

2 Corinthians

1:1 Paul, an apostle of the Messiah Jesus through the will of God,¹ and brother Timothy to the gathering in Corinth,² along with all those who are set apart in Achaia,³ **1:2** grace and shalom to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus the Messiah.⁴

1:3 Blessed be the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus the Messiah,⁵ the Father of mercies and the God of all encouragement,⁶ **1:4** who encourages us in the midst of all our affliction, so that we are able to encourage those who are in every kind of affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are being encouraged by God.⁷

1:5 For just as the sufferings that the Messiah experienced are plentiful in our lives,⁸ in the same way our encouragement is plentiful in the light of the Messiah.⁹ **1:6** And if we are afflicted, it is for your encouragement and salvation.¹⁰ If we are being encouraged, it is for your being encouraged, that has its effect in your patiently enduring the same kind of sufferings that we also suffer.¹¹ **1:7** In addition, our hope for you is certain,¹² because we know that just as you are co-participants in sufferings, likewise also you are co-participants in encouragement.¹³

1:8 We do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning our affliction which occurred in Asia—that we felt overwhelmed beyond our strength to the point that we despaired even of staying alive.¹⁴ **1:9** Indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves¹⁵ with the express purpose that we not trust in ourselves but in God, who raises the dead,¹⁶ **1:10** who has rescued us from such a great threat of death and will rescue us.¹⁷ It is in Him that we have hoped, because, indeed, He will yet rescue us,¹⁸ **1:11** while you also assist us with your prayers,¹⁹ so that the gift to us may result in many being grateful through the many prayers on our behalf.²⁰

1:12 For our reason to brag is this, the testimony of our understanding about ourselves, that by means of single-minded resolve and purity of motive from God, and not by means of worldly wisdom, but by means of the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.²¹ **1:13** We certainly are not writing anything to you but either those things that you recognize as familiar or those things that you truly understand.²² And I certainly expect that you yourselves will understand them until the end,²³ **1:14** just as you also have understood us up until now, that we are your reason for boasting, just as you also are ours in the day of our Lord Jesus.²⁴

1:15 Indeed, on the basis of this confidence, we were formerly planning to come to you, so that you could have double the grace,²⁵ **1:16** that is, to pass through you to Macedonia and again from Macedonia to come to you, and to be sent on our way by you to Judea.²⁶ **1:17** Therefore, after I planned this, I did not treat the matter frivolously, did I? Or the things that I am planning, am I planning them according to flesh, so that with me there will be yes, yes and no, no?²⁷

1:18 Instead, God is faithful, because our message to you is not yes and no,²⁸ **1:19** because he who really belongs to God, the Son, Jesus the Messiah,²⁹ who was proclaimed among you through us, through me, Silvanus, and Timothy, did not become yes and no, but he has become and continues to be yes because of Him.³⁰ **1:20** As many promises of God as there are, they have become yes because of him.³¹ Therefore, also through him the Amen to God is for the purpose of His glory through us.³²

1:21 Again, He who establishes us with you for the purpose of the Anointed One/Messiah and has anointed us is God,³³ **1:22** who also sealed us and gave us the down payment of the Spirit in our hearts.³⁴

1:23 I am calling on God as witness to my existence, that, in order to save you from excessive discomfort, I did not come to Corinth,³⁵ **1:24** because we are not being domineering over your belief. Instead, we are fellow-workers of your joy, for you have stood and continue to stand by means of your belief.³⁶ **2:1** I reached a decision myself on this—not to come to you again in sorrow,³⁷ **2:2** because, if I am causing you sorrow, indeed who is the one who makes me happy except the one who was caused sorrow because of me.³⁸ **2:3** And I wrote this very thing, in order that, when I came, I would not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice, because I had confidence in all of you that my joy has its source in all of you.³⁹

2:4 With great affliction and distress of heart, I wrote to you through many tears, not so that you would be caused sorrow, but so that you would know the love that I have especially for you.⁴⁰

2:5 If someone has caused someone else sorrow, he has not caused me sorrow, but in part, in order that I would not be the burden, all of you.⁴¹ 2:6 Fit for such a one is this consequence by the many,⁴² 2:7 so that you should rather forgive and encourage the one who has done this, lest somehow such a one become drowned in even more sorrow.⁴³ 2:8 Therefore, I encourage you to confirm your love for him.⁴⁴

2:9 Consequently, to this end I also wrote—so that I may know your authenticity, i.e., if you are obedient in everything.⁴⁵ 2:10 And the one whom you forgive, I also forgive, because, indeed, what I myself have forgiven and continue to forgive, if I have forgiven and continue to forgive anything, it is on account of you in the presence of the Messiah,⁴⁶ 2:11 in order that we may not be exploited by the adversary, because we are not ignorant of his intentions.⁴⁷

2:12 When I came to Troas for the purpose of proclaiming the good news of salvation through the Messiah, and when a door was opened for me in the Lord,⁴⁸ 2:13 I had no rest in my spirit when I did not find my brother Titus. Instead, saying good-bye to them, I left for Macedonia.⁴⁹ 2:14 Yet, thanks be to God who always leads us in His victory parade in the Messiah, and who manifests the aroma of the knowledge of him through us in every place,⁵⁰ 2:15 because we are a fragrance of the Messiah for God among those who are being saved and among those who are being destroyed⁵¹— 2:16 to the ones an aroma from death to death, and to the others an aroma from life to life.⁵²

And who is fit to produce these kinds of effects,⁵³ 2:17 because we are not like many, selling the message of God for a profit, but as from a pure motive, but as from God, we are speaking in the presence of God in the Messiah?⁵⁴

3:1 Are we at this point beginning to recommend ourselves? Or do we need, like some people, written letters of recommendation to you or from you?⁵⁵ 3:2 You are our letter, having been written in your hearts, known and read by all men,⁵⁶ 3:3 as you demonstrate that you are a letter of the Messiah, served by us,⁵⁷ having been written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not even on stone tablets but on fleshly heart tablets.⁵⁸

3:4 And such confidence we have toward God in the light of the Messiah,⁵⁹ 3:5 not that we are fit in and of ourselves to consider anything as from ourselves, but our being fit is from God,⁶⁰ 3:6 who, indeed, has made us fit as servants of the New Covenant, not that which is based on a piece of writing but on the Spirit, because the piece of writing kills, but the Spirit produces life.⁶¹

3:7 And, if the serving of people of death, which was engraved in words on stones,⁶² came into existence in glory, so that the people of Israel were not able to look steadily at the face of Moses on account of the glory of his face, even as it was fading,⁶³ 3:8 how much more will the serving of people of the Spirit be in glory?⁶⁴

3:9 If the serving of people of condemnation has glory, much more will the serving of people of justification abound with glory.⁶⁵ 3:10 Indeed, that which has been made to be glorious in this case has not been made glorious on account of the surpassing glory.⁶⁶ 3:11 For if that which fades existed by means of glory, much more that which remains exists in glory.⁶⁷

3:12 Therefore, because we have such a hope, we act with great boldness⁶⁸ 3:13 and are not like Moses. He kept putting a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was fading.⁶⁹ 3:14 Nevertheless, their minds were hardened.⁷⁰ For until this day, at the reading of the Old Covenant, the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in the Messiah.⁷¹ 3:15 Indeed, until today, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart.⁷² 3:16 Yet, [remember that]

whenever he returned to the Lord, he lifted off the veil <Exodus 34:34>.⁷³

3:17 And the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.⁷⁴ 3:18 And we all, by virtue of an unveiled face, are reflecting the glory of the Lord,⁷⁵ and are being transformed into the same image from glory into glory, just as from the Lord, that is, the Spirit.⁷⁶

4:1 Therefore, having this responsibility of serving people just as we were mercifully granted it, we do not become discouraged.⁷⁷ 4:2 Instead, we have renounced the things that one hides out of a sense of embarrassment, while we do not operate according to any method of trickery or distorting the message of God.⁷⁸ In contrast, with full disclosure of the truth, we recommend ourselves to the entire understanding of men in the presence of God.⁷⁹

4:3 And if our good news has been concealed, it has been concealed in those who are being destroyed,⁸⁰ 4:4 in whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving in order that they may not see the light of the good news of the glory of the Messiah, who is the icon of God.⁸¹ 4:5 For we are not proclaiming ourselves but Jesus the Messiah, the Lord, and ourselves as your slaves on account of Jesus.⁸²

4:6 Because God is the one who said,

Light shall shine out of darkness <Isaiah 9:2; Genesis 1:3>,

He has caused light to shine in our hearts for bringing to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of Jesus the Messiah.⁸³

4:7 So we have this treasure in clay pots, in order that the exceeding greatness of power may be from God and not from ourselves,⁸⁴ 4:8 while we are being afflicted in everything but not crushed, confused but not despairing,⁸⁵ 4:9 persecuted but not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed⁸⁶—4:10 always carrying about in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our body.⁸⁷ 4:11 For we who live are always being handed over to death on account of Jesus, in order that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our mortal flesh.⁸⁸ 4:12 For this reason, death operates in regard to us, and life in regard to you.⁸⁹

4:13 And having the same spirit of belief according to what has been written,

I believe; therefore I speak <Psalm 116:10>,

we also believe; therefore, we also speak,⁹⁰ 4:14 knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus both will raise us with Jesus and will present us with you.⁹¹ 4:15 Consequently, all things are on account of you, in order that grace, after it has increased throughout the many, will cause the giving of thanks to exist in abundance to the glory of God.⁹²

4:16 Therefore, we are not discouraged, but if, indeed, our outer man is being destroyed, nevertheless, our inner man is being renewed day by day.⁹³ 4:17 For our momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,⁹⁴ 4:18 while we do not pay any heed to the things which are seen, but to the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.⁹⁵

5:1 This is because we know that, if our earthly, tent-like house is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in the heavens not made by human hands.⁹⁶ 5:2 Nevertheless, in this present condition we groan, while we greatly desire to be fully clothed with our dwelling from heaven,⁹⁷ 5:3 because, indeed, by being clothed, we will not be found naked.⁹⁸ 5:4 Certainly, we who are “in the tent” are weighed down and groaning, on the basis of which we do not want to be unclothed but clothed, in order that that which is mortal may be swallowed up by life.⁹⁹

5:5 In addition, the one who made us for this very thing is God, who has given us the down payment of the Spirit.¹⁰⁰ 5:6 Therefore, being always confident and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord¹⁰¹—5:7 for we walk by means of belief and not by seeing¹⁰²—5:8 we are indeed

confident and are resolved rather to be away from the body and to be at home with the Lord.¹⁰³ **5:9** Therefore, we also aspire, whether we are at home or away, to be pleasing to Him,¹⁰⁴ **5:10** because we must all appear before the judgment seat of the Messiah, in order that each person may receive what he is “due” for the things which he has done in the body, whether it be a good thing or evil.¹⁰⁵

5:11 As a result, because we understand the fear of the Lord, we are persuading men.¹⁰⁶ Thus, we have become well-known to God, and we hope that we also have become well-known in your minds.¹⁰⁷ **5:12** We are not again recommending ourselves to you, but we are giving you an opportunity to brag about us, in order that you may have something for those who brag about appearance instead of about the heart.¹⁰⁸ **5:13** If we are out of our minds, it is for God. If we are in our right minds, it is for you,¹⁰⁹ **5:14** because the Messiah’s love impels us, having seriously considered this, that one man died for all. Therefore all men died.¹¹⁰ **5:15** He died for all, so that those who live may no longer live for themselves but for him who died and was raised on their behalf.¹¹¹

5:16 Therefore, from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh. If, indeed, we have known the Messiah according to the flesh, nevertheless now we know him no longer on this basis.¹¹² **5:17** Consequently, if someone is in the Messiah, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Look, new things have come into existence.¹¹³

