on the mercy of God? In what ways has God's grace proved sufficient to you in the midst of your weaknesses?

BUILDING UP THE CORINTHIANS (2 Cor. 12:11-21).

How does Paul end his “fool’s speech”? 2 Cor. 12:11-13.

About what event does Paul worry? What does he fear? How do you think he wishes the Corinthians would respond to his concerns? 2 Cor. 12:14-21.

In the last verses of 2 Corinthians, Paul is concerned about preparations at Corinth for his “third visit.” His first visit had been during his second missionary journey, which featured an eighteen-month stay at Corinth (Acts 18:1-18). His second visit would have been the painful one, during which his relationship with the church was strained (2 Cor. 2:1-5). Paul writes 2 Corinthians from Macedonia on his third missionary journey, to prepare for his “third visit” to Corinth (Acts 20:1-3). If we are to judge from the report Paul provides in Romans 15:25-27, his final visit to Corinth was successful.

Paul is still concerned about the Corinthians’ hurt feelings because he refused to accept their support (2 Cor. 12:13). Strangely, an opposite charge also seems to be circulating that Paul had been taking financial advantage of them (verses 14-18). Perhaps some had suggested that Paul’s refusal of support was a cover for extortion through his associates in arranging the collection (verses 16-18).

What claim does Paul make about his motives? 2 Cor. 12:19 (compare 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10).

Earlier in 2 Corinthians, Paul already has asked the Corinthians to imagine him making important statements about his motives in the presence of Christ (2 Cor. 2:10, 17). Could you make such a declaration about your motives for ministry? Does everything we do for others spring from a loving desire to build them up in the Lord?

Can we say with Paul that in “everything” we do in serving others we do it for their spiritual welfare? Do we consider the benefits that may come to us, or do we serve others simply for their sakes?

“We are speaking in Christ before God. Everything we do, beloved, is for the sake of building you up” (2 Cor. 12:19, NRSV).

CHRIST IS POWERFUL IN YOU (2 Cor. 13:1-4).

Paul plans to visit the Corinthians soon. What warning does he give about this visit? How would you feel if you received such a warning? 2 Cor. 13:1-4.

Paul has just expressed concern over the many problems at Corinth. He was troubled that the problems he had dealt with earlier in his letters and visits may still be there when he returns (2 Cor. 12:20, 21). Now he warns that he will come to Corinth to take bold action. He has given such a warning before: "Choose, then: am I to come to you with a rod in my hand, or with love and a gentle spirit?" (1 Cor. 4:21, REB). If he did not live up fully to the spirit of that warning in his second visit, he promises he will do so on his third.

Paul writes to the Corinthians, "He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you" (2 Cor. 13:3, NIV). In what sense is this statement a warning and in what sense a promise? What do these words reveal to you about Paul in his approach to the Corinthian believers?

Paul has discussed "power" and "weakness" a great deal in 2 Corinthians. He believed that "power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9, NRSV). This understanding comes from his view of Christ's work. The Crucifixion represents "weakness." But that event must always be viewed in light of the Resurrection, an event that demonstrates God's "power" (2 Cor. 13:4). Why can Paul, in his weakness, promise to return to Corinth with such power? Because he identifies both with the crucified Christ and the risen Lord: "For we are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God" (2 Cor. 13:4, NRSV).

Though Paul's words seem threatening to the wayward Christians of Corinth, we may still hear in them a hopeful promise: "He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful in you" (2 Cor. 13:3). God knows exactly what we need to help us grow in His grace. Do we avail ourselves of what he longs to do in our lives? Whether our need is for Christ's discipline or comfort, may it be so for us!

How has Christ been powerful in your life and congregation during the past year, month, and week? Prepare a testimony to share with your class of how Christ's power was manifested in your weakness.

THE TAKE-HOME TEST (2 Cor. 13:5-14).

Paul commands his converts in Corinth to practice self-examination. In what ways does this remain an important Christian duty? 2 Cor. 13:5-10.

