

Chapter One

THE PROBLEM OF ADVERSITY (1:1-24)

IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Was this epistle addressed to any other than the Corinthians?
2. What is affliction? What purpose does it serve?
3. What is comfort? How does one know when he is receiving comfort?
4. What behavior toward the Corinthians is Paul defending?
5. Why is it wrong for preachers to vacillate?

SECTION 1

Affliction (1:1-11)

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

To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia:

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

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. ⁶If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. ⁷Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. ⁹Why, we felt that we had received the sentence of death; but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead; ¹⁰he delivered us from so deadly a peril, and he will deliver us; on him

SECOND CORINTHIANS

we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. ¹¹You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us in answer to many prayers.

1:1-7 Aim: The aim of adversity or affliction is to strengthen. That is God's aim. Men have difficulty accepting that. Men cannot see the eternal purpose in all earthly circumstances and most of them will not believe God's revelation. God subjected all creation to futility (which inevitably includes affliction) so that it would hope and groan for divine assistance and redemption (Rom. 8:18-39). With the subjection to affliction, God also supplies the divine assistance.

The word for *comfort* in Greek is *paraklesseos*. It is a combined word from *para* meaning "alongside" and *kaleo*, meaning "to call or summon into one's presence." It is the same word used by the apostle John in his Gospel as the name of the Holy Spirit, or *Paraclete*, and is translated, "Comforter, Counselor" (Jn. 14:16, 26; 15:26). The word means "to call for an assistant." To be *comforted* means to be assisted, helped, strengthened.

Should those who preach and teach the gospel understand their experiences of affliction as *assistance*? Yes! So says God through the apostle Paul. Such an understanding and acceptance can only come, however, when the human mind and emotions are surrendered to the divine revelation. Acceptance will not come by human reason or feeling or experience. Everything in the human perspective says affliction is disadvantageous and in opposition to man's highest good. Only God knows affliction assists man to his highest good. Man has to believe God in *opposition* to his feelings and his experiences.

The Greek word *thlipsei* is translated *affliction* and means, "trouble, suffering due to pressure of circumstances." It is translated "straitened" in the KJV. Jesus was under constant *pressure* in his earthly ministry (see Col. 1:24). He was "troubled" or "straitened" often (Luke 12:50; John 11:33, 38; 12:27; 13:21). He said those who wished to be his disciples would enter through a difficult gate and continually travel on a road of *affliction* (Matt. 7:13-14) (*tethlimmene*, Greek perfect tense verb depicting a continuity of circumstances and results). *Thlipsei* refers not only to physical suffering but also to mental, emotional and psychological pressures. Every servant of God *will* suffer both afflictions. Sometimes physical suffering is induced by the

THE PROBLEM OF ADVERSITY

psychological afflictions, or vice versa. Jesus experienced both (see Heb. 2:10-18; 5:7-9; 12:1-2). Paul suffered both (II Cor. 11:21-33; 12:7-10; Phil. 4:10-13; Gal. 6:17). The early christians suffered both (Heb. 10:33; I Thess. 2:14; I Pet. 4:12ff; Rev. 2:13; II Thess. 1:4, etc.).

Christians are not to be surprised that affliction comes their way as if it were something strange (I Pet. 4:12). All who would live godly in this world will suffer persecution (II Tim. 3:12). In fact, anyone not being disciplined or strengthened by affliction should question their relationship with Christ (see Heb. 12:5-11).

Jesus was assisted (strengthened) by the afflictions and pressures He suffered. The book of Hebrews says Jesus was "perfected" through the things he suffered (Heb. 2:10; 5:9; 7:28; 12:2). That means, Jesus reached the goal God set for him and he did it through suffering affliction. It was for the very purpose of suffering that Jesus came into the world (Isa. 53:1-12; John 12:27; Luke 12:50; Matt. 26:38-39). It was revealed to Paul that part of the purpose of God for christians is to fulfill in their lives the afflictions of Christ (Col. 1:24-26). Paul also learned that messengers of the gospel are "perfected" (reach the goal God has for them) through affliction (II Cor. 12:7ff).

One of the primary gains of affliction is the capacity to minister to others. And it is not so much that we could never be of *any* help until we have suffered, as it is that the *sufferer* is made aware there is someone who understands, who sympathizes, and knows what it feels like to suffer. God had no need to become incarnate in Jesus and experience affliction in order to make *him capable* of helping us. But we needed to *know* he had experienced the same afflictions we experience in order that we would trust and turn to him as one who understands and as one who conquered.

The Creator (incarnate) experienced affliction for our sake. We creatures experience it, secondly, because we could not really understand and sympathize without it. We are not omnipotent and omniscient — we are not divine — we *must* learn by doing. Furthermore, it is our affliction that motivates us to comfort the afflicted. What made David the "shepherd-king" of Israel? His afflictions at the hand of Saul and others. What made Moses the great deliverer of Israel? The "abuse" he suffered as an Israelite (Heb. 11:24-28).

SECOND CORINTHIANS

To aspire to the spiritual perfection or maturity of Jesus Christ without aspiring to the suffering and affliction of Christ is to misunderstand the Scriptures. Paul plainly says in verse 5, "For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort (strength) too." It is the christian's *calling* to suffer for doing right (see I Peter chapters, 2 and 4). Affliction is christian education. The first thing the christian learns in affliction is that he is to be a comfort (strength) to others. The suffering christian is trained by his affliction so that he may lead others to the strength that comes from their afflictions. Christian comfort extended to those being afflicted is not merely sympathy — it is leading the afflicted to find the *strength* that should be coming from what they are experiencing. Strengthening is the *aim* of affliction. Looked at from God's perspective, affliction is not an adversity but an advantage! Affliction is not a weakness, but a strength. Paul found that when he was driven to God's grace by his weaknesses, he actually became strong (cf. II Cor. 12:7-10). And that especially applies to ministers of the Gospel.