5:18 Thus, everything is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through the Messiah, and who gave to us the service of reconciliation,¹¹⁴ **5:19** namely, that God was reconciling the world to Himself by means of the Messiah by not accounting to them their acts of disobedience and by placing in us the message of reconciliation.¹¹⁵ **5:20** Consequently, we are ambassadors for the Messiah as God encourages people through us, “We beg you on behalf of the Messiah, be reconciled to God.”¹¹⁶ **5:21** He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, in order that we may become those who are justified before God in him.¹¹⁷

6:1 And because we work with Him, we also encourage you not to receive the grace from God in vain,¹¹⁸ **6:2** because He says,

At the acceptable time I really listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you
<Isaiah 49:8>.¹¹⁹

Behold, now is the truly acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.¹²⁰

6:3 We are giving no reason for someone to criticize us in anything, in order that our service not be criticized.¹²¹ **6:4** Instead, in everything, we are recommending ourselves as God’s servants—in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in stressful circumstances,¹²² **6:5** in beatings, in imprisonments, in the midst of riots, in labors, in sleepless nights, in times of going without food,¹²³ **6:6** in single-minded resolve, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in a sanctified spirit, in unhypocritical love,¹²⁴ **6:7** by means of the message of truth, by means of the power of God, by means of the weapons of righteousness for the right and left hands,¹²⁵ **6:8** through glory and dishonor, through slander and praise, as deceivers and true,¹²⁶ **6:9** as those who are ignorant and those who are very knowledgeable, as those who are dying and yet, behold, we live, as those who are being trained and yet we are not dying,¹²⁷ **6:10** as grieving but always rejoicing, as poor and yet making many rich, as having nothing while also possessing everything.¹²⁸

6:11 Our mouth has been opened to you, Corinthians. Our heart has been totally open.¹²⁹ **6:12** You are not finding restrictions in us, but you are finding restrictions within your own guts.¹³⁰ **6:13** So in a reciprocal manner, as though I am speaking to my children, also open up to us.¹³¹

6:14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers, because what partnership does righteousness have with lawlessness, or what fellowship does light have with darkness?¹³² **6:15** And what agreement does the Messiah have with Beliar, or what part does belief have with unbelief?¹³³ **6:16** And what agreement is there between the temple of God and that of idols, because we are the temple of God, just as God says,

I will dwell among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people <Exodus 29:45; Leviticus 26:12>?¹³⁴

6:17 Therefore, “come out from their midst and be separate,” says the Lord. “And do not touch what is unclean, and I will welcome you <Isaiah 52:11; Ezekiel 20:34>.”¹³⁵

6:18 And “I will be your Father, and you will be My sons and daughters,” says the Lord Almighty <similar to II Samuel 7:14, Isaiah 43:6>.¹³⁶

7:1 Therefore, because we have all these promises, those whom I love, let us cleanse ourselves from all polluting of our flesh and spirit, while finishing being separate in the fear of God.¹³⁷

7:2 Make room for us. We harmed no one. We corrupted no one. We took advantage of no one.¹³⁸ **7:3** I do not speak to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts, in order to die with us and to live with us.¹³⁹ **7:4** Great is my confidence in you. Great is my bragging about you. I have been filled with encouragement. I am increasing more and more in joy in all our affliction.¹⁴⁰ **7:5** In fact, when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest. But we were afflicted in every way—battles without, fears within.¹⁴¹ **7:6** Nevertheless, God, who encourages the downcast, encouraged us by means of the appearing of Titus.¹⁴² **7:7** And not only by his appearing but also by the encouragement with which he was encouraged through you, reporting to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.¹⁴³

7:8 Consequently, even though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it, even though I did regret it, for I see that the letter caused you sorrow, even if for a little while.¹⁴⁴ **7:9** Now I rejoice, not because you were caused to be sorrowful, but because you were caused to be sorrowful for the purpose of repentance. You were caused to be sorrowful according to God, so that, because of us, you should not suffer loss in anything.¹⁴⁵ **7:10** The sorrow that is according to God produces a repentance that a person does not regret and that results in salvation. However, the sorrow of the world produces death.¹⁴⁶

7:11 For behold how much earnestness (σπουδήν) this very same being caused sorrow according to God has produced in you, even indeed vindication, indignation, fear, longing, zeal, and avenging of wrong. In every matter you have recommended yourselves to be pure.¹⁴⁷ **7:12** Therefore, when I wrote to you, it was not strictly for the sake of the one who did wrong, nor just for the sake of the one who was wronged, but so that our earnestness (τὴν σπουδὴν ὑμῶν) on your behalf could be revealed to you before God.¹⁴⁸

7:13 Therefore, we have been encouraged, and, because of our encouragement, we rejoiced even more over the joy of Titus—that his spirit has been refreshed by all of you.¹⁴⁹ **7:14** Therefore, if I have bragged about anything to him concerning you, I have not been disappointed. Instead, just as we spoke all things to you in the truth, thus also our bragging to Titus proved to be the truth.¹⁵⁰ **7:15** In addition, his affections are even greater toward you as he remembers the obedience of you all, just as you welcomed him with fear and trembling.¹⁵¹ **7:16** I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you.¹⁵²

8:1 We make known to you, brothers, the grace of God that has been given within the gatherings of Macedonia,¹⁵³ **8:2** that, in a great ordeal of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their charitableness.¹⁵⁴ **8:3** I declare that, according to their potential and beyond their potential, they made their choice on the basis of their own free and independent agency (αὐθαίρετοι),¹⁵⁵ **8:4** begging us with much encouragement for the grace and participation in serving those who have been set apart.¹⁵⁶ **8:5** In fact, not just as we had hoped, they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in the light of the will of God,¹⁵⁷ **8:6** so that we have encouraged Titus that, just as he had begun, thus also he complete in you this gracious work.¹⁵⁸ **8:7** Besides, just as in everything you are flourishing—in belief, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness (πάσῃ σπουδῇ), and in love from us in you—as a result, thrive also in this gracious work.¹⁵⁹

8:8 I am not speaking by way of commandment, but as indeed providing clear evidence of the genuineness of your love by means of the earnestness of others (διὰ τῆς ἐτέρων σπουδῆς).¹⁶⁰ **8:9** You

know about the grace of our Lord Jesus the Messiah, that, while being rich, he became poor on your account, so that you may become rich by means of his poverty.¹⁶¹ 8:10 Thus, I give my opinion in this matter.¹⁶²

This is better for you, who a year ago not only began to do this but also began to *desire* to do this.¹⁶³ 8:11 Therefore, now indeed, finish the doing of it, so that, just as there was the willingness of desiring to do it (ἡ προθυμία τοῦ θέλειν), thus also there will be the completion of it out of what you have.¹⁶⁴ 8:12 If the willingness (ἡ προθυμία) is present, it is acceptable according to whatever a person has, not according to what he does not have,¹⁶⁵ 8:13 because it is not in order that there may be relief for others and affliction for you, but because of equity.¹⁶⁶ 8:14 At the present time, your abundance exists for their need, in order that their abundance also exist for your need, so that there may be equity,¹⁶⁷ 8:15 just as it has been written,

He who gathered much did not have more than was necessary, and he who gathered little was not in need <Exodus 16:18>.¹⁶⁸

8:16 Thanks be to God, who gives the same earnestness (τὴν αὐτὴν σπουδὴν) on your behalf to Titus' heart,¹⁶⁹ 8:17 because, on the one hand, he has embraced encouragement, and, on the other hand, being very earnest (σπουδαιότερος), he has gone to you on the basis of his own free and independent agency (αὐθαίρετος).¹⁷⁰ 8:18 We also sent with him the brother who is admired with respect to the good news throughout all the gatherings.¹⁷¹ 8:19 And not only this, but also he was handpicked by the gatherings as our companion for glorifying his Lord and for our willingness, as we traveled with this gracious gift that is being administered by us.¹⁷²

8:20 We were avoiding this very thing—someone's finding fault with us with respect to this abundant gift that is being administered by us,¹⁷³ 8:21 because we care about what is morally right—not only in the eyes of the Lord, but also in the eyes of men.¹⁷⁴

8:22 In addition, we have sent with them our brother of whom we have often determined with clear evidence in his being earnestly excellent in many situations, and now he is even more earnestly excellent because of his great confidence in you.¹⁷⁵ 8:23 As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker for you. As for our brothers, they are envoys of the gatherings, the glory of the Messiah.¹⁷⁶ 8:24 Therefore, show them, in full view of the gatherings, the evidence of your love and of our bragging on your behalf.¹⁷⁷

9:1 Certainly, to write to you concerning the service to the set apart ones is more than I really need to do,¹⁷⁸ 9:2 because I know your willingness of which I brag to the Macedonians concerning you, "Achaia has been prepared for a year." Thus, your zeal has stirred up most of them.¹⁷⁹ 9:3 And I have sent the brothers so that our bragging concerning you will not be an empty one in this matter, with the result that, just as I was saying, you may be prepared,¹⁸⁰ 9:4 lest somehow, if the Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention, you) would be embarrassed in this situation.¹⁸¹

9:5 Therefore, I considered it necessary to encourage the brothers to go to you ahead of us and to prepare beforehand your previously promised praiseworthy gift, that it may be ready in this way as a praiseworthy gift and not as a gift that is grudgingly granted with greed.¹⁸² 9:6 There is this principle, "He who sows grudgingly will also reap grudgingly, and he who sows in a praiseworthy manner will also reap in a praiseworthy manner."¹⁸³ 9:7 Each person should sow just as he decided beforehand in his heart, not out of sorrow or under compulsion, because God loves a cheerful giver.¹⁸⁴

9:8 Plus, God is able to cause all grace to exist in abundance towards you with the result that, in everything, always having all contentment, you may abound in every good work,¹⁸⁵ 9:9 just as it was written,

He distributed. He gave to the poor. His righteousness endures into the age <Psalm 112:9>.¹⁸⁶

9:10 He who provides seed to the sower and bread for food will provide and multiply your seed and will increase the products of your righteousness,¹⁸⁷ 9:11 as you are made wealthy in every situation for a completely single-minded commitment that is producing through us thanksgiving to God,¹⁸⁸ 9:12 because the service of this form of worship is not only fully supplying the needs of the set apart ones, but also is causing an abundance through many thanksgivings to God.¹⁸⁹ 9:13 In the light of providing clear evidence by this service, they will glorify God for your submission to your confession to the good news of the Messiah and for your single-minded commitment to participate with them and with all others,¹⁹⁰ 9:14 as they, in their prayer for you, long for you on account of the extraordinary grace of God in you.¹⁹¹

9:15 Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.¹⁹²

10:1 Now I myself, Paul, who, on the one hand, am humble in your midst when I am personally present and, on the other hand, am bold toward you when absent, encourage you with the gentleness and kindness of the Messiah.¹⁹³ 10:2 I ask that, when I am present, that I not have to be bold with the confidence with which I consider to be bold towards some who consider us as walking according to the flesh.¹⁹⁴ 10:3 Even though we are *walking in* the flesh, we are not *fighting according to* the flesh,¹⁹⁵ 10:4 because the weapons of our battle are not of the present realm. Instead, they are divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.¹⁹⁶ We are demolishing reasonings 10:5 and every exalted thing that is being lifted up against the knowledge of God. Indeed, we are taking captive every thought in order to be obedient to the Messiah.¹⁹⁷ 10:6 In addition, we are ready to avenge all disobedience whenever your obedience is brought to completion.¹⁹⁸