Ellen White gave similar counsel: “You do not know your own spiritual condition. You are lacking in every heavenly grace. You should humbly and carefully examine your own hearts, your own individual characters. You need to open your hearts that light may shine upon your darkness, that you may see and understand your motives. The apostle’s injunction is, ‘Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves’ [2 Cor. 13:5]. What is the character of your thoughts, your spirit, your purposes, your words and actions? Compare them with Scripture, and see whether you represent the character of Christ. Go to Jesus humbly, and break your hearts hardened by feelings of bitterness and hatred. Let the grace of Christ soften and melt you that you may put away everything that is destructive of your peace.”—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 13, p. 87.

List the benefits and risks of self-examination. Are there some times when we should practice self-examination and some times when we should not? Explain your answer.

“ ‘Examine yourselves, whether we be in the faith’ (2 Cor. 13:5). Some conscientious souls, on reading this, immediately begin to criticize their every feeling and emotion. But this is not correct self-examination. It is not the petty feelings and emotions that are to be examined. The life, the character, is to be measured by the only standard of character, God’s holy law. The fruit testifies to the character of the tree. Our works, not our feelings, bear witness of us.”—*In Heavenly Places*, p. 131.

Paul helps the Corinthians to write their take-home test. The questions he suggests they should ask themselves are: (1) Are you living in the faith? (2) Does your life show you are completely aware that “Jesus Christ is in you”? (2 Cor. 13:5, NRSV). Because Paul hopes for a good outcome on the test, he concludes:

“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor. 13:14, NIV).

FURTHER STUDY: Many places in Scripture reflect the “strength in weakness” theme. One such place is the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. Take time to review these letters. Note especially the messages to Smyrna and Sardis. Think of other passages in which you can trace this theme.

Ellen White applies the need for self-examination (2 Cor. 13:5) to parents. “Parents, as you deal with your children, remember that you are dealing with a reproduction of yourselves. Therefore be sure to examine yourselves, to see whether you are indeed transformed in word and spirit.”—Manuscript 79, 1901, p. 7 (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 7, p. 75).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Explain how Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was a “messenger of Satan” (2 Cor. 12:7, NRSV).
2. Why does Paul include Deuteronomy 19:15 in 2 Corinthians 13:1?
3. Paul suggests it would have been better for the Corinthians to defend him than for him to have defended himself (2 Cor. 12:11). Do we defend those who have sincerely taken part in ministry but still have been criticized? Or are we more likely to leave them alone to their own problems? If the answer to the last question is Yes, how can we improve?
4. Paul’s experience with his “thorn in the flesh” teaches us that God sometimes chooses to work through our weaknesses rather than get rid of them. Is this just as true of emotional and psychological weaknesses as of physical ones? Explain your answer.

SUMMARY: We are not to conduct our ministry on the world’s terms. Rather, we are to follow Christ’s own pattern. Instead of pointing to our own credentials, we are to allow God’s power to shine through our weakness.



A Daughter's Prayers

Esther Simbolon

When Sanggulna Sihotang of Sumatra, Indonesia, was ready for the sixth grade, she enrolled in a school in a neighboring city. It was too far away to return home at night, so her parents arranged for her to live with a family near the school.

One of Sanggulna's friends lived with the Simbolons, an Adventist family. Sanggulna visited them often and grew to love them. One day she asked them, "Why do you go to the church on Saturday?"

"We worship on the Sabbath day as the Bible commands," Mr. Simbolon said. "Jesus says that those who love Him, keep His commandments." Sanggulna thought that made sense, and the next Saturday she skipped school and went to church with her friends. When she told her parents, they were angry. "I just want to know what the truth is," she explained.

Mr. Simbolon invited her parents to visit the Adventist church. They went to church and were impressed. They allowed Sanggulna to live with the Simbolons while she attended school, and the next year she transferred to an Adventist school. Sanggulna became convinced that the Adventist Church taught the truth, and she wanted to share her faith with her parents.

When she returned home for vacation, her father was not there. She learned that on his way home from working in another area, he had suddenly jumped off the train and fled into the fields, shouting wildly. Someone found him and had tried to care for him. Apparently he was possessed by a devil. He consulted a witch doctor, but he still did not get well. When Sanggulna learned this, she urged her mother and siblings to pray for Father. Not long after that, he returned home, apparently well.