1:8-11 After-effect: Paul illustrates his point by referring to one of his own experiences. He uses the expression, ". . . we do not want you to be ignorant . . ." to emphasize the importance of what he is about to say (see I Cor. 10:1; 12:1; Rom. 1:13; 11:25; I Thess. 4:13). He is discussing a very important christian doctrine — the purpose of affliction. This question about the reason for suffering is a question which all mankind longs to have answered. So Paul wants the Corinthian church to pay particular attention to what he has to say.

When Paul suffered this affliction is not certain. It is most likely a reference to the trouble that resulted from the riot in Ephesus (see Acts 19:23 — 30:1). The lives of Paul and his co-workers were in danger there. Paul did not tell the Corinthians what the affliction was, but he did describe its seriousness.

He said they were "utterly" (Gr. *huperbolon*, literally, "thrown over" or "excessively"), "unbearably" (Gr. *huper dunamin*, literally, "beyond power") "crushed" (Gr. *ebarethenai*, literally, "burdened down"). Paul and his co-workers, on this occasion, suffered deep depression. The Greek word *exaporethenai* is translated *despair* and literally means, "to be utterly without a way through." Death stared them in the face and they saw no way out of it. Within themselves (Gr. *alla autoi en heautois*, lit. "and ourselves, in ourselves . . .") they

THE PROBLEM OF ADVERSITY

were possessed (Gr. *eschekamen*, "had, possessed, seized") with the sentence of death (Gr. *apokrima tou thanatou*).

Do christians get depressed? Do ministers of the gospel suffer depression? Yes! Apostles suffered depression. Even the Lord Jesus himself experienced it! Jesus once said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished!" (Luke 12:50). The Greek word *sunechomai* is translated *constrained* in the RSV, and *distressed* in the NIV. The word literally means "to be pressed together, to be pressured." The depressing shadow of the cross was constantly across the path of Jesus. His soul was "troubled" often by the unjust death he was to die (see John 12:27ff; 13:21). In Gethsemane he "grieved and was distressed" and his soul "was deeply grieved even unto death" (Matt. 26:37-38). David, king of Israel, suffered depression (see Psa. 3; 5; 6; 10; 12; 13; etc.).

Does such despair serve any purpose? Yes! Paul said his despair in Asia came *in order that* (Gr. *hina*) they should not rely on themselves but on God who raises the dead. God "knocks the props out from under us" occasionally in order to show us that *he* is the only way through. God desires that we trust *completely* in him. Our Father has a divine inheritance to give us which we cannot receive unless we trust him completely. Abraham was despairing of ever having a child; Moses despaired of his ability to lead Israel; David despaired of ever being king of Israel — but God "pulled them through." Not only did God fulfill in them what he promised in this life, but out of their surrender to his grace, he saved them for eternal life with him.

If Paul's extremity was the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19), God delivered him, and his co-workers, through secondary means. God did not work any miracles to stop the riot. He simply made it possible for the town clerk to persuade the rioters against violence. This being the case, how did Paul know it was God who had delivered him? He knew there was no way out of the "deadly peril" surrounding him, and when the impossible became possible, he believed it was from God. Besides, Paul had hoped in God in times past and had been delivered. The Greek word *elpikamen* is perfect tense and means Paul had *set his hope* on God in the past and was continuing to do so. The temptations to pride, independence, self-reliance and human capability are so strong and so constant, God must continually allow some people to "endure a hard struggle with sufferings . . ." (see Heb. 10:32). All men "have

SECOND CORINTHIANS

need of endurance so that they may do the will of God and receive what is promised" (Heb. 10:36). Suffering produces endurance, character, and hope (Rom. 5:3-5). God subjected all of this present creation (humanness included) to futility for the purpose that it might turn to him in hope (see Rom. 8:18-25). Now when suffering, despair, loss and human frailty sweeps over the soul of man, there are only two alternatives. One is to allow a "root of bitterness" to spring up, increase the "trouble," and thereby become defiled (see Heb. 12:12-17). The other is to throw oneself completely upon the mercy and grace of God, learning that when we admit and live in a spirit of human weakness we may become strong through trust in God (II Cor. 12:1-10). It sounds paradoxical that strength will come from an attitude of weakness. And without God in the equation, it would be a contradiction. Friedrich Nietzsche scoffed at such a doctrine. His trust was in the "autonomy of man" and the "death of God." He believed the only good in the world came from man's "will to power." And his contribution to the world was a disciple named Adolph Hitler!

Dependence on God is easy to say but difficult to really do. Many trust him and depend on him as long as circumstances are prosperous and health is good. But true faith should be able to overcome our feelings when things are not going well.

Christians must help one another in such times. Paul called upon the Corinthians in this letter to *cooperate* (Gr. *sunupourgounon*, "helping together with") by intercessory prayer in securing his deliverance through the hand of God for the work he still had to do. Paul believed the prayers of the Corinthians would contribute in some way to receiving an answer from God. While God *could* act whether we pray or not, he is a divine Father and knows that our relationship to him is deepened and made secure only when we are constant in our dependence upon him. Praying and receiving answers produces thanksgiving throughout the church.