10:7 You are looking at things outwardly. If anyone is convinced that he himself belongs to the Messiah, at this point let him consider this in regard to himself, that just as he belongs to the Messiah, so also do we.¹⁹⁹ 10:8 And even if I brag some more about our authority that the Lord gave us for your building up and not for your destruction, I shall not feel ashamed.²⁰⁰ 10:9 My purpose is not to seem as if I am intimidating you by my letters.²⁰¹ 10:10 There is the fact that someone says, "On the one hand, his letters are heavy and strong, but, on the other hand, his personal appearance is weak, and the delivery of his message is worthy of contempt."²⁰² 10:11 Let such a person consider this, that who we are in our message through our letters when we are absent, such also we are in actions when present with you.²⁰³

10:12 We definitely are not bold to classify or compare ourselves with any of those who recommend themselves. In contrast, those who measure themselves by means of themselves and compare themselves with themselves lack understanding.²⁰⁴ 10:13 Plus, we will not brag beyond the limits of our work, but according to the measure of the assignment which God allotted to us, to reach even as far as you.²⁰⁵ 10:14 We are not overextending ourselves as if we did not reach to you, for, indeed, we were the *first* to come to you with the good news of the Messiah.²⁰⁶ 10:15 We are not going to brag in the labors of others that extend beyond our limits. But we have the expectation that, as your belief increases, it will result in our being greatly enlarged among you according to our assignment.²⁰⁷ 10:16 The result will be to preach the good news to regions beyond you so as not to brag in another's assignment towards those who have been prepared.²⁰⁸ 10:17 Instead,

Let him who brags brag in the Lord <cf. Jeremiah 9:24>.²⁰⁹

10:18 Consequently, he is not demonstrating clear evidence who recommends himself but whom the Lord recommends.²¹⁰

11:1 I wish that you would put up with a little foolishness from me. Indeed, you are putting up with me.²¹¹ 11:2 I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God. I promised you in marriage to one husband in order to present you to the Messiah as a pure virgin.²¹² 11:3 However, I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve with his craftiness, your minds would be seduced away from a single-minded resolve and pure sincerity towards the Messiah.²¹³ 11:4 If someone comes proclaiming a different kind of Jesus whom we did not proclaim, or you receive another spirit that you did not receive, or another message of the good news which you did not accept, you put up with it well enough.²¹⁴

11:5 It is true that in no way do I consider myself inferior to the “super-apostles.”²¹⁵ 11:6 If I am an amateur in speech, nevertheless I am not in knowledge. Certainly, in every way, we have demonstrated this to you in everything.²¹⁶ 11:7 Or did I commit a sin by humbling myself in order that you could be exalted, because I proclaimed the good news of God to you without charge?²¹⁷ 11:8 I robbed other churches by taking wages from them in order to serve you.²¹⁸ 11:9 Therefore, when I was present with you and in need, I was not a burden to anyone. Instead, when the brothers came from Macedonia, they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you and will continue to do so.²¹⁹

11:10 The truth of the Messiah is in me, because this bragging on my behalf will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia.²²⁰ 11:11 Why? Because I do not love you? God knows that I do.²²¹ 11:12 And what I am doing, indeed I shall continue to do, so that I may destroy the opportunity of those who desire an opportunity to be found just like us in that which they are bragging.²²² 11:13 Such men are pseudo-apostles, dishonest workers, who masquerade as apostles of the Messiah.²²³ 11:14 And no wonder, because the adversary himself pretends to be a messenger of light.²²⁴ 11:15 Therefore, is it not surprising if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds?²²⁵

11:16 Again I say, no one should think me a fool. But if you do, indeed receive me as a fool so that I may also brag a little.²²⁶ 11:17 What I am saying, I am not saying according to the Lord but in foolishness in this situation of bragging.²²⁷ 11:18 Because many brag according to the flesh, I will brag also,²²⁸ 11:19 because you, being wise, gladly put up with the foolish.²²⁹ 11:20 You put up with someone if he enslaves you, if he devours you, if he grabs hold of you, if he puts on airs, if he beats you on the face.²³⁰ 11:21 To my shame, I must confess that we have been weak.²³¹

However, in whatever someone is bold (I am speaking in foolishness), I also am bold.²³² 11:22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.²³³ 11:23 Are they servants of the Messiah? I am speaking as one who is out of his mind. I far more—in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, in more severe beatings, in frequent dangers of death.²³⁴ 11:24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes.²³⁵ 11:25 Three times I was beaten with a stick. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day adrift at sea.²³⁶ 11:26 In frequent travels I have experienced dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own countrymen, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the desert, dangers on the sea, dangers from false brethren.²³⁷ 11:27 I have been in labor and hardship, through frequent sleepless nights, in famine and thirst, often without food, in cold and nakedness.²³⁸ 11:28 Besides these external experiences, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the gatherings.²³⁹ 11:29 Who is weak without my being weak? Who is made to stumble without my burning with concern?²⁴⁰

11:30 If it is necessary for me to brag, I will brag about things pertaining to my weakness.²⁴¹ 11:31 The God and Father of our Lord Jesus the Messiah, He who is blessed into the ages, knows that I am not lying.²⁴² 11:32 In Damascus, the ethnarch under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to arrest me.²⁴³ 11:33 Then, I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and thus escaped his hands.²⁴⁴

12:1 It is necessary for me to brag. Even though it is not profitable, yet, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord.²⁴⁵ 12:2 I know a man in the Messiah fourteen years ago, whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows, where such a man was snatched away up to the third heaven.²⁴⁶ 12:3 I know such a man, whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows,²⁴⁷ 12:4 that he was snatched away into paradise, and he heard words too holy to speak that are not possible for a man to speak.²⁴⁸ 12:5 I will brag on behalf of such a man, but on behalf of myself I will not brag except in regard to my weaknesses.²⁴⁹ 12:6 For if I desire to brag, I will not be foolish, for I will speak the truth. However, I am holding back, lest someone attribute to me more than what he sees me doing or what he hears from me.²⁵⁰

12:7 In the light of the extraordinary degree of revelations, therefore, in order that I would not have an undue sense of my self-importance, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of the adversary, in order to torment me, in order that I would not have an undue sense of my self-

importance.²⁵¹ **12:8** Regarding this thorn, I encouraged God three times that it would leave me,²⁵² **12:9** but He said to me, “My grace is enough for you, for My power completes its purpose in your weakness.” With pleasure, therefore, I would rather brag about my weaknesses, so that the power of the Messiah may take up its abode in me.²⁵³ **12:10** Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with hardships, with persecutions and stressful circumstances for the sake of the Messiah. For when I am weak, then I am strong.²⁵⁴

12:11 I have become a fool, and you have forced me to do so. I should have been recommended by you, because I was not inferior to the “super-apostles,” even though I am a nobody.²⁵⁵ **12:12** To be sure, the signs of an apostle were performed among you with all perseverance—by signs and wonders and powerful acts.²⁵⁶ **12:13** In what respect were you treated worse than the other gatherings, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me for this injustice.²⁵⁷

12:14 Behold, this is the third time that I am ready to come to you, and I will not burden you, because I do not seek what you have but you. Children are not obligated to save up for their parents but parents for their children.²⁵⁸ **12:15** And I will gladly spend and be spent for your lives. If I love you so much more than the false apostles do, am I to be loved less than you love them?²⁵⁹ **12:16** Be that as it may, as for me, I did not burden you. But being the crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit.²⁶⁰

12:17 When I have sent anyone to you, I have not taken advantage of you through him, have I?²⁶¹ **12:18** I encouraged Titus to go, and I sent with him the brother. Titus did not take advantage of you, did he? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did we not walk in the same steps?²⁶²

12:19 You have probably been thinking that all along we have been defending ourselves to you. Actually, we are speaking in the presence of God because of the Messiah. Thus, all things, beloved, are for your being built up.²⁶³ **12:20** I am afraid, lest somehow when I come, I may not find you to be as I wish, and I may not be found by you to be as you wish, lest somehow there be strife, envy, angry feelings, conflicts, slanderous exchanges, gossips, prideful feelings, and confusing situations.²⁶⁴ **12:21** I am afraid, lest when I come again, God may humble me before you, and I will mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past (τῶν προημαρτηκότων) and not repented of the uncleanness, sexual immorality (πορνεία), and licentiousness that they have practiced.²⁶⁵

13:1 This is the third time that I am coming to you.

Every fact shall be substantiated on the basis of the testimony of two or three witnesses
<Deuteronomy 19:15>.²⁶⁶

13:2 I have said before, and I am saying again as when I was present the second time and now when I am absent, to those who have sinned in the past (τοῖς προημαρτηκόσιν) and to all the rest, that, whenever I come again, I will not spare anyone,²⁶⁷ **13:3** because you are seeking proof of the one who is speaking in me, the Messiah, who is not weak towards you but is powerful within you.²⁶⁸ **13:4** Indeed, he was crucified because of weakness, but he lives because of the power of God. We also are weak because of him, but we live with him because of the power of God towards you.²⁶⁹

13:5 Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Show clear evidence for yourselves. Or do you not understand something about yourselves, that Jesus the Messiah is in you, unless indeed you lack the clear evidence?²⁷⁰ **13:6** I hope you understand that, as for us, we do not lack clear evidence.²⁷¹ **13:7** We pray to God that none of you practice evil, not so that we may appear as having clear evidence, but so that you may practice what is good, even if we are as those who lack clear evidence.²⁷²

13:8 We can do nothing against the truth but only for the truth,²⁷³ **13:9** meaning that we rejoice when we are weak and you are strong. This indeed we pray for, i.e., your maturation.²⁷⁴ **13:10** For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that, when I am present, I may not use severity according to the authority that the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down.²⁷⁵

13:11 Finally, brothers, rejoice, mend your ways, be encouraged, and be like-minded. Be in shalom, and the God of love and shalom will be with you.²⁷⁶ 13:12 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.²⁷⁷

13:13 The grace of our Lord Jesus the Messiah, the love of God, and the commonality of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.²⁷⁸

¹ Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ – Paul identifies himself as the author of this letter. He is also an apostle, an authoritative spokesman for the long expected anointed one as predicted in the Old Testament, the Jewish Messiah, who is Jesus of Nazareth and who has qualified through his death and resurrection to be the permanent king of the restored Kingdom of Israel when he returns, as well as the only high priest who intercedes with God on behalf of believing sinners in order that they may acquire His eternal mercy. Indeed, from the story in Acts 9, we learn that Paul is the sole apostle to the Gentiles. All the other apostles are assigned the responsibility of proclaiming the message of Jesus as the Messiah to the Jews. Paul also indicates that he received this responsibility as a result of God's eternal plans and purposes. He probably wrote this letter from the northern province of Macedonia approximately 18 months after 1 Corinthians, i.e., about the fall of A.D. 56, during his third missionary journey, having first visited Corinth during his second missionary journey approximately 3-4 years earlier.

There are three reasons Paul is writing this letter –

- 1) To commend the Corinthians according to Titus' report that they have responded well to his previous letter (3rd Corinthians technically) and dealt adequately and repentantly with the sin which he confronted during his second visit and in the letter so that he is convinced that their Christianity is authentic.
- 2) To defend his being a genuine apostle in the light of the influence of the false apostles who are promoting the Mosaic Covenant as the center of any sinner's relationship with God.
- 3) To encourage the Corinthians to fulfill their promise to collect and send a financial gift to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and Judea during their famine.

I think that all three of these reasons are tied together as a means for Paul to defend himself as an apostle and promote the true apostolic message of Jesus as the Messiah.

Another way to state the purpose of this letter – Paul's confident, foolish bragging and encouragement in the midst of weakness for upbuilding in the truth.

² καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφὸς τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ τῇ οὔσῃ ἐν Κορίνθῳ – Paul is writing to the same group of people to whom he wrote 1 Corinthians, the believers in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah and who have been changed inwardly by God to become believers. These people constitute the Christian community in the city of Corinth west of Athens, Greece, and who gather in whatever way they can, probably in people's homes, in order to teach, encourage, and support one another in the midst of their common faith in God and in Jesus as the Messiah.