Then one day he became angry. He threatened his family and forced them to sleep outside that night. Sanggulna prayed earnestly for her father to give his heart to God. Her prayers were answered, and her father has not had a problem since then.

The entire family began attending church, and recently Sanggulna and her parents were baptized. Jesus rules their hearts now; they do not need to fear devils.



Sanggulna (left). Esther Simbolon is associate director of child evangelism in the North Sumatra Mission.

Promises for Ministry



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Cor. 1:19, 20; 3:17; 5:17; 7:1; 9:6; 12:8, 9.

MEMORY TEXT: “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians of the power and motivation found in God's promises to give us hope.

“NO MATTER WHAT, I’LL ALWAYS BE THERE FOR YOU.”
 In 1989 an 8.2 earthquake in Armenia killed more than 30,000 people. When a father found his son's school flattened, he remembered a promise he had once made to his son, “No matter what, I’ll always be there for you.” So he began to dig through the rubble. Other parents, along with the fire chief and the police, tried to pull him off. But to each he asked, “Are you going to help me now?” No one did. He dug alone for twelve hours, twenty-four hours, thirty-six hours. In the thirty-eighth hour, he pulled back a boulder and heard his son's voice. “Armand!” he screamed. In response, he heard, “It’s me, Dad! I told the other kids not to worry. I told ’em that . . . you’d save me and when you saved me, they’d be saved. You promised You did it, Dad!”—Adapted from Mark V. Hansen, “Are You Going to Help Me?” in *Chicken Soup for the Soul* (Deerfield Beach, Fla.: Health Communications, 1993), pp. 273, 274.

THE PROMISE (2 Cor. 1:19, 20).

“For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not ‘Yes and No’; but in him it is always ‘Yes.’ For in him every one of God’s promises is a ‘Yes.’ For this reason it is through him that we say the ‘Amen,’ to the glory of God” (2 Cor. 1:19, 20, NRSV).

Who is the center of all God’s promises? 2 Cor. 1:19, 20.

Paul hears the absolute, divine “Yes!” ringing out in a fascinating setting. His opponents have accused him of speaking out of both sides of his mouth—promising to come to Corinth on the one hand and withdrawing that promise on the other. Paul wants to be sure that, whatever their views of his travel plans, the Corinthians understand the gospel. God’s word of hope in Christ is not doubtful but certain, not deceitful but truthful.

How are we to respond to God’s promise in Christ? 2 Cor. 1:20.

The gospel is God’s invitation to which we are requested to respond. The divine “Yes!” calls forth the human “Amen!” To us is given the joyous privilege of declaring the “Amen!” in word and life to God’s gracious provisions.

What attitude toward God’s promises do we see among the heroes of faith? Heb. 11:32-34.

“We are pilgrims and strangers on this earth, looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. The path in which we travel is narrow, and calls for the exercise of self-denial and sacrifice, but God has not left us without help. He has filled His Word with wonderful promises, to strengthen and cheer His children. In these promises He draws back the veil from eternity, and gives us glimpses of the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory that awaits the overcomer.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, August 22, 1906.

Recall a time when one of God’s promises strengthened and cheered you. What glimpses of glory did this promise help you to see?

FREEDOM IN THE SPIRIT (2 Cor. 3:17).

“Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Cor. 3:17, NKJV).

Paul promises that the Spirit’s presence brings “liberty.” “Liberty” for what? 2 Cor. 3:12-18.

Paul shares this promise as he contrasts the old-covenant ministry with his own, new-covenant ministry, which is an expression of God’s eternal covenant of grace. He writes that many of his fellow citizens experience the presence of a “veil” as they read the Old Testament. This “veil” keeps them from understanding the gospel. But “when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed” (2 Cor. 3:16, NRSV; compare Exod. 34:34). Since Paul has contrasted the misuse of the law in the old covenant with the role of the Spirit in the new covenant, he emphasizes the promise “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17, NRSV).

New-covenant life and ministry are all about receiving and appreciating the Spirit’s presence. Gone is any attempt to live by a checklist of “dos” and “don’ts.” The life of a new-covenant Christian is marked instead by freedom—freedom to share life, not with a checklist, but with the Spirit; freedom to view the glory of the Lord; freedom to be transformed into His image (verse 18). This thought stays with Paul, for his last wish in the letter is that “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor. 13:14, NIV).