SECTION 2

Acrimony (1:12-24)

12 For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience that

we have behaved in the world, and still more toward you, with holiness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God. ¹³For we write you nothing but what you can read and understand; I hope you will understand fully, ¹⁴as you have understood in part, that you can be proud of us as we can be of you, on the day of the Lord Jesus.

15 Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a double pleasure; ¹⁶I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea. ¹⁷Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans like a worldly man, ready to say Yes and No at once? ¹⁸As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. ¹⁹For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we preached among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No; but in him it is always Yes. ²⁰For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God. ²¹But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has commissioned us; ²²he has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

23 But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming to Corinth. ²⁴Not that we lord it over your faith; we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.

1:12-14 Suspicion: Every preacher of the gospel will have to endure, sometime or another, the acrimony of some of the members of his "flock". Jesus did (see John 15:18-27). Paul did — he is defending himself against the rancor and ill will of some of the Corinthians here. This is almost an inevitable hazard of the ministry of the gospel. It certainly should *not* be so. Jesus poured out his heart in prayer that it *not* be so (John 17:1ff). But it is, and ministers of the gospel should not be "surprised" at it (see I Pet. 2:18-25; 4:12-19, etc.). Paul suffered suspicion and indifference from a number of the churches he established (Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Thessalonians).

The Corinthians had communicated to Paul that they mistrusted his motives. They were suspicious of his relationship toward them

SECOND CORINTHIANS

because he had promised to visit them and did not. They were questioning his integrity and his sincerity. They did not know, or disregarded, all the facts as to why he had not fulfilled his intention to visit and concluded that he was not dealing with them above board.

Paul appeals to the record of his past life. He tells them it is a matter of pride to him, *endorsed* (Gr. *marturion*, witnessed to) by his own conscience, that his *behavior* (Gr. *anestraphemen*, conduct, mode of life, literally — “to turn back in time”) had been *holy* (Gr. *hagioteti*, upright, honest) and in *godly sincerity* (Gr. *eilikrineia tou theou*). He calls upon the Corinthians to investigate his past dealings both “in the world” and “toward them”, and to judge his character on that basis. They would find that he behaved toward the world and toward them, *not* with a worldly attitude (Gr. *sophia sarkike*, wisdom of carnality), but in the grace of God (Gr. *en chariti theou*), that is, under the constraint of God’s grace toward him. In other words, Paul acted toward all people as God had acted toward him — with grace. Paul was constrained by the love of Christ to always view all men as God viewed them (see II Cor. 5:14-17).

Paul said, “I also take pride in the fact that ‘we’ (editorial ‘we’) are continuing to write to you nothing but what you can read and understand.” He gave them no cause in his use of language to be suspicious of his intentions toward them. Paul uses the Greek word *epiginoskete* which means more than just knowing — it means *to perceive, to understand*. Paul had not come to them earlier (when he preached there, Acts 18; and when he wrote them before, I Cor.) with sophistries, double entendres, and euphemisms. His words were simple, plain, direct, logical and understandable, (cf. I Cor. 2:1-5). He did not speak in “myths, endless genealogies. . . speculations. . . godless chatter, and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge. . .” (see I Tim. 4:7; 6:20-21; II Tim. 4:4; Titus 1:13-14; II Pet. 1:16-21). Paul did not tell many allegories or use many illustrations. He was clear and straight to the point. His objective was to communicate, to produce understanding. There was no way the Corinthians could honestly accuse him of trying to disguise his motives or his intentions in what he had preached or written to them. So why are some of them now jumping to the conclusion that Paul has misrepresented himself to them? There were probably some in the Corinthian church still promoting the divisions, giving allegiance to

different apostles and leaders, who wanted to take advantage of Paul's failure to visit them and cast suspicion on his integrity. That is one of the chief tools of those who promote partyism in the church.

The apostle concludes this thought by saying, "My hope is that you will understand 'us' completely (as you have partially understood 'us') and realize that you can be as proud of 'us' as 'we' shall be of you on the day of the Lord Jesus."

Christian people need to concentrate on being sincere, loving, and understandable. Unity in the body of Christ is dependent, to a large degree, on *understanding*. Feelings, motives, intentions, opinions, aims and aspirations should be clearly and lovingly communicated. Covert, disguised, surreptitious language and actions should not be a part of christian relationships.

1:15-22 Slander: Someone had evidently slandered Paul and accused him of instability and untrustworthiness. Paul had first told the Corinthians he would visit them "after passing through Macedonia" (I Cor. 16:5). Later, perhaps in the unpreserved letter (the "severe" third letter — see Introduction), he mentioned that he wanted to visit them twice; once on the way to Macedonia, and once on the return from Macedonia. Paul implies here that the Corinthians knew of this last plan and that he had not fulfilled his promised visits.

Paul writes that because he was "sure" of the mutual understanding and confidence existing between him and the Corinthians, he had been *intending* (Gr. *eboulomen*, perfect tense, continuous action in past time) to make a "double" visit so they might have a double "grace" of God through the fellowship of an apostle of the Lord. That was what he had been planning. But he decided against it. He implies that God revealed to him he should not make this "double" visit (II Cor. 1:23). God knew some of the Corinthians would think Paul was "lording it over their faith" should he visit them as he planned. To spare them that problem, Paul changed his plans. And when he changed his plans, someone at Corinth assailed his integrity and accused him of *vacillating* (Gr. *elaphria*, lightness, fickleness).