³ σὺν τοῖς ἀγίοις πᾶσιν τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Ἀχαΐᾳ – Whereas Paul had used much the same phrase and made this group very general in 1 Corinthians (ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ = in every place), here he is more specific and refers to the other Christians in southern Greece on the north coast of the Peloponnesus surrounding Corinth. All of them must have experienced some interaction with the false apostles, whose situation he describes in more detail in chapters 10 & 11. And because of the effects that they are having on the Corinthian and Achaian Christians, he is writing this letter.

Paul calls the Christians "the set apart ones," i.e., the sinful human beings in whom God has worked through His Holy Spirit to make them inclined spiritually towards Him and His message of truth so that their fundamental desire is to believe His truth, the specifically the message of Jesus as the Messiah, and to obey His moral commandments as they await Jesus' return and his establishing the Kingdom of God.

⁴ χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ – Paul wishes God to continue working out His favorable purposes and plans in these Corinthian and Achaian Christians to bring about their *shalom*, i.e., moral perfection and forgiveness, in the eternal Kingdom of God where Jesus as the Messiah will rule over them after he plays the very important role of their high priest (cf. Hebrews) and advocate (cf. 1 John 2:1ff.) at the final judgment, which in their case will be at his return. Paul calls God the Father of believers as both their source of existence and the one who has adopted them to be His children, who, as a result, become members of the group who will inhabit the eternal Kingdom of God.

Briefly, I think that this letter is like Galatians in that Paul is combatting the erroneous teaching of Jews who claim to be followers of Jesus as the Messiah and yet who are promoting Moses and the Mosaic Covenant as more important than Jesus. Indeed, these men are also claiming to be actual apostles of Jesus and that Paul is not. However, this letter is less harsh and direct than Galatians. It is as though Paul has to address the error of the false apostles in a roundabout way in order not to come across as authoritarian and demanding, which is the manner by which the other men are treating the Corinthians, who seem to be accepting of their harsh treatment.

The false apostles are all about outward, religious appearance instead of inward, genuine faith and obedience. And they think that they can point out things in Paul's outward behavior that proves that he is not a true follower of Jesus.

It also seems that the Jews of Jesus' and Paul's day expected the Messiah to promote Moses and the Mosaic Covenant above himself, i.e., that he is simply a true disciple of Moses and his responsibility is to lead the Jews and the world to follow Moses and his covenant in as strict and complete manner as possible. Therefore, when Jesus says in Matthew 12:6 that he is greater than the temple, it was considered the height of blasphemy by the Jewish leadership. The Messiah should submit to the temple (and the Mosaic Covenant) in its entirety, even by bringing his own sacrifices to it for the forgiveness of his own sins, not declare that he is greater than Moses and the Mosaic Covenant.

The ramifications of this letter is that so-called biblical leaders will promote religious activity above the simplicity and purity of belief in and moral obedience to Jesus, and they will do so in an authoritarian manner that includes demanding that they be paid for their work.

Cf. 2 Corinthians 2:17 because we are not like many, selling the message of God for a profit, but as from a pure motive, but as

from God, we are speaking in the presence of God in the Messiah?

Cf. 2 Corinthians 3:1 Are we beginning to recommend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, actual written letters of recommendation to you or from you?

Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:12 We are not again recommending ourselves to you, but we are giving you an opportunity to brag about us, in order that you may have something for those who brag about appearance instead of about the heart.

Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:16 Therefore, from now on we recognize no one on the basis of merely their external stuff. If, indeed, we have known the Messiah on the basis of his external stuff, nevertheless now we know him no longer on this basis.

Cf. 2 Corinthians 10:7 You are looking at things outwardly. If anyone is convinced that he himself belongs to the Messiah, let him consider this once more in regard to himself, that just as he belongs to the Messiah, so also do we.

Cf. 2 Corinthians 10:10 There is the fact that someone says, "On the one hand, his letters are heavy and strong, but, on the other hand, the appearance of his body is weak, and the delivery of his message is worthy of contempt."

Cf. 2 Corinthians 11:6 If I am an amateur in speech, nevertheless I am not in knowledge. Certainly, in every way, we have demonstrated this to you in everything.

Cf. 2 Corinthians 11:18 Because many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also, 11:19 because you, being wise, gladly put up with the foolish. 11:20 You put up with someone if he enslaves you, if he devours you, if he grabs hold of you, if he puts on airs, if he beats you on the face. 11:21 To my shame, I must confess that we have been weak.

⁵ εὐλογητός ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ – Under the present circumstances of Paul's own suffering and potential rejection as an apostle by the Corinthians, he begins by expressing the greatest admiration for God and His project that involves Jesus as the Messiah, the predicted in the Old Testament anointed one and ruler over Israel and the created reality as God's Son, the final Davidic king. Indeed, he says that He is Jesus' God, the one who brought him into existence in the created reality and therefore told and is telling his story as the centerpiece of the creation and the most important person in human history.

This is truly a sign of an authentic believer, that Paul can praise and bless God in the midst of difficult circumstances and suffering.

⁶ ὁ πατὴρ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν καὶ θεὸς πάσης παρακλήσεως – God is the very source of mercy (plural in the Greek for emphasis – cf. Romans 12:1, Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship) and forgiveness that is necessary in order for morally depraved human beings to obtain citizenship in the eternal Kingdom of God. Thus, He also provides the necessary encouragement, comfort, and persuasion intellectually and inwardly for people to embrace fully this biblical message of His eternal mercy as truth, especially in the midst of any suffering they endure as Paul will go on to say. Being changed inwardly and comforted, persuaded, and encouraged fully and enduringly over the course of the present life is God's requirement of human beings for their receiving His eternal mercy and entering in the Kingdom of God. But He is also the one who ensures this happens.

I think that Paul is talking about this and the mutual suffering and encouragement that he and the Corinthians are receiving from God in order to remind them and establish a good rapport with them since he is going to have to criticize them for their being led astray by the false apostles (and to tell them how much he is encouraged by their response to his letter where he confronted them on the sin which had existed among them). He wants to make it clear that they are being "afflicted" by these false teachers that is similar to all the afflictions which he has endured as a true apostle of Jesus the Messiah. Indeed, to be afflicted by those who are hostile to biblical truth is simply part of what we have to expect as followers of Jesus.

παρακλήσις – used 11x in 2 Corinthians.

παρακαλέω – used 18x in 2 Corinthians.

⁷ ὁ παρακαλῶν ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ θλίψει ἡμῶν εἰς τὸ δύνασθαι ἡμᾶς παρακαλεῖν τοὺς ἐν πάσῃ θλίψει διὰ τῆς παρακλήσεως ἧς παρακαλούμεθα αὐτοὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ – Paul refers specifically to himself and Timothy, as shown by the fact that he continues by using the contrasting personal pronouns "we/us" and "you/you." Paul and Timothy are able to be successful in comforting and encouraging others of the truth of the biblical message only when God miraculously works within these other people. This divine comfort and encouragement is the same that comes to Paul and Timothy in the midst of their suffering as the latter two both model being encouraged by the biblical message of God's promise of eternal life and continue to proclaim this message to the Corinthians (and others). Thus, Paul and Timothy's ability to comfort and encourage others includes their ability to continue believing and proclaiming the biblical message in the midst of the hardship of their suffering. However, as I said, the actual comforting and encouraging of others is accomplished only if God is working inwardly in these other people.

We human beings naturally find it quite difficult to be comforted and encouraged by the truth of God's love and mercy in the midst of the most painful suffering. Suffering truly tests the authenticity and endurance of a person's belief in the biblical message. Thus, it actually requires a miracle of God to cause a suffering morally depraved human being to be comforted and persuaded that the biblical message is true, and, indeed, this is God's project with respect to individuals that involves Paul's also continuing to use every appropriate human means at his disposal, especially the articulation of his theological ideas through speech and writing, to comfort and persuade other human beings (cf. Romans 5:3-5). Paul also recognizes that however God comforts and encourages him of the truth of the biblical message, probably referring to the evidence of the Old Testament and the ideas of Jesus as the Messiah which result from both a close study of the OT and the information which directly came to light when Jesus was on earth, along with God's inward work through His Spirit, it is this same method, content, and dynamic which are at play when Paul is seeking to comfort and persuade others of the biblical truth when they are going through suffering. Thus, Paul is implying that he expects to be able to comfort and encourage the Corinthians in the midst of their being afflicted by

the false apostles (and in the midst of the discomforting letter that he sent them before this one – cf. 2 Corinthians 2 & 7).

θλίψις – used 9x in 2 Corinthians

⁸ ὅτι καθὼς περισεύει τὰ παθήματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ἡμᾶς – Jesus assured his apostles that they would suffer hostility from the world similar to what he had experienced. Therefore, it is no surprise to Paul that Timothy and he are going through the level of similar suffering that they are. Indeed, Paul is saying this in a manner, i.e., “For just as...,” where he means that it is just a fact of reality that Jesus’ apostles would experience the same kind of mistreatment by people who categorically object to and are hostile to the good news of God’s mercy as he had been.

πάθημα – used 3x in 2 Corinthians – in 1:5,6,7

⁹ οὕτως διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ περισεύει καὶ ἡ παρακλήσις ἡμῶν – It is also a fact of reality that Paul and Timothy enjoy a level of comfort and encouragement through the truth of the biblical message that is commensurate with the level of their suffering for this message—all by the miracle of God’s grace at work within them that occurs because of God’s plan to use them in bringing about the fulfillment of His project of producing a people fit and qualified through their authentic belief for the eternal kingdom and realm where Jesus will be their king and everyone else will have received God’s complete and eternal mercy (mercies!).

¹⁰ εἴτε δὲ θλιβόμεθα, ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑμῶν παρακλήσεως καὶ σωτηρίας – The purpose of Paul’s and Timothy’s suffering that results in God’s further comforting and persuading them of the truth of the biblical message is so that they may be authoritative spokesmen for the good news of God’s mercy to the Gentiles, and specifically the Corinthian Christians in this context. Implied of course is that this is on the basis of Paul’s being called by God to be the sole and unique apostle to the Gentiles. Thus, God fully intends to use Paul and Timothy as His tools to comfort the Corinthian Christians and persuade them of the truth and value of the biblical message that ultimately results in their eternal salvation and participation in the eternal Kingdom of God.

θλίβω – used 3x in 2 Corinthians

¹¹ εἴτε παρακαλούμεθα, ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑμῶν παρακλήσεως τῆς ἐνεργουμένης ἐν ὑπομονῇ τῶν αὐτῶν παθημάτων ὧν καὶ ἡμεῖς πάσχομεν – There is a kind of theologically symbiotic relationship between Paul’s and Timothy’s suffering, persuasion, and encouragement and the Corinthians’ suffering, persuasion, and encouragement. The former results in the latter—through the inward miracle of God in both parties. The Corinthian Christians patiently persevere in their belief in Jesus as the Messiah through their sufferings as a result of Paul’s and Timothy’s doing the same and as a result of Paul’s and Timothy’s continuing to teach and exhort them to embrace the biblical message.

Logically, this symbiotic relationship exists between anyone else down through history and the apostles’ “speaking” as preserved for us in the New Testament documents. And, by extrapolation, this symbiotic and sequential relationship exists between any authentic Christian’s suffering, persuasion, and encouragement and another authentic Christian’s suffering, persuasion, and encouragement where the former is able to encourage the latter. The obvious difference, however, is that only Paul is an inerrant and authoritative spokesman for the Messiah. The rest of us are merely seeking to learn from Paul (and the other biblical authors) as well as we can, thereby constantly pointing each other to these biblical authors, willing to be wrong in our interpretations, but working to find the one, correct interpretation of each passage with each other’s help.