How would your Christian experience change if you claimed the promise of 2 Corinthians 3:17? In what specific ways would it affect your witness?

“How much joy we might bring into our life here below if we would but make these promises our own. As we talk of the mansions that Christ is preparing for us, we shall forget the petty annoyances that we meet day by day. It is our privilege to sing the songs of Zion now, to turn our eyes to the light, to bring hope into our hearts and into the hearts of others. God desires us to gather up His promises, that we may be strengthened and refreshed. Let us take our eyes off the curse, and fix them on the grace so abundantly provided.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, August 22, 1906.

EVERYTHING HAS BECOME NEW (2 Cor. 5:17).

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Cor. 5:17, NRSV).

Have we taken as seriously as we should God’s “new creation” work? 2 Cor. 5:17.

Arthur Custance calls Christians “a new kind of species.” For him, the new-birth miracle “is not a symbolic rebirth, like that achieved by ritual in some pagan religions of antiquity and even of today. It is a fundamental change in human nature, so great a change that it amounts to a genuine form of speciation. . . . We indeed remain *in* the world, but we are no longer *of* the world.”—Quoted in David C. Needham, *Alive for the First Time* (Sisters, Ore.: Questar Publishers, 1995), p. 63.

Review these additional promises describing God’s creative work in our lives: John 3:3, 7; Rom. 5:8-10; Eph. 2:10; 1 John 3:1, 2. Which means the most to you? Why?

“The important thing is to become united to Christ, to believe in Christ as a personal Saviour, to live by faith in the Son of God. The question to ask the soul is, ‘Am I a partaker of the divine nature, represented as being born again? Has a new moral taste been created?’ If not, the soul is in deadly peril. He who is born of God is a new man. ‘If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.’ The old imperious will is gone. The pride is cleansed from the soul. Selfishness is uprooted. The quick, passionate temper no longer masters the man; for Jesus Christ has brought the thoughts into captivity to Himself.”—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, Sept. 26, 1892.

Can you say the following about your experience? If not, what can you do to change it?

“Every promise in the book is mine,
Every chapter, every verse, every line;
All are blessings of His love divine,
Every promise in the book is mine.”

—*Let There Be Praise* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), no. 130.

REAPING BOUNTIFULLY (2 Cor. 9:6).

“Remember that the person who plants few seeds will have a small crop; the one who plants many seeds will have a large crop” (2 Cor. 9:6, TEV).

Second Corinthians 8 and 9 is the strongest and longest offering appeal in Scripture. You will remember that Paul is gathering funds for “the collection,” which was to relieve the needs of the poor Christians in Jerusalem. Paul believed this project would make real the reconciliation he preached. He encouraged the Corinthians to be generous by repeating the above principle of sowing.

How is this principle as true in the spiritual field as it is in the agricultural field?

“Liberality both in spiritual and in temporal things is taught in the lesson of seed sowing. The Lord says, ‘Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters.’ Isa. 32:20. ‘This I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.’ 2 Cor. 9:6. To sow beside all waters means a continual imparting of God’s gifts. It means giving wherever the cause of God or the needs of humanity demand our aid. This will not tend to poverty. ‘He which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.’ The sower multiplies his seed by casting it away. So it is with those who are faithful in distributing God’s gifts. By imparting they increase their blessings. God has promised them a sufficiency that they may continue to give. ‘Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom.’ Luke 6:38. . . . As we distribute God’s temporal blessings, the evidence of our love and sympathy awakens in the receiver gratitude and thanksgiving to God.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 85, 86.

Think of a time when you contributed more money or time and energy than you thought you had to spare. How did God refill your resources?

“One may spend freely and yet grow richer; another is tight-fisted, yet ends in poverty. A generous person enjoys prosperity, and one who refreshes others will be refreshed” (Prov. 11:24, 25, REB).

SUFFICIENT GRACE (2 Cor. 12:8, 9).

“Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness’” (2 Cor. 12:8, 9, NRSV).