He begins the defense of his character by asking the rhetorical question, expecting a negative answer, "I was not vacillating when I determined to do this, was I?" Apparently some had accused Paul of making promises like *worldly-minded* (Gr. *kata sarka*, according to flesh) heathen, irresolute, erratic, indecisive. He challenges them to

SECOND CORINTHIANS

produce evidence from his manner of life that he is unreliable or double-minded. He always kept his word — he was never guilty of doing just what was convenient or expedient for himself. He never said “yes” from one side of his mouth and “no” from the other side. He always said what he meant and meant what he said! He fully intended to keep his word to visit them twice. It was not *his indecision* that kept him from fulfilling his plan, but God’s divine direction!

As Stedman points out, it is significant that Paul did not say, “Yes or No.” It is not wrong to say “No” to some requests and circumstances. What is wrong is to say “Yes and No,” or to equivocate. It is wrong to say “No” and mean “Yes” or to say “Yes” and mean “No”! Christians are to be honest, firm and unequivocal toward their commitments, whether they are “Yes” or “No.” Jesus taught that his followers were to be so definite and unambiguous when they gave their word that the rest of the world would accept their “Yes” as nothing but “Yes,” and their “Nay” as nothing but “No” (Matt. 5:37 and see James 5:12).

Christians are to be people who keep their word because that is the essence of God’s character. This is Paul’s argument in verse 18. God keeps his word (Deut. 7:9; Psa. 119:89-90; Isa. 55:10-11; I Cor. 1:9; 10:13; II Thess. 3:3; Heb. 6:13-20, etc.). Paul is arguing that it is contrary to the regenerated nature of a Christian to deliberately equivocate because it is contrary to the nature of God. The record of Jesus’ life and words in the four Gospels verify that God keeps his word because God Incarnate (Jesus) always fulfilled his words. Not one word of Jesus (except the prophecies of his second advent) have failed to be fulfilled. The absoluteness of Jesus’ words and actions is what Paul is referring to in verse 19. Whatever Jesus promised (or promises) was always answered with an absolute “Yes”!

The *ultimate “Yes”* of God was the *resurrection* of Jesus Christ from the dead. The resurrection of Christ was the supreme, unequalable, veracity of God manifested in the historical frame of reference. All of God’s promises (from Genesis to Revelation) find their verification or ratification in Christ’s historical, bodily, resurrection from the dead. This is what the apostle means in verse 20. We believe this is also what Paul meant when he wrote in Hebrews 6:17, “So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he interposed

THE PROBLEM OF ADVERSITY

(himself) with an oath. . . .” In other words, God’s oath to verify the immutability of his promises, was himself (incarnate in Jesus Christ) upon the cross and raised from the dead!

Because of the veracity of God demonstrated historically in the ultimate historical act of raising Jesus from the dead, men may have assurance and respond with “Amen” (so-be-it, yes, verily, I agree, that is correct) to every promise of God. There is no word in the Greek text for the English word *utter*, however, it is proper to supply that word in a translation because Paul is here talking about man’s response to God’s faithfulness. God’s absolute faithfulness is properly responded to when man is faithful to keep his *own* word. Saying “Amen” to God’s veracity involves more than mere words — it demands action. Paul is arguing that his own manner of life has demonstrated this.

In summation of the defense of his veracity and integrity Paul appeals to the guarantee or the “seal” of God’s Spirit. Every christian should be able to appeal to the “seal” of God’s Spirit as a guarantee of his godly character. That is because every christian is being transformed into the image of God’s Son by the power of God’s word transforming his mind (see Rom. 8:5, 29; 12:1-2; II Cor. 3:18; Eph. 1:13-14). To be “sealed” by God’s Spirit is simply to have God’s image imprinted upon our character or nature (see Special Study, *Blessing of Being Sealed by The Holy Spirit*).

There is nothing mystical or extra-Biblical about the “seal” of the Spirit of God. In ancient times, a sovereign’s “seal” marked documents and objects with the authority of the sovereign. In other words, such documents were authenticated as belonging to the king by the seal stamped upon them. The seal was usually an engraving made in the likeness or image of the king. In the same way, God acting upon the believer’s nature through the divine word of the Spirit, has engraved his image (see Special Study, *Blessing of Being Sealed by The Holy Spirit*). When a believer loves God and obeys God, then the Spirit of God (in the word of God) bears witness with the spirit of the believer that he is a child of God (see Rom. 8:12-17). William Barclay says it this way, “When Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit as an *arrabon* (guarantee) given us by God, he means that the kind of life we live by the help of the Holy Spirit is the first installment of the life of heaven and the guarantee that the fullness of that life will some day open

SECOND CORINTHIANS

upon us.”

In this context, then, Paul is inviting the Corinthians to compare his past manner of life toward them with the witness of the Holy Spirit in the word of God and test his veracity. He expects to be declared faithful because his life is “sealed” (marked, measured, characterized) by the Spirit of God.

1:23-24 Statement: Paul does not return slander for slander. He makes an honest, open statement of reasons he believes will justify his rearrangement of plans to visit Corinth. First, he implies God will approve of his change of plan — he calls God to witness against him should he be guilty of lying. It may be he is even implying that God gave him divine direction in refraining from visiting Corinth as he had planned. Second, whether it was God’s or Paul’s decision, or both, it was to “spare” the Corinthians something unpleasant. Rebuke and discipline is always unpleasant (cf. Heb. 12:11) for the moment. Sometimes, it may even be unprofitable! Paul always tried to find things in christians to praise. He used criticism and rebuke as little as possible. The less a teacher or preacher uses rebuke, the more effective it is when absolutely necessary. He had already rebuked them severely in the letter we do have (I Corinthians) and probably in a letter or visit for which we have no extant record. So Paul decided against carrying out his earlier plan to visit Corinth on the way to Macedonia, because, as things stood between them another visit (which would undoubtedly call for more correction) could only have hurt him and them (see II Cor. 2:1-4).