With vs. 3-7, Paul is setting up his readers for the rest of the letter where he will be both criticizing them and encouraging them to embrace both the message of the gospel as he has been presenting it and him as a true apostle of Jesus.

πάσχω – used in only this verse in 2 Corinthians

¹² καὶ ἡ ἐλπίς ἡμῶν βεβαία ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν – Paul’s and Timothy’s long-term expectation of the eternal salvation of the Corinthian Christians is well based on the miraculous role that suffering will play in their being comforted and persuaded of the truth of the biblical message as God continues to comfort and persuade them inwardly through His grace. And most likely Paul’s and Timothy’s confidence comes from having watched God work in the Corinthians to the effect that they truly seemed to embrace the message of Jesus as their king and priest and to live their lives accordingly after they initially chose to believe during their first visit. Nevertheless, these Christians have come under the influence of false teachers who are promoting the Mosaic Covenant above Jesus, and Paul hopes to lead them back to the “simplicity and purity of devotion” to Jesus (cf. 11:3).

He is also now looking forward to his third visit after their response to his recent letter, thus even more confident that they are genuine in their belief (cf. chapters 2,7, 12, and 13).

¹³ εἰδότες ὅτι ὡς κοινωνοὶ ἐστε τῶν παθημάτων, οὕτως καὶ τῆς παρακλήσεως – Assuming with some confidence that the Corinthian Christians are genuine in their belief in the apostolic message, Paul’s and Timothy’s theological understanding of reality assures them that as they experience the same kind of hostility from the world (even the authoritarian and demanding treatment of the false apostles) that Jesus experienced, they also will experience the same miraculous comfort and persuasion of the truth of the message in the midst of the hardship of their suffering. Thus, Paul and Timothy can also feel confident that the Corinthian Christians’ ultimate destiny is eternal salvation and life from God. God does not give up on His people in whom He has powerfully worked to change their hearts and cause them to become believers.

In the context, the strongest possibility for the origin of the suffering of the Corinthian Christians is the false apostles who are very worldly in their approach to the Corinthians, even being harsh and overbearing towards them as similar to the persecution that Christians (and Paul in Asia as he will go on to describe) would receive from other kinds of unbelievers (cf. chapter 11).

¹⁴ οὐ γὰρ θέλομεν ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, ὑπὲρ τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν τῆς γενομένης ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, ὅτι καθ’ ὑπερβολὴν ὑπὲρ δύναμιν ἐβάρηθημεν ὥστε ἐξαπορηθῆναι ἡμᾶς καὶ τοῦ ζῆν – As part of his providing evidence of their genuine apostleship, Paul now tells the Corinthians about how Timothy and he suffered for the sake of the message of Jesus as the Messiah in Asia, i.e., western Turkey. The inference one is to draw is that the false apostles of chapter 11 are not experiencing any negative repercussions from what they are saying about Jesus and the Mosaic Covenant, because all they are saying is that Jesus promoted the covenant and not himself. Paul is proclaiming that Jesus replaces the covenant as the center of any Jew’s life, and this is

getting him in trouble all over the place, including among Gentiles who do not even care about or understanding the Jewish issue of the Mosaic Covenant. Indeed, the suffering that Timothy and he experienced in Asia was so intense that they wondered seriously if this was the end of their lives on earth.

This incident is most likely the one described in Acts 19:23-41 in Ephesus during the latter part of his third missionary journey (since this part of Luke's account of events in Ephesus is separate from the events in Acts 19:1-22, even though it does not sound as though Paul was in as much danger as some of his traveling companions. It is also possible that this is a more recent incident in Ephesus just before Paul writes 2 Corinthians in Macedonia or Illyricum and of which the Corinthians are not yet familiar ("we do not want you to be ignorant"), especially if Luke leaves out a lot of details regarding Paul's lengthy stay of 2¼ to three years in Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:8-10; 20:31). However, the best way of understanding Acts 19 is as mentioned above. Nevertheless, it should not surprise the Corinthians that once again Paul found himself near death for the sake of the gospel (cf. 2 Corinthians 11). This also helps in interpreting the suffering that the Corinthians are enduring as mentioned in v. 7, that it is coming from unbelievers, and the most emphasized unbelievers in this letter are the false apostles described in chapter 11.

The upshot of all this for Paul is that his suffering for the gospel is evidence of his being a genuine apostle of Jesus, while the Corinthians' suffering, even by being bullied by the false apostles, is evidence of their being genuine Christians.

¹⁵ ἀλλὰ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς τὸ ἀπόκριμα τοῦ θανάτου ἐσχέκαμεν – Paul and Timothy feared for their lives in Ephesus when the whole city seemed to turn against them.

¹⁶ ἵνα μὴ πεποιθότες ὦμεν ἐφ' ἑαυτοῖς ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ τῷ ἐγείροντι τοὺς νεκρούς – If God can raise sinful believers from the dead, then certainly He can rescue Timothy and Paul from physical death in Ephesus, and they trusted Him for just exactly this. Here also is probably the wisest notion that a human being can grasp and express, that hard times come into our lives for the express purpose of causing us to look forward to and trusting ultimately in God's raising us from the dead and welcoming us into the eternal Kingdom of God at the second coming of Jesus when he sets up his millennial kingdom. In other words, God is not the God who saves us from physical death on this earth, and trusting Him for things in this life except ongoing belief is nothing in comparison to trusting Him for raising us from the dead and mercifully granting us eternal life. Thus, God is mostly concerned with saving us from eternal condemnation and destruction, in order that we may rise from the dead and live eternally in Jesus' kingdom.

¹⁷ ὃς ἐκ τηλικούτου θανάτου ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς καὶ ῥύσεται – God ultimately rescued Paul and Timothy from "such a great a threat of death," physically speaking, in Asia, where "death" is a metonymy for "possibility" or "threat" of physical death. Then, he adds that God will rescue them from something in the future. There are two possibilities for what he means—1) eternal condemnation and death through Jesus' advocacy, or 2) another and current situation like that in Asia where Timothy and he are being threatened with physical death by people who are just as hostile to God and Jesus as the ones in Asia. I think that it is the latter in the light of the effect of the Corinthians' prayers that Paul mentions in v. 11 as well as the thankfulness of many who, I assume, will benefit from Paul's and Timothy's remaining alive and continuing to teach the biblical message to them (cf. 11 also).

¹⁸ εἰς ὃν ἠλπικαμεν ὅτι καὶ ἔτι ῥύσεται – Paul repeats for emphasis sake that Timothy and he are confident that God will rescue them from the current threat of physical death. I think that the "yet" in this statement helps lead in the direction of interpreting Paul as referring to another physical death as God continues to use Paul as the sole apostle to the Gentiles. He is saying that he will continue to encounter life-threatening situations because this is part of his responsibility as an apostle of Jesus who was hated by the world to the extent that the world executed him as a criminal.

¹⁹ συνυπουργούντων καὶ ὑμῶν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τῇ δεήσει – Paul's role in human history is to proclaim the biblical message of Jesus as Messiah to the Gentiles. Therefore, he is counting on the Corinthian Christians to pray that they may stay alive so that people who have been affected by Paul's fulfilling his responsibility as the apostle to the Gentiles will be grateful when he is able to continue to teach them.

Just as Paul's responsibility is to proclaim the gospel in life-threatening situations, the Corinthian Christians' responsibility is to pray for him that he survive them.

²⁰ ἵνα ἐκ πολλῶν προσώπων τὸ εἰς ἡμᾶς χάρισμα διὰ πολλῶν εὐχαριστηθῇ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν – Paul is saying that they will be grateful that God saved him from physical death in order that he may continue teaching and encouraging them as he is doing now. This interpretative option is making more sense in the light of Paul's talking about many people praying and many people being grateful together as their prayers are answered for the preserving of Paul's life now.

This would also be a subtle way of Paul's defending himself before the Corinthians as the one true apostle to the Gentiles to whom they should listen in contrast to the false apostles of chapter 11. And he does not have to be saying that he is absolutely convinced that God guarantees that He will keep him alive. All he would be saying is that, if God so chooses to preserve his life a little while longer, then people praying for this will be a good thing along with their thanking God for answering their prayers in this manner. In other words, Paul is still a believer in God's total sovereignty over his life and also realizes that eventually he will die when God so chooses for him to do so.

²¹ ἡ γὰρ καύχισις ἡμῶν αὕτη ἐστίν, τὸ μαρτύριον τῆς συνειδήσεως ἡμῶν, ὅτι ἐν ἀπλότῃ καὶ εἰλικρινείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ σαρκικῇ ἀλλ' ἐν χάριτι θεοῦ ἀνестράφημεν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, περισσοτέρως δὲ πρὸς ὑμᾶς – Paul's and Timothy's single-minded resolve and wholistic, sincere motivation from God as a result of His kindness and work within them and that leads them to perform Paul's gift and role as the apostle to the Gentiles is what gives them confidence in the authenticity of their belief. Indeed, no one can carry out his responsibility as a human being within the biblical story apart from God's causing him to do so. It is not human wisdom, which is what the false apostles are using, that is guiding Paul and Timothy to fulfill their apostolic role, but God's grace and independent work within them according to His ultimate plans and purposes. The combination of the

objective (God and His grace within the context of the truth of the gospel) and the subjective (their inner inclinations and drive) are what convince Paul and Timothy that they are true Christians and carrying out Paul's apostolic responsibility. Ultimately, they brag about God's grace and not about anything coming from themselves which is accomplishing their own salvations. This is in contrast to the false apostles (chapter 11) who have ulterior motives for influencing the Corinthians. Thus, Paul is carefully contrasting himself with them to defend himself without sounding heavy handed or domineering.

καύχησις – used 6x in 2 Corinthians

²² οὐ γὰρ ἄλλα γράφομεν ὑμῖν ἀλλ' ἢ ἃ ἀναγινώσκετε ἢ καὶ ἐπιγινώσκετε – What Paul and Timothy are writing now about God's grace (as the first cause of their carrying out their responsibilities and their acquiring eternal salvation) and their inner motivation (which is in line with God's grace) are completely consistent with what they had taught the Corinthians during the 18 months that they initially had spent with them. Therefore, all this information is not new news to them, and the Corinthians can say either that they are at least familiar with these concepts, even if they have not fully grasped them, or that they have a really good understanding of them. In other words, Paul and Timothy are implying that there is a process of growth of understanding, so that people should not be expected to know or grasp completely even the most "essential" ideas of the biblical message in order to be saved and acquire eternal life. Nevertheless, they should desire to know the apostolic message, and their *desire* for truth, which has come about by virtue of God's changing their hearts and orienting them towards Him, is really the essential intellectual ingredient in order to obtain eternal life (cf. Philippians 2:13).

This is also in contrast to the false apostles who have brought a message that is different from Paul's, most likely including the necessity of the Gentile Corinthian Christians to follow the Mosaic Covenant in order to prove they are true followers of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah.

²³ ἐλπίζω δὲ ὅτι ἔως τέλους ἐπιγνώσεσθε – Here, hope is not just hope but Paul's being able to expect with great certainty that the Corinthian Christians will continue to grasp what he is saying about God's grace and its effects within him until the end of their lives or Jesus' return, whichever comes first. It is this perseverance of belief throughout the rest of their lives that will ultimately qualify them for mercy at the final judgment and, therefore, entrance into the eternal Kingdom of God. Notice Paul briefly switches to the first person singular "I" and then back again to the first person plural "we."

Paul wants the Corinthians to hold on to his apostolic message until the end of their lives, not the message of the false apostles.