In what setting does Paul receive the Lord’s assurance that His grace is enough? 2 Cor. 12:1-10.

In the conclusion of 2 Corinthians, Paul defends his ministry against his opponents’ accusations. In a “fool’s speech,” he compares his own credentials to those his opponents offer. They are Hebrews. So is he (2 Cor. 11:22). They are “ministers of Christ.” So is he. But he has a longer and more impressive list of ministry accomplishments and hardships (2 Cor. 11:23-29). He ends this section of foolish boasting with the humiliating story of his escape from Damascus—in a basket.

He moves on to suggest for comparison his own matchless visionary experience in which he “heard things that are not to be told” (2 Cor. 12:4, NRSV). As with the previous section, he ends this one with a story that, far from glorifying his credentials, displays his weakness. Three times he prayed for God to remove his “thorn in the flesh.” But three times, God refused. Instead, He gave a most personal and profound answer, which we also may claim: “He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness’” (2 Cor. 12:8, 9, NRSV).

In what area or weakness of your life do you need to apply this personal, penetrating word from the Lord? (2 Cor. 12:8, 9). How and when will you make such applications in your life and service?

“Closely to study our emotions and give way to our feelings is to entertain doubt and entangle ourselves in perplexity. We are to look away from self to Jesus. . . .

“When temptations assail you, when care, perplexity, and darkness seem to surround your soul, look to the place where you last saw the light. Rest in Christ’s love, and under His protecting care. When sin struggles for the mastery in the heart, when guilt oppresses the soul and burdens the conscience, when unbelief clouds the mind, remember that Christ’s grace is sufficient to subdue sin and banish the darkness. Entering into communion with the Saviour, we enter the region of peace.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 249, 250.

FURTHER STUDY: Look up the word *promise* in a concordance and add to the passages we have examined in these lessons.

“Comfort, encouragement, and support have been provided for every condition of life. Let us rejoice in the love of God. Let us praise Him who has made promises so royal. Let these promises keep our hearts in perfect peace. Jesus lives. His hand is guiding us. Constantly our hearts may be filled with the peace that passeth all understanding, even the peace that Jesus gives: Let us make the promises of God’s Word our own. In times of test and trial these promises will be to us glad springs of heavenly comfort.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, August 22, 1906.

“He whose heart is fixed to serve God will find opportunity to witness for Him. Difficulties will be powerless to hinder him who is determined to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. In the strength gained by prayer and a study of the Word, he will seek virtue and forsake vice. Looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of the faith, who endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself, the believer will willingly brave contempt and derision. And help and grace sufficient for every circumstance are promised by Him whose word is truth. His everlasting arms encircle the soul that turns to Him for aid. In His care we may rest safely, saying, ‘What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.’ To all who put their trust in Him, God will fulfill His promise.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 467.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are some of your favorite promises in 2 Corinthians that this week’s lessons did not discuss? Why do they hold special meaning for you?
2. We measure sound in decibels and light in lumens. What scale would you use to rate the power of one of God’s promises? Which of the five promises in this week’s lesson is the most powerful on your scale?
3. The promises we studied this week help us to recall major themes in 2 Corinthians. Take time to review the quarter’s lessons. Which of the truths about God that Paul discussed do you want to remember? Why?

SUMMARY: In facing the joys and trials brought his way by the Corinthian church, Paul demonstrated an important strategy for Christian living—claiming and clinging to God’s promises.

Russian Soldier Becomes Soldier for Christ

J. H. Zachary

Far from home and serving in the Russian army, Igor Pashkin had a lot of time to think. His lifelong acceptance of atheism wrestled with the concept of God. Gradually he became convinced that life is the work of a super intelligence. But who or what was it? He sought an answer in the Russian Orthodox Church, but he had no personal relationship with God.

Igor returned to his home in Omsk and enrolled in the university to study English. When he learned that an Australian pastor was conducting evangelistic meetings in the city, he decided to go. It would be a good chance to improve his English.

He enjoyed listening to the English speaker. When he spoke on the prophecy of Daniel 2, Igor recognized the empires that rose and fell—Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome. This prophecy offered compelling evidence that the Bible is true. From that time on Igor attended the meetings for another reason: to learn more about the Bible.