Second, Paul explained his change of plans by stating he did not want to give any appearance of lording it over the Corinthians. He could have visited them as planned, asserted his authority, criticized publicly their christian immaturity, and handed down apostolic reprimands and edicts. But he wanted to spare them that. That was the way “false apostles” acted (II Cor. 11:12-13; Gal. 2:4; II Pet. 2:10 — 22; Rev. 2:2). True apostles admonished tenderly, always willing to sacrifice self for the sake of the “flock” (I Cor. 4:14-15).

Thus Paul explained his decision not to carry out his original plan to visit the Corinthians and defended his veracity. His reasons for not fulfilling the original intention are righteous and good because they were to the advantage of the Corinthians and not for Paul.

One of the major problems in the ministry of the gospel is this one

THE PROBLEM OF ADVERSITY

of fulfilling promises. Preachers, elders, Sunday School teachers, and other servants of the Lord sometimes make promises to do something for someone or be somewhere at sometime when they do not intend to keep those promises at all. Promises to lend assistance, visit, attend a meeting, write a letter, or pray for someone should not be made flip-pantly or insincerely! No christian, especially a minister of the gospel, should promise unless he intends to keep his word. Any promise broken should be able to be justified only by the same principles Paul justified his — that not fulfilling the promise would benefit the recipient more than fulfilling it. The christian minister's "yea" must be "yea" and his "nay" must be "nay" — he must be a man faithful to his word.

APPREHENSION:

1. Who wrote II Corinthians?
2. When did he write it?
3. What transpired in his relationship to the Corinthians *between* the two epistles from his pen?
4. What does the word "comfort" mean in the Biblical sense?
5. Did the Lord Jesus have to suffer "affliction"? Why?
6. How much affliction did Paul suffer? Can you recite his afflictions?
7. Does the Bible say "affliction" or suffering is part of the christian calling? Where?
8. How severe was Paul's affliction mentioned in II Corinthians ch. 1?
9. If Paul's extremity in this chapter refers to the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19), how did God deliver him?
10. Why was Paul having to defend his veracity in this letter?
11. How did Paul defend his veracity?

APPLICATION:

1. How would the leadership of the church (preachers, elders, deacons and Sunday School teachers) benefit from taking this

SECOND CORINTHIANS

- book to heart?
2. How do you feel about the Biblical teaching that the aim of adversity and affliction is to strengthen?
 3. Are you able to surrender your feelings about affliction to the teaching of the Bible? Is it easy?
 4. Does it help you to know that Jesus and Paul and other christians *struggle* in their faith and feelings over affliction?
 5. Have the afflictions you experienced made you better able to serve Christ and others? In what way?
 6. Should christians get depressed? Does depression mean absence of faith?
 7. When are you aware of your greatest feelings of strength?
 8. Have you ever had people suspect your veracity and integrity? How did you deal with it?
 9. Should christians always try to make sure their words are clearly understood? Do they?
 10. When a christian promises something, is he obligated to keep his word? How good is your word?
 11. What should a christian do if he has promised something he cannot possibly fulfill because of an emergency or circumstances beyond his control?
 12. Upon what do you base your belief that God will keep all his promises?

Special Study

BLESSING OF BEING SEALED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT (Eph. 1:13-14)

INTRODUCTION

I. CONTEXTUALLY

- A. These two verses combine to form one of great “spiritual blessings” God has blessed us with in Christ
 - 1. Paul lays two huge sentences on the Ephesian church in chapter one
 - 2. The first sentence 1:3-14 is a catalog of all the ways in which God has blessed christians in Christ
 - 3. The second sentence 1:15-23 is Paul’s prayer that these christians may know (understand and experience) those blessings.
- B. Paul did not place all this “breathtaking” stress upon spiritual blessings without reason
 - 1. Spiritual blessings are not contingent upon favorable physical circumstances and are available to all believers alike
 - 2. Spiritual blessings thus have to do with the abiding realities, not the temporary trappings of the flesh.
 - 3. Spiritual blessings supply man’s most desperate need — to be remade into the person God intended him to be — this will be the thrust of these two verses this morning.

II. EXEGETICALLY

- A. Reading these two verses in the Greek text is an interesting experience.
 - 1. Literally it would read something like this:
“In Him also, you, the ones having heard the word, that one of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, in Him also, you, the ones having believed, were sealed (passive) with Spirit, the promised one, the holy one, who is the down-payment of our inheritance until the redemption which will give complete possession unto the praise of His glory.”

SECOND CORINTHIANS

2. The Berkeley Version is also interesting here:
“In Him you also, after listening to the message of the truth, the Gospel of our salvation, have as believers in Him been stamp marked with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the pledge-deposit of our legacy for the releasing of our deed of purchase, and all to the praise of His glory.”