²⁴ καθὼς καὶ ἐπένωτε ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ μέρους, ὅτι καύχημα ὑμῶν ἔσμεν καθάπερ καὶ ὑμεῖς ἡμῶν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ – Paul and Timothy had the pleasure of seeing the Corinthian Christians clearly grasp God's apostolic role for them in their lives and their role in Paul's and Timothy's lives, i.e., to be grateful for one another at the judgment when Jesus returns and intervenes on behalf of all of them. This correct understanding of each other had been in effect until the pseudo-apostles came along and disrupted it among the Corinthians. Paul is now, with this letter, in the process of restoring a correct understanding to both of them. In other words, if there is any reason for the Corinthian Christians to brag about their association with other people, it is their relationship with Paul and Timothy as God's authorized apostolic workers who, with them, will receive eternal mercy and life when Jesus returns. Therefore, at the final judgment, the Corinthians will be able to look at Paul and Timothy, and Paul and Timothy will look at the Corinthians and brag about how they helped each other persevere in genuine faith in order to reach the point of receiving God's eternal mercy at Jesus' return.

By extrapolation it is all other Christians down through history and their association with the apostles and their message preserved in their writings in the New Testament who can boast in this association as the former also approach the time when they will receive eternal mercy and life when Jesus returns. While it is not entirely inappropriate to brag about our relationship with other Christians, including those in Christian history who lived after the apostles, nevertheless we should never elevate these others and our relationship to them above that of our relationship to the biblical authors, especially the apostles and their writings in the New Testament. Therefore, it certainly can be the case that all the glowing talk that we modern Christians use to describe the people with whom we are associated is completely off the mark according to Paul. There are only certain men and women, all from past history and all within the biblical account, with whom we should claim association, starting with Abraham and ending with the apostles. To claim association with anyone else with too much emphasis is to put them between us and the biblical persons, which Paul demonstrates in 1 Corinthians and Galatians is just plain evil, if it is not hopefully only out of total naiveté.

²⁵ καὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πεποιθήσει ἐβουλόμην πρότερον πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐλθεῖν ἵνα δευτέραν χάριν σχῆτε – Because Paul and Timothy were counting on God's working within the hearts and minds of the Corinthian Christians in conjunction with their mutual relationship and understanding of one another, i.e., with Paul and Timothy as apostolic workers of Jesus and the Corinthians as recipients of their apostolic message, they planned to return to them and keep the discussion, encouragement, and relationship going. Paul and Timothy wanted the Corinthians to receive a double gift of grace from God that they explain in the next verse.

πεποιθήσις = confidence; used 4x in 2 Corinthians. Here, and -

2 Cor. 3:4 Such confidence we have through Christ toward God.

2 Cor. 8:22 We have sent with them our brother, whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things, but now even more diligent because of his great confidence in you.

2 Cor. 10:2 I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh.

²⁶ καὶ δι' ὑμῶν διελθεῖν εἰς Μακεδονίαν καὶ πάλιν ἀπὸ Μακεδονίας ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ ὑφ' ὑμῶν προπεμφθῆναι εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν – The double gift of grace to the Corinthians would be in the form of their being exposed twice to Paul and Timothy and the apostolic message of Jesus as the Messiah as they passed through Corinth on their way to northern Greece, Macedonia, and on their way back from northern Greece. And this would be before Paul and Timothy proceeded back to Jerusalem with their monetary gift to the Jewish Christians during the current famine (cf. 2 Corinthians 8,9). Thus, it was not Paul's plan to return to

Ephesus, which he had done after writing the “letter of sorrow” from Macedonia without going back to Corinth.

As a result, Paul will later say that he chose not to return to Corinth after his second visit there where something disturbed him so much that instead he wrote a letter from Macedonia and then went back to Ephesus.

Plus, he decided to remain in the Asian/Greek area in order to deal with the situation in Corinth, with respect to both the false apostles and the immoral behavior of someone within the Corinthian Christian community with the resultant harsh treatment brought on by the influence of the false apostles who were emphasizing punishing people severely according to the Mosaic Covenant.

²⁷ τοῦτο οὖν βουλόμενος μήτι ἄρα τῇ ἐλαφρίᾳ ἐχρησάμην; ἢ ἂν βουλεύομαι κατὰ σάρκα βουλεύομαι, ἵνα ἢ παρ’ ἐμοὶ τὸ ναὶ καὶ τὸ οὐ οὐ – It would seem that the false apostles are accusing Paul of being duplicitous in his commitment to the Corinthian Christians, while they are claiming to be wholeheartedly committed to them, perhaps because Paul had made it known to the Corinthians that he would visit them, but was unable to do so for good reasons. And the Corinthians, in turn, were buying the argument of the pseudo-apostles that Paul was wishy-washy out of selfish motives. Thus, Paul is saying that people are naturally wishy-washy because of their moral depravity, but he is definitely not being so as he fulfills his apostolic responsibilities.

But what was so persuasive about the false apostles? In addition, the phrase κατὰ σάρκα (= according to the flesh) refers to the manner with which people act on the basis of their own moral depravity that has at its core rebellion against God and complete self-aggrandizement, even when the people include biblical terminology and concepts. In other words, the pseudo-apostles are accusing Paul of being unbiblical and worldly even while referring to the biblical message of Jesus as the Messiah when they themselves are the ones who are being unbiblical and worldly while referring to the biblical message. They are using the world’s methodologies that stem from human sin.

Paul and Timothy are saying that it is true that a revealing characteristic of man’s moral depravity is to claim to be committed to people and then break that commitment for completely selfish reasons. It is to abandon truth for the sake of one’s own selfish agenda and avoidance of suffering.

Cf. 2 Corinthians 10 & 11 where Paul not only describes in more depth the situation with the pseudo-apostles but also lists the amount of suffering that he has endured for the sake of the NT message. Paul’s goal is not to preserve himself but to preserve the truth and the Corinthians’ faith in the truth to the extent that God might use him according to His grace and even if it means rejection by others at the cost of his own life.

²⁸ πιστὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς ὅτι ὁ λόγος ἡμῶν ὁ πρὸς ὑμᾶς οὐκ ἔστιν ναὶ καὶ οὐ – Regardless of Paul’s and Timothy’s motives, the real issue is the faithfulness of God and the truthfulness of the message of the gospel of Jesus the Messiah that they proclaim. Cf. Philippians 1 where Paul applauds the people who are selfishly ambitious but are presenting accurately and with a healthy dose of grace the information about Jesus as the Messiah. Therefore, once again, Paul and Timothy refer and appeal to God and His faithfulness, because the message which they are presenting focuses on Him and has its basis in Him.

²⁹ ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ γὰρ υἱὸς Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς – Interesting syntax here. Paul is defending his apostleship and that he, not the pseudo-apostles, belongs to God. However, the one who really belongs to God, the most important person who belongs to God, is Jesus the Messiah, and it is to him that Paul and Timothy want to direct the attention of the Corinthians. Thus, we can infer that as much as the false apostles are pointing to Jesus as the Messiah, they are subtly directing the Corinthians’ attention to them and not to Jesus, while Paul wants to direct people’s attention to Jesus alone and not to him. Yet, he is having to defend himself, putting him in the uncomfortable position of talking about himself more than he would like.

Paul had to do this same kind of thing in 1 Corinthians 1-4.

³⁰ ὁ ἐν ὑμῖν δι’ ἡμῶν κηρυχθεὶς, δι’ ἐμοῦ καὶ Σιλουανοῦ καὶ Τιμοθέου, οὐκ ἐγένετο ναὶ καὶ οὐ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ γέγονεν – The most important person in all of human history is Jesus the Messiah, not Moses as the Jewish false apostles are claiming, not Paul as the Corinthian Christians may think that he is claiming, and certainly not the false apostles as they imply to a degree by their authoritarian manner and attitude.

Therefore, the real issue here is the Corinthians’ belief in Jesus as the Messiah, who has become such on the basis of God’s doing. So even though Paul is an authoritative spokesman for the Messiah and consequently has to put himself forward to some degree in order to communicate the apostolic message to people, he must and does regulate the force with which he proclaims this message so as to fulfill his responsibility as a spokesman while not making himself appear authoritarian and more important than Jesus. This obviously is a difficult balance to achieve, but Paul constantly works at it because of how important it is. The key as he is saying here is that everything should point to God and Jesus, but it certainly takes a wise person (like Paul) to know how to point people to God and Jesus with as much force and encouragement as possible and then stop short of causing people to focus on him. This would be the same as urging people to believe the truth of God without violating their individuality and personal accountability before God. This is the whole point of religious freedom as it should be practiced everywhere.

³¹ ὅσαι γὰρ ἐπαγγελίαι θεοῦ, ἐν αὐτῷ τὸ ναὶ – Through the Abrahamic Covenant, God has promised that the Jews become a “great nation” and that those who imitate Abraham’s faith acquire eternal life. The ultimate and certain fulfillment of these promises in a sinful human being’s life is through Jesus as Messiah and advocate, because he is the focal point of all created history. Jesus, not the Mosaic Covenant as set forth by the false apostles, is the only tool available according to God’s plans and purposes for God to fulfill His promises to human beings who do not deserve them, whether the promise for the Jews to become powerful, authentic believers on the land of Israel, or the promise for Abraham and those of similar faith to acquire eternal life.

³² διὸ καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ τὸ ἀμὴν τῷ θεῷ πρὸς δόξαν δι’ ἡμῶν – God alone is to get the glory for rescuing people through Jesus from His eternal condemnation and destruction and for making the Jews a “great nation.” One of the ways that He will get the glory is that people will pronounce Amen to God, i.e., that He is faithful and they believe and base their lives on His faithful mercy, and

that they do this on the basis of Jesus as their Messiah and advocate. Therefore, while Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy have been an important means by which the Corinthians give God the glory by pronouncing Amen to Him, because they proclaimed the message of Jesus as the Messiah to them, nevertheless the mutual bragging that Paul, Timothy, and the Corinthians do with respect to one another is far less than the bragging that they do about God. Again, Paul and Timothy are encouraging the Corinthians to look ultimately to God and then to Jesus the Messiah, not to them. And yet, Paul is an apostle to whom they must look for the proper information about God and Jesus, and they must not look to the pseudo-apostles.

The real question that the Corinthians have to answer is, who has the correct message about the Messiah and Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah in the light of what God is doing? Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy or the false apostles?

³³ ὁ δὲ βεβαιῶν ἡμᾶς σὺν ὑμῖν εἰς Χριστὸν καὶ χρίσας ἡμᾶς θεός – Paul’s and Timothy’s claim is that it is God and God alone who should be credited with establishing the apostles as apostles and the Corinthian Christians as Christians, including anointing, i.e., setting apart for a unique purpose, the apostles for their special role of being the authoritative spokesmen for Jesus, the ultimate Anointed One (Χριστὸν), so that their speaking about biblical issues should be received by other sinful human beings as though it were Jesus himself speaking.

Another option is that “anointed us” (and the sealed, etc. in v. 22) refers to Paul, Timothy, and the Corinthian Christians. However, as Paul goes on to talk about himself and Timothy, his argument is more about defending himself as the one true apostle to the Corinthian Gentiles while not including them in the benefits of the gospel yet.

³⁴ ὁ καὶ σφραγισάμενος ἡμᾶς καὶ δοὺς τὸν ἄρραβῶνα τοῦ πνεύματος ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν – God is the one who has commissioned, through His inward work by the Holy Spirit, the apostles to carry out their authoritative responsibilities. This inward work also constitutes the down payment, i.e., God’s evidence, of His fulfilling His promise of granting eternal life to the apostles and the other apostolic workers like Timothy and Silvanus. Eternal life, ultimately, is what they are counting on also, not being viewed as wildly successful human beings in this world. Paul is willing to give up all fame and honor in the world in order to gain eternal life and mercy from God. cf. 5:5.