When the pastor invited listeners to follow Jesus in baptism, Igor stepped forward. That night he told his wife of his decision to be a Christian. He expected her to rejoice with him, but instead, she became angry. "I'll not be a Christian! You must choose," she demanded. "It is me or God." Igor chose God.

Living for God may make life better, but it does not make life easier. His wife left him; the university refused to excuse him from classes on Saturday; and Igor refused to break the Sabbath, even if it meant he would be expelled. He asked God to intervene, and rejoiced when the university changed its position.

Igor longs to share the joy of his new faith with others, and has dedicated his life to missionary work. He preached to inmates in a youth correction facility and led three young men to Jesus. He and a friend held a two-week evangelistic series in a village nearby. On opening night 300 people attended. Following the series, 20 persons were baptized. Recently he translated for The Quiet Hour evangelistic teams who are planting churches in unentered cities of Russia. Between translating assignments, Igor preaches the gospel to all who will listen.



Igor Pashkin (left); James Zachary is director of evangelism for The Quiet Hour in Redlands, California.

Lessons for Fourth Quarter, 1998

The fourth quarter Sabbath School Bible Study Guide, entitled *Our Wonderful God*, focuses on becoming better acquainted with God so that we may serve him more fully.

Lesson 1: Our Ancient of Days.

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Chron. 16:24, 25; Ps. 90:1, 2, 4; 139:7-10; Isa. 44:6-8; 14:26, 27; Jer. 10:10, 11.

MEMORY TEXT: Isaiah 45:22

KEY THOUGHT: It is important to have a clear conception of God. It is important to know how He relates to evil and how we should relate to Him.

OUTLINE:

- The Eternal God (Ps. 90:1, 2, 4).
- The Only God (Isa. 44:6-8).
- The Universal God (Isa. 14:26, 27).
- The Living God (Jer. 10:10, 11).
- The Omnipresent God (Ps. 139:7-10).

Lesson 2: Our Lord Most High

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Gen. 18:25; Ps. 147:5; Jer. 31:34; Rom. 11:33; Eph. 1:19-21; Col. 1:16, 17; Rev. 5:13.

MEMORY TEXT: Ps. 91:1, 2.

KEY THOUGHT: As Creator, Judge, and Benefactor of His created beings, God is sovereign over all the universe.

OUTLINE:

- The Supreme Ruler of All (Rev. 5:13).
- The Creator of All (Col. 1:16, 17).
- The Infinite God (Ps. 147:5).
- The All-Powerful God (Eph. 1:19-21).
- The Judge of All the Earth (Gen. 18:25).

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CHRIST
SAW YOU
THERE . . .

NOW YOU
CAN SEE HIM
THERE TOO.



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AT THE
CROSS
AND BE CHANGED

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AND JOHN THOMAS MCLARTY

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INTER-AMERICAN DIVISION



| Unions | Churches | Membership | Population |
|------------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Caribbean | 478 | 146,678 | 3,485,000 |
| Central American | 928 | 312,445 | 32,573,500 |
| Colombian | 598 | 142,892 | 38,000,000 |
| Cuban | 145 | 16,882 | 11,000,000 |
| Dominican | 339 | 103,912 | 8,100,000 |
| French Antilles-Guiana | 115 | 23,314 | 928,000 |
| Haitian | 288 | 200,865 | 7,200,000 |
| North Mexican | 409 | 106,923 | 64,748,400 |
| Puerto Rican | 255 | 29,417 | 3,800,000 |
| South Mexican | 1,004 | 342,400 | 30,051,600 |
| Venezuela-Antilles | 336 | 79,933 | 22,557,000 |
| West Indies | 580 | 155,327 | 2,867,000 |
| Division | 1 | 99 | |
| Totals | 5,476 | 1,661,087 | 225,310,500 |

Statistics as of March 31, 1997

Mission Projects:

1. Plant at least 12 new congregations in previously entered areas of the French Antilles Guiana Union.
2. Upgrade Buenavista Health Center in western Colombia.
3. Construct seven chapels in urban and rural areas of Colombia that have no church presence.