III. ETYMOLOGICALLY

- A. Seal - literal sense: “A device bearing a design, a name or some other words so made that it can impart an impression in relief upon a soft substance like clay or wax. When the clay or wax hardens, it permanently bears the impression of the seal.”
 1. Archaeologists find them being used 4000 B.C.
 2. Originally they took the form of a cylinder, gradually superseded by the scarab (beetle-shaped)
 3. Some carried on cords around neck like necklace; some cone-shaped in boxes; most in form of finger-rings
- B. Seal - uses
 1. As an authentication
 2. As a mark of ratification of a covenant
 3. As a means of protecting documents to seal against tampering
 4. As a deputation of authority
 5. As an official mark of ownership

IV. APPLICABILITY - Three areas of blessing for the christian in having been sealed with the promised holy Spirit.

- A. He Etches the Image of God and His Son Upon our Being
- B. He Gives Us the Earnest-Payment of Our Inheritance
- C. He Empowers Us As Emissaries of our Great God

Discussion

I. ETCHES THE IMAGE OF GOD UPON OUR BEING

- A. Authenticates our genuineness as belonging to Him
 1. “The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God . . .” Rom. 8:16.

BLESSING OF BEING SEALED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

2. Does not say that the Holy Spirit bears witness *to* our spirit but *with* our spirit — *summarturei*; the H.S. bears witness — and our own spirit bears witness.
3. If my spirit says I am a child of God, and the testimony of the Holy Spirit shows that I am not a child of God, then I am not a child no matter what my spirit says. The two witnesses must agree. My spirit must agree with the testimony of the Holy Spirit.
4. This co-witness of the Spirit of God with our spirit, whereby we are assured that we are children of God, is a very important and blessed reality. **BUT IT HAS BEEN SO OFTEN MISUNDERSTOOD AND MISINTERPRETED.**
5. How does the Spirit bear witness with our spirit? A still small voice? A feeling? emotion? impulse? The Bible nowhere affirms such leadings! All people and religious denominations who claim such subjective witness of the Holy Spirit not only contradict one another — they contradict the Bible. The Bible claims to be the witness of the Spirit. The Spirit of God does not contradict Himself.
6. Since there are no inspired men living today — and those who claim to be such contradict the word of God in what is His witness about who are the children of God — the only witness which we have of the Spirit to us is found in His written Word. *No one knows the Spirit's will on any subject unless he has learned it from the written Word.* Anything that claims to be the Holy Spirit's teaching must not contradict this!
7. The Spirit of God lays down the terms by which we become a child of God, and when we believe and obey these terms then both the Holy Spirit and our own spirits testify that we are the sons of God.
8. **WHAT A BLESSING TO HAVE SUCH A SEAL PUT UPON OUR MINDS AND HEARTS . . . WE DO NOT HAVE TO DEPEND UPON FICKLE AND VACILLATING EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS . . . NOR UPON THE WHIMS AND OPINIONS OF MEN BECAUSE OUR SALVATION IS**

SECOND CORINTHIANS

AUTHENTICATED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT HIMSELF IN HIS UNCHANGING, ONCE-FOR-ALL WORD . . . NO GUESSING, NO ANXIETY.

9. "These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God" I John 5:13 THIS IS THE EMPHATIC WORD OF JOHN'S WRITINGS . . . "THAT YE MAY KNOW. . . ."
- B. Glorifies (The H.S. transfers some of the glory of God to our nature)
 1. "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit" II Cor. 3:18.
 2. Alexander Campbell said it this way in his *Christian System* "The work of redemption is a system of works, or deeds, on the part of God, which constitute the most splendid series of moral facts men or angel ever saw. . . . When these facts are understood or brought into immediate contact with the mind of man, as a moral seal, they delineate the image of God upon the human soul. All the means of grace are, therefore, only the means of impressing this seal upon the heart, of bringing these moral facts to make their full impression on the soul of man. The testimony of the Holy Spirit through the apostles and the faith of those who believe and obey this testimony are the channel through which these facts, or the hand of God, draws the image on the heart and character of man." He went on to say . . . "all the moral facts which can form moral character after the divine model, or which can effect a moral or religious change in man, are found in the testimony of God."
 3. What is this image of God . . . this glory of God which is impressed or sealed upon our being? The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and self-control.
 4. I submit these as characteristics of God which we can enjoy as blessings if we will allow the Holy Spirit to impress

BLESSING OF BEING SEALED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

them upon our natures: honesty; goodness; creativeness; humor; appreciativeness; enjoyment; giving-ness

5. Carol King has a phrase in her song, *Way Over Yonder*, "And the sweet-tasting good life is so easily found . . . way over yonder, that's where I'm bound." Let's appropriate that here.

THE SWEET-TASTING GOOD LIFE OF GOD IS EASILY FOUND . . . IF WE JUST LET THE SPIRIT ETCH IT UPON OUR BEING BY KNOWING AND DOING WHERE THE SPIRIT LEADS IN THE SPIRITS WORD.

6. You see, this is the work of the Spirit. God the Father is the creative source of blessing; the Son is the revealer of the possibility of such blessedness and obtainer of it in the flesh; the Holy Spirit is the agent by which this blessing may be impressed or sealed upon the nature of man! HOW MIND STAGGERING! GOD CREATES THE BLESSING, THE SON WINS IT FOR US, THE HOLY SPIRIT TRANSFERS AND SEALS IT UPON THOSE WHO WILL ACCEPT IT BY FAITH!