³⁵ Ἐγὼ δὲ μάρτυρα τὸν θεὸν ἐπικαλοῦμαι ἐπὶ τὴν ἐμὴν ψυχὴν ὅτι φειδόμενος ὑμῶν οὐκέτι ἤλθον εἰς Κόρινθον – Now that Paul hopes that he has convinced the Corinthians that his motivation and behavior towards them has always been good and moral, he feels that it is time to answer their implied question, “Ok, Paul, then why did you not come back to us but sent the letter instead when you had told us that you were returning after you visited Macedonia?” Here he starts presenting them with the real reason why he did not come to Corinth, as opposed to the reason the pseudo-apostles are giving, i.e., that Paul was neglectful of them and unloving towards them. Instead, Paul did not desire to be overbearing toward the Corinthians and make them intimidated by his reappearance. He had already been disappointed by whatever immoral behavior he discovered when he visited them on his way to Macedonia, and we can assume that he must have dealt with the issue as best as possible at the time. However, the person and/or persons involved clearly did not respond well to his dealing with it at the time, so that he had to write another letter to them that he mentions in this letter. Thus, he was saving them from excessive discomfort and sorrow by not reappearing in Corinth. It was for this reason, not out of being wishy-washy that he did not return as he had said he would. Thus, there are two reasons for Paul’s writing this letter—1) To encourage the Corinthians in their response to the sin among them which he had to confront and in regard to which he wrote his last letter (3rd Corinthians technically) and to defend his actions in strongly confronting the sin when perhaps the false apostles were saying he was a bit too heavy-handed; and 2) To encourage the Corinthians to reject the false apostles’ message of the Mosaic Covenant while also defending his apostleship and the true message of the gospel.

In chapter 7, Paul will express how delighted he is that the Corinthians have responded so well to his letter and to Titus in regard to the former sin issue, but he is still concerned about the influence of the false apostles, which must be why he takes so much time to defend his apostleship and message, especially in chapters 10-13.

³⁶ οὐχ ὅτι κυριεύομεν ὑμῶν τῆς πίστεως ἀλλὰ συνεργοὶ ἐσμεν τῆς χαρᾶς ὑμῶν τῇ γὰρ πίστει ἐστήκατε – Even though Paul is an authoritative apostle, Timothy’s and his relationship to the Corinthians’ Christianity is as guides, not as authoritarian tyrants. They are very aware of the personal and individual nature of belief, that it must be something a human being does as much as possible based upon the inner work of God along with intellectual interaction with the biblical truth. It should not be because of the influence, personality, or some such cause from another human being, even from an apostle. Therefore, the condition the Corinthians have fulfilled for being authentic Christians is their own belief, not their submission to an authoritarian human being or their following the Mosaic Covenant—such as is the situation with the false apostles.

As a result, all the true apostles walked a difficult line, the line of being authoritative without being either authoritarian or uncaring with respect to people’s belief. Paul and Timothy want the Corinthians to enjoy the hope of salvation that they have acquired by virtue of their own independent belief and not because of coercion from other human beings. Plus, they always encourage Christians that it is their belief in Jesus and moral obedience that have their ultimate source in God’s sovereign grace, not their scrupulous adherence to the Jewish Mosaic Covenant by which they might hope to earn God’s blessings, that is the necessary condition for acquiring eternal salvation and life from God. This is the fundamental difference between Paul’s perspective and that of the Jewish, false apostles.

³⁷ Ἐκρίνα γὰρ ἐμαυτῷ τοῦτο τὸ μὴ πάλιν ἐν λύπῃ πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐλθεῖν – Paul is willing to own the decision not to visit them, but he considers his reason a good one, too. It was not to cause them and him any more discomfort and sorrow than was absolutely necessary and wise in this present situation, which he goes on to explain to some degree. He had dealt with the situation when he was there, and yet it was not enough to clear it up and get the person who was involved in the immoral behavior back on track with the gospel and its call to morality. So would another visit fix the problem? This is what Paul had to be wondering, and he decided on his own that a letter addressing the same issue would be better at this point, so that, if the letter worked, the next time

he appeared in Corinth they would all be on the same page theologically speaking, thus resulting in everyone being happy with God and with one another, including with Paul and Paul with them.

It sounds as though Paul's second visit to the Corinthians was before the false apostles began to influence them. Paul tried to deal with the situation of sin with grace and mercy. But this didn't work. Then the false apostles came along and dealt with it from the harsh and punitive standpoint of their understanding of the Mosaic Covenant, and this did work—of sorts. However, it worked so well that it brought even more sorrow and sadness to the situation (cf. 2:7,8). And Paul did not want to return to Corinth and come across to the Christian community as harsh and domineering like the false apostles. So he wrote a letter instead that hopefully would result in their returning to an attitude of grace and mercy for handling immoral situations. And his letter worked (cf. chapter 7). The Corinthians felt bad about not dealing with the situation at all before and dealing with it too harshly as a result of the false apostles' influence (cf. 2:7,8).

³⁸ εἰ γὰρ ἐγὼ λυπῶ ὑμᾶς, καὶ τίς ὁ εὐφραίνων με εἰ μὴ ὁ λυπούμενος ἐξ ἐμοῦ – Paul admits that his writing the truth to them in a previous letter has brought some discomfort and sorrow into their lives, in spite of the fact that he was not personally there again in Corinth, and in spite of the fact that his primary purpose was to love them and not cause them pain and sorrow—even though this was unavoidable since he was dealing with an issue of sin and immoral behavior within the community. Nevertheless, the individual who is at the center of this issue can change his mind and bring joy to Paul's heart and mind even without Paul's being there. Indeed, this seems to be what happened.

Interesting syntax at the end of this verse with ἐξ ἐμοῦ instead of ὑπὸ ἐμοῦ, but the meaning seems to be the same. It is the person whom Paul made to grieve through his letter who also brings joy to his heart by his repentance.

cf. 2 Corinthians 10:10, “There is the fact that someone says, ‘On the one hand, his letters are heavy and strong, but, on the other hand, the appearance of his body is weak, and the delivery of his message is worthy of contempt.’”

³⁹ καὶ ἔγραψα τοῦτο αὐτό, ἵνα μὴ ἐλθὼν λύπην σχῶ ἀφ’ ὧν ἔδει με χαίρειν, πεποιθὼς ἐπὶ πάντας ὑμᾶς ὅτι ἡ ἐμὴ χαρὰ πάντων ὑμῶν ἐστίν – The whole Christian community in that area was complicit in originally mishandling the situation involving this one person and in, therefore, making Paul sad. His hope was that, after he wrote them and urged them to correct the situation, they would all once again live in accordance with the truth and be the cause of joy instead of sorrow within him, especially since this was probably the second time he was having to deal with this issue. As a result, Paul could come visit them and be happy because this mishandled situation would have been taken care of by everyone. Thus, they could move on in their growth in understanding and living well the good news of God's mercy through Jesus the Messiah.

⁴⁰ ἐκ γὰρ πολλῆς θλίψεως καὶ συνοχῆς καρδίας ἔγραψα ὑμῖν διὰ πολλῶν δακρύων, οὐχ ἵνα λυπηθῆτε ἀλλὰ τὴν ἀγάπην ἵνα γνῶτε ἦν ἔχω περισσοτέρως εἰς ὑμᾶς – Paul was anguished over their situation—to the point of tears when he first wrote them about it after just having visited them. His response of truth could have been interpreted by them as being unloving. Indeed, it made them grieve, probably partly because he sounded harsh. But Paul wants to assure them that he was being entirely loving toward them. So it is not that Paul would not expect them to grieve appropriately over what was going on, but that they would interpret his letter as more an act of love on his part than a reason to make them sad.

Cf. John the Baptist in Luke 3 to the crowds, “You offspring of vipers...” John was harsh towards people whom he considered for the moment to be unbelievers. Paul was being lovingly truthful in his previous letter towards people whom he considered to be authentic believers. And I am sure he wanted to come across differently from the false apostles who were championing the Mosaic Covenant.

⁴¹ Εἰ δέ τις λελύπηκεν, οὐκ ἐμὲ λελύπηκεν, ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ μέρους, ἵνα μὴ ἐπιβαρῶ, πάντας ὑμᾶς – Probably the pseudo-apostles are helping to convince the Corinthians that Paul is the sole source of their sadness because of both his heavy-handedness in his letter and neglect by not coming to them when he had promised that he would. Yes, Paul has confronted the issue aggressively, which makes it seem as though he is the one who causing them so much pain and sorrow. Paul looks like the bad guy here, which is often what happens when someone confronts immoral behavior and his honesty meets with anger, disapproval, and rejection—because people do not like to hear that they are wrong.

However, Paul's point is that they need to look to the individual who caused this problem, not to him, for the source of their sorrow. He is not what is burdening them, especially because he chose not to appear again personally in Corinth, which he was concerned would feel heavy-handed to them if he had. He is simply the messenger of truth, and their burden comes from this man's sin colliding with the truth, which should be the case anytime the biblical message collides with immorality. We should not blame God and the Bible for what is making us sad about somebody's behavior, but should blame the person's actions simply in the light of the truth of God in the Bible.

⁴² ἱκανὸν τῷ τοιοῦτῳ ἡ ἐπιτιμία αὕτη ἡ ὑπὸ τῶν πλειόνων – This is why Paul did not visit Corinth again at this time, because he did not want his presence as an apostle to add to the weight of the whole community on this man for his repentance and making a change in his life, thus causing everyone more discomfort than was necessary. Now Paul can say that what they have done towards him is right to help him move away from what was disturbing Paul and them and provoked his writing them a letter. The punishment fits the crime so to speak. It meets the requirements of justice. It is suitable and adequate for what this man did. Paul's showing up in town would make the punishment seem greater to him than it should be.

⁴³ ὥστε τοῦναντίον μᾶλλον ὑμᾶς χαρίσασθαι καὶ παρακαλέσαι, μὴ πως τῇ περισσοτέρᾳ λύπῃ καταποθῇ ὁ τοιοῦτος – Paul's only apparent heavy-handedness has turned into actual heavy-handedness on the part of the Corinthians—and maybe because of the influence of the Mosaic Covenant-centric Jewish false apostles. Just as Paul backed off by not visiting Corinth, he is encouraging them to back off and do only what is necessary to allow this man to come to grips with his immorality properly, repent, and make a change in his life.

We can assume that he has learned about all this through Titus who took his letter to them as Paul relates in chapter 7.

⁴⁴ διὸ παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς κυρῶσαι εἰς αὐτὸν ἀγάπην – Paul’s ultimate goal is for the Corinthians to remain committed to one another in the midst of their genuine belief in Jesus and the apostolic message, regardless of how much sorrow he has experienced and the truth has caused in this present situation. The point is to get back to the cross of the Messiah and its implications in all their lives, i.e., whereby they continue to appeal to God for His eternal mercy and count on Him to grant it through Jesus while also loving one another sacrificially as fellow believers.

⁴⁵ εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ ἔγραψα ἵνα γνῶ τὴν δοκιμὴν ὑμῶν, εἰ εἰς πάντα ὑπήκοοι ἐστε – Even though Paul’s intentions are not authoritarian, it is still true that any human being’s response to him and his presentation of truth demonstrates the authenticity of this person’s Christianity, because the person is recognizing his authority as an apostle and the biblical truth which he is presenting. And this also was Paul’s purpose in writing the letter after having first addressed the issue when he was present in Corinth. He basically wanted to find out through his letter whether they are authentic Christians or not. If they responded well to Paul’s admonition to deal with the immoral behavior in their midst, then he would know that the Spirit of God has worked in them and that they are genuine in their faith. If they ignored him and rejected what he said in the letter, then he would know that all their previous words where they proclaimed to be followers of Jesus were only an act. And this would be in the face of whatever influence the false apostles with their erroneous message are attempting to have on the Corinthians.

⁴⁶ ὃ δέ τι χαρίζεσθε, κἀγὼ καὶ ἐγὼ ὁ κεχάρισμαι, εἰ τι κεχάρισμαι, δι’ ὑμᾶς ἐν προσώπῳ Χριστοῦ – Forgiveness of others by Christians is ultimately in the light of the existence and role of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, as our advocate at the judgment when he returns and we obtain God’s eternal mercy through him. In addition, Paul as an apostle factors in the Corinthians’ authentic belief, that it will result in their forgiveness by God through the Messiah, which makes it all the more imperative that he be forgiving of this man and of them just as they have forgiven him. Thus, there is a symbiotic relationship between all Christians’ forgiveness of one another in the light of their forgiveness by God through Jesus as their advocate. Cf. 1 Timothy 1:15, “The message is faithful and worthy of all acceptance, that the Messiah Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.”

⁴⁷ ἵνα μὴ πλεονεκτηθῶμεν ὑπὸ τοῦ σατανᾶ· οὐ γὰρ αὐτοῦ τὰ νοήματα ἀγνοοῦμεν – There is a definite adversary to truth and God’s purposes within the world. This single person as the Bible describes him is Satan, an angelic being who has been granted by God a fair amount of influence in earthly affairs, especially it would seem at the level of leaders who help establish the current trends in religions, societies, and cultures. In addition, according to the clues in this context, the goal of Satan (his name means adversary) is to drive a wedge between Christians, while using the truth, especially the truth about immorality, to cause them to act in an overbearing way toward one another and not being gentle and forgiving towards one another (as the false apostles are encouraging the Corinthians to do towards those who have “broken the Mosaic Covenant”), thus alienating them from each other—and ultimately from God in the process as they become proud and arrogant in their self-righteous response to immorality in their presence and forget the key element of the gospel of God’s grace and forgiveness. It is as Jesus says that lacking mercy towards one another results in rejecting God’s mercy and missing out on eternal salvation (Matthew 5:7, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy”).

Paul’s goal is to avoid falling into this trap and encourages the Corinthian Christians to love one another genuinely (with gentleness, kindness, and compassion) and thereby remain unified and genuine believers in God on the basis of their understanding the good news of God’s gracious and independent mercy through the Messiah Jesus.

⁴⁸ Ἐλθὼν δὲ εἰς τὴν Τρωάδα εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θύρας μοι ἀνεωγμένης ἐν κυρίῳ – In the midst of handling this situation at Corinth from western Asia (the area on the coast of modern western Turkey where Troas was located; and probably Ephesus specifically), Paul left Ephesus and traveled towards Macedonia for the purpose of proclaiming the NT message, so that others could hear and become authentic believers—as well as for the purpose of meeting up with Titus as soon as possible to hear how his letter of sorrow had been received in Corinth. His concern for the Corinthians was driving him towards them overland from Ephesus to Troas and then to northern Greece, Macedonia.

And it was clear to him that God had prepared not only a platform for him to speak the gospel in Troas but also the hearts of some of his listeners who became genuine believers in Jesus the Messiah.

⁴⁹ οὐκ ἔσχηκα ἄνεσιν τῷ πνεύματι μου τῷ μὴ εὐρεῖν με Τίτον τὸν ἀδελφόν μου, ἀλλὰ ἀποταξάμενος αὐτοῖς ἐξῆλθον εἰς Μακεδονίαν – This is the first mention in the New Testament of Titus. I wonder if he has been a rather latecomer Paul’s entourage and had not yet been to Corinth, thus making him less intimidating than Paul and Timothy in regard to the sin issue which the latter two had confronted during Paul’s second visit to the city. Or at least it is that his personality is easier for the Corinthians to handle than Paul’s and Timothy’s. Certainly, there is something about Titus that made him the obvious choice for Paul to send to Corinth in place of him.

Thus, Paul was looking for Titus to meet him in Troas and report on the Corinthian’s situation with the possibility that Titus was going to give a bad report and recommend that Paul himself go immediately to Corinth to help with the situation (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:13ff.; Paul must have been hugely relieved by Titus’ report so that now he is writing this letter with Timothy in lieu of returning to Corinth, because the Corinthians have responded so well to his other (3rd actually) letter). However, when Titus did not show up in Troas and even though there was plenty of opportunity to proclaim successfully the NT message there, Paul’s deep concern for the Corinthians motivated him to press on to Macedonia and northern Greece, hoping to meet up with Titus there.

This of course sounds shocking to our modern Christian sensibilities that an apostle would pass up a clear and God-given opportunity to see other people come to authentic belief and gain salvation from God’s eternal condemnation just because his co-worker had not met up with him to report on how a difficult situation was being handled in a different location. Couldn’t Paul trust God for handling it through Titus? After all, he had trusted God for his own physical life (cf. 1:9). But Paul believed that he

had a *bona fide* choice to make between staying in Troas and traveling closer to Corinth for the sake of continuing to help the Corinthians with this difficult immoral issue. Clearly, he really wanted to get things squared away in Corinth and therefore headed west and closer to this city, probably hoping to meet up with Titus on his way east towards him.

⁵⁰ Τῷ δὲ θεῷ χάρις τῷ πάντοτε θριαμβεύοντι ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ καὶ τὴν ὁσμὴν τῆς γνώσεως αὐτοῦ φανεροῦντι δι' ἡμῶν ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ – In Paul's day, a Roman general who conquered new lands and peoples would bring some of these people as slaves to Rome for display in a victory parade in his honor. Paul uses this imagery to make the point that even though he left behind the obvious opportunity to proclaim the biblical message in Troas, he knew that God was still his Conqueror and thus leading him as His slave in His victory parade wherever Paul and his apostolic entourage went. Therefore, even though Paul and Timothy were not going to smell like apostolic workers and be "successful" presenters of the biblical message of the Messiah in Troas, because they had left there, they would smell like apostolic workers and be "successful" presenters of the biblical message in Macedonia and wherever they traveled after leaving Troas. In other words, their "mistake" of leaving Troas and missing out on the opportunity there to evangelize would not ultimately be a mistake. Wherever they were, they were providing people with the opportunity to know the Messiah and his purpose of providing people with God's eternal mercy.

This is encouraging to any of us Christians that regardless of the outward appearance of our success in influencing people towards believing in the gospel, we can know that God is always using us to this effect. Our job is not to measure our success, but like Paul to choose to be the most loving we can towards people, exercising biblical wisdom and trust in God. We then can trust Him for the results in the midst of doing the best we can to make the right choice.

⁵¹ ὅτι Χριστοῦ εὐωδία ἐσμέν τῷ θεῷ ἐν τοῖς σωζομένοις καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις – As God leads Paul, Timothy, and other apostolic workers with Paul on their journeys, as though they are marching in front of Him in His victory parade, they act as the traditional censers in these parades by being an aroma of the biblical message while they proclaim this message. The effect of this aroma is demonstrated among the two kinds of people in this world—those who are being saved and rescued from God's condemnation by embracing the message and those who will be destroyed by God eternally because of their rejection of the message.

⁵² οἷς μὲν ὁσμὴ ἐκ θανάτου εἰς θάνατον, οἷς δὲ ὁσμὴ ἐκ ζωῆς εἰς ζωὴν – As an apostle, Paul, along with his apostolic workers, with their aroma of Jesus, affect non-believers who remain such and lack a changed inwardness by pushing them even more toward eternal condemnation if they continue to disbelieve. And they affect people who are either in the process of becoming genuine believers or are already believers and who have God-given authentic biblical inwardness by pushing them even more toward eternal salvation and life in the Kingdom of God. This is to say that Paul has one of two effects on people. He either draws people to God so that they have genuine belief, or he pushes people away from God so that they have genuine unbelief and exhibit rejection of the truth.

Therefore, regardless of whether we are proclaiming the gospel with our words or our actions, we too are affecting people. Or rather, God is affecting people by using us in ways that we cannot even see.

The important principle to grasp from vs. 14-16 is that the "job" of us Christians in being evangelists, those who proclaim the good news of Jesus as the Messiah by our words and actions, is to affect both the elect and the non-elect equally! Our "success" in being Christians is not only in affecting certain sinners to repent and believe that Jesus is the Messiah who has appeared in order to save us from God's condemnation, but also in affecting certain sinners to be offended by the gospel and reject it in order to incur God's eternal condemnation and destruction.

For example, **Acts 14:1** And it happened in Iconium, according to the same practice, they entered into the synagogue of the Jews and spoke in such a manner that a large multitude believed, both Jews and Greeks. **14:2** But the unbelieving Jews stirred up and embittered the minds of the Gentiles against the brothers. **14:3** Therefore, they spent a long time there, speaking out with bold openness on the basis of the Lord, who was bearing witness to the message of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. **14:4** But the multitude of the city were divided, and some were with the Jews, and some were with the apostles.⁵² **14:5** And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their leaders to mistreat and stone them, **14:6** they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra, and Derbe, and the surrounding region.⁵² **14:7** And there they continued to proclaim the gospel.

⁵³ καὶ πρὸς ταῦτα τίς ἱκανός – Paul's and Timothy's question is with the false apostles in mind. Who really is fit/qualified and meets God's requirements to be an apostle so as to have a genuine positive or negative effect on other morally depraved human beings that is coming entirely from a position of accurate truth and authority? The implied answer of course is Paul and Timothy because of God's having changed their inwardness and granting them an accurate understanding of Jesus in relationship to the Mosaic Covenant, i.e., because of the Spirit (cf. 3:3,6). In addition, of course, God has assigned Paul, through his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (and not the false apostles), the responsibility to be an authoritative apostle. And Timothy gets included because of his close association with Paul and Paul's being convinced that Timothy is a *bona fide* believer himself who is ready and willing to help Paul in the proclamation of the gospel whenever Paul wants to carry out this responsibility.

⁵⁴ οὐ γάρ ἐσμεν ὡς οἱ πολλοὶ καπηλεύοντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐξ εἰλικρινείας, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐκ θεοῦ κατέναντι θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ λαλοῦμεν – The Corinthians were experiencing two different kinds of "apostles"—those who sold the good news of Jesus as the Messiah for monetary gain, the false apostles, and those who provided it freely, or at least without demanding that they be supported (cf. 1 Corinthians 9 where Paul explains his not exercising his right to be supported by the Corinthians in order to remain loving towards them). Only the latter, i.e., Paul, Timothy, et al., were "from God" and could say that their presentation of the message was "in the Messiah" (ἐν Χριστῷ) as they were those who authentically associated with him as their Lord and Savior by means of their changed inwardness and belief by the Spirit of God.

Was it the case that small, religious societies in the Roman Empire paid their teachers and officers, so that Paul is viewed as a

charlatan because he does not demand to be paid, which comes from his view of God's grace—that it cannot be obtained through a person's making himself worthy of it? Certainly it was true of the sophists that they were paid for their wisdom and instruction. It was probably not unusual for Jewish rabbis to expect (even demand) to be paid for their work. Thus, it may have been engrained in the culture that the only ideas worth hearing are those from reputable spokesmen who get paid. This is not much different from today. These teachers are experts, who perform their responsibilities with an air of authoritarianism and an attitude of "You owe me for what I am providing you." So while the laborer is definitely worthy of his wages, the gospel laborer is also free to provide the message without charge as a reflection of his being granted mercy and salvation by God without his earning it. The phrase ἐξ εὐκρινείας uses the same word, "purity of (clean, single-minded, without duplicity) motive," as 1:12 where Paul first declared the appropriateness of his inner motivation for his conduct in the world and towards the Corinthians. This then is in contrast to the false apostles' motivation and behavior, which is worldly in comparison because they demand to be paid for their services and they are quite domineering in their treatment of the Corinthians. The false apostles, therefore, are more concerned about their position as teachers in people's lives and about money than they are about truth and behaving morally