C. Secures and protects us against being defrauded by the thief of souls

1. When we are sealed by the H.S. we can live confidently that there is no power in this world or the other capable of robbing us of our souls, our life, our being.
2. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand." John 10:27-28
3. "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." John 5:24
4. "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Col. 3:2-3
5. "Little children, you are of God, and have overcome them; for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the

SECOND CORINTHIANS

world." I John 4:4

6. "We know that any one born of God does not sin, but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him." I John 5:18
7. The book of Revelation pictorializes a great host which no man can number sealed by God — protected from the dragon and the beasts not able to be overcome by the great spiritual battle that rages between God and His enemies.
8. **WHAT A TREMENDOUS BLESSING TO KNOW THAT WE HAVE HAD THE SEAL OF GOD PUT UPON US. NO MATTER THE WORLD WANTS TO ERADICATE US . . . NO MATTER THAT IT MAY APPEAR AS IF THE FORCES OF UNGODLINESS WILL WIN THE STRUGGLE . . . GOD KNOWS WHO HIS ARE, HE HAS THEM MARKED AND SEALED, AND THEY ARE SECURE!**

II. HE GIVES US AN EARNEST OF OUR INHERITANCE

A. Holiness

1. What is the legacy left us by that Son of man who came to earth, born in a stable, who had not where to lay his head?
2. He brought us word from our Father that holiness is our legacy. The most needful, most enjoyable treasure God could will to us is holiness
3. What is the deepest longing of the human soul? To be clean, to be good, to be pure, to be true, to be a beautiful-person.
4. This is what I want when I get to God. Bags full or banks full of gold and diamonds are not what my soul cries out for. Ivory palaces and mansions are not what I want for my eternal inheritance. **I WANT, I NEED, I MUST HAVE HOLINESS!**
5. "I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. . . . Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? . . . There is

BLESSING OF BEING SEALED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Rom. 7:18-8:1

6. Now God has taken care of my problem. He has provided me a cleansing, a goodness, a purity, a freedom from guilt, a holiness by the death of His Son. And when He comes for us this is what our great inheritance shall be — we shall be like Him.
7. But when we are sealed by the Holy Spirit — when His spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are a child of God, we have a down payment on this holiness already. **WE CAN NOW ENJOY GOODNESS, FREEDOM FROM GUILT, PURITY, HOLINESS — A TASTE OF WHAT THE FULL INHERITANCE WILL BE!**
8. Neither the real nor the pseudo (alleged) *baptism* of the Holy Spirit has anything to do with the sealing of the H.S. The baptism of the H.S. fell upon *Cornelius before* the two spirits could witness with one another that he was a child of God. He had not yet been baptized in water for the remission of sins. In like manner the baptism of the H.S. had nothing to do with providing him with a down-payment on his inheritance for neither baptism in the H.S. nor spiritual gifts imparted holiness (Judas). **SO WHY ALL THIS MAJORING IN THE MINORS? THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT ARE NOT WHERE IT'S AT! NEITHER REAL NOR ALLEGED!**

B. Rest

1. Another aspect of the legacy left to us is rest. Jesus came and said, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest" Matt. 11:28.
2. What makes work into labor? The frustration of seeing the fruits of one's work dissipated — the agony of knowing that one has spent himself laboring in something whose fruits are only temporary and ultimately useless. **THIS IS WHAT MAKES WORK INTO TIRING, FRUSTRATING, DEADENING LABOR.**
3. If the results of our work could find completion or perfection — if we could have confirmed to us that our work was eternally useful and abiding, that it wouldn't

SECOND CORINTHIANS

just disappear with time — we could find perfect rest.
REST IS NOT JUST THE ABSENCE OF WORK!

4. God has laid up for us an inheritance of rest. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them” Rev. 14:13.
5. But those sealed by the Holy Spirit may now have a down-payment, a taste of that rest. Paul wrote the Hebrew Christians and said, “For we who are believing, are entering that rest . . .” Heb. 4:3.
6. Jesus said, “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal” John 6:27.
7. Paul wrote the Corinthians, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” I Cor. 15:58.
8. Friend, if you’re sealed by the Holy Spirit, you’ll never get weary. Bone-tired and muscle-weak yes — but soul-tired and spirit-weary, never!

C. Dominion

1. Man was made to have dominion. “Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth” Gen. 1:26.
2. God has promised that one day His saints shall reign with His Christ forever and ever. Rev. 22:5, etc.
3. But the blessing of being sealed by the Holy Spirit is that we may now enjoy a taste of that dominion.
4. The exciting second chapter of Hebrews asks, “What is man that thou art mindful of him?” and answers by showing that while man was created to have dominion, because of sin he does not now have it, but Christ came in flesh and blood and won back man’s dominion for him.
HE DEFEATED THE INVADER, SATAN!

BLESSING OF BEING SEALED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

5. Christ, if we believe and trust Him, has set us free from being dominated by circumstances, by earthly things, by ego, by fears, by falsehoods, by others, by even Satan. **IN FACT, IN CHRIST, WE HAVE DOMINION OVER CIRCUMSTANCES, OVER THINGS, OVER EVERYTHING AND MAY ENJOY AND USE EVERYTHING TO GLORIFY GOD!** Mind you, I did not say we can selfishly take anything we want and use it in a way to bring shame upon God.
6. Whatever circumstances God sees fit to give us here, whatever talents, whatever worldly things, whatever associations, **WE ARE RULERS-OVER TO GLORIFY GOD AND REJOICE IN. . . .**
7. "For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's." I Cor. 3:21-22
8. ". . . in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Rom. 8:37
ALL THINGS ARE YOURS — MORE THAN CONQUERORS! What blessedness — what happiness — what glory. Friend, if you've been sealed with the imprint of God's Holy Spirit, you have been certified and authorized to be a joint heir with His Son, and to have dominion with Him.

III. EMPOWERS US AS EMISSARIES OF OUR GREAT GOD

- A. Certifies us as authentic representatives of Almighty God
 1. When the Spirit of the Holy God is etched upon our hearts . . . when we are sealed with the Spirit of Christ . . . it is an announcement to the world that we are on business for the King.
 2. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:34-35
 3. J.B. Phillips on II Corinthians 3:3 "You are an open letter (epistle) about Christ which we ourselves have written,

SECOND CORINTHIANS

not with pen and ink but with the Spirit of the living God. Our message has been engraved not in stone, but in living men and women."

4. Many false prophets have gone out into the world (I John 4:1-6). The world desperately needs some authenticating mark upon the true prophets. That mark is the seal of the Holy Spirit. One who preaches the true apostolic message and one who lives the true apostolic message.
 5. "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine" John 8:31 **IF YOU ARE SEALED BY HIS SPIRIT THROUGH HIS WORD, THEN YOU ARE A CERTIFIED DISCIPLE OF HIS, AND THE WHOLE WORLD WILL KNOW . . . YOU WILL BE HAPPY AND BLESSED AND SO WILL OTHERS!**
- B. Certifies the authority of our message
1. When the image of God is stamped upon us by the Holy Spirit, we will proclaim and live the truth and the power of His truth preached and lived will be vindicated in the world.
 2. The work of the Holy Spirit is to convince the world of sin, righteousness and the judgment. The only agency by which the Spirit works in doing this is the written, preached and lived Word of God.
 3. But in the midst of all the failures and inadequacies of men's philosophical, political and ethical systems, **THOSE SEALED BY THE SPIRIT ARE CONDUCTORS OF THE GREATEST POWER IN THE UNIVERSE.**
 4. The power to convert men and change their eternal destiny is more awesome than the power to create this universe!
 5. "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he had granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become part-takers of the divine nature" II Pet. 1:3-4.

BLESSING OF BEING SEALED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

6. "For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ . . ." II Cor. 10:3-5.

WHAT A BLESSING TO KNOW THAT WE ARE SEALED BY HIS SPIRIT TO BECOME CHANNELS THROUGH WHICH THE AWESOME POWER OF HIS WORD WORKS . . . AND IT SHALL NEVER RETURN UNTO HIM VOID!

- C. Certifies the power of His divine providence on our behalf
 1. When the nature of God is etched upon our minds through the Holy Spirit's agent, the Word of God, we know God as our beneficent, loving, acting, Father who is ready to use all His creation on our behalf.
 2. "We know that God works everything for good for those who love him, and are called according to his purpose" Rom 8:28.
 3. "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us . . ." Eph. 3:20.
 4. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory . . ." II Cor. 4:17.
 5. Even angels "are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" Heb. 1:14.
 6. The O.T. gives us a vivid account of god's providential power being used for those with His mark upon them. Ezekiel ch. 9 pictures God's faithful ones being marked with His seal upon them. Then the book of Daniel shows God using kings, kingdoms, circumstances and creation to provide exactly and abundantly what those marked by Him must have to fulfill His purpose in their lives.
 7. He is the same God today to those with His seal upon them. THE BOOK OF REVELATION IS HIS MESSAGE THAT HE IS EVEN NOW USING KINGS

SECOND CORINTHIANS

AND KINGDOMS, CIRCUMSTANCES AND CREATION TO SERVE HIS SEALED ONES! WHAT POWER AND WHAT POWERS ARE OURS!

Conclusion

- I. SO THE BLESSING OF BEING SEALED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT
 - A. Etches the Image of God Upon Our Being
 - B. Gives Us the Earnest-Payment of Our Inheritance
 - C. Empowers Us as Emissaries of our Great God
- II. A WARNING
 - A. You are either sealed by the Holy Spirit or marked with the mark of the beast.
 1. The great division of mankind in the book of Revelation is between only two kinds of humanity . . . those with the mark of God upon their foreheads, and those with the mark of the beast.
 2. Satan puts his mark upon all those not sealed by the Holy Spirit.
 3. Jesus told the Jews in John 8 who wanted to kill Him because He told them the truth, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires."
 4. The seal or mark of Satan is the "mark of the beast" in Revelation and is given to those who worship the beast, political and military power; those who worship the false prophet, false religion and doctrine; those who worship the harlot, worldliness, carnal-mindedness.
 - B. Satan can even counterfeit the seal of the Holy Spirit;
 1. The beast and the false prophet are able to work signs (false signs) that will deceive men and women if they do not know what the true sealing of the Holy Spirit is
 2. Satan is able to change himself into an angel of light to deceive the ignorant
 3. He will try to deceive us into thinking that the immature, temporary miracles of the Holy Spirit are the seal of God
 4. He will try to deceive us into thinking that Pharisaic at-

BLESSING OF BEING SEALED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

itudes toward works and self-righteousness are the seal
of God

III. BUT WHAT IS THE SEAL?

- A. How do we know we are sealed by the Holy Spirit?
- B. How do we know others are sealed by the Holy Spirit?
- C. As we said at the beginning, When the Holy Spirit bears witness *with* our spirits
- D. But *what* does the Holy Spirit witness?
- E. Very simply, He bears witness in His Word that those Believing, Repenting and Obeying God are sealed by God as His

IV. NOW WILL YOU JOIN ME IN THIS SONG AS A PRAYER
TO GOD FOR HIS SEALING

Just the first stanza and chorus 175

“O to be like Thee! Blessed Redeemer:
This is my constant longing and prayer;
Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures,
Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear.
O to be like Thee! O to be like Thee!
blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art;
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy full-ness;
Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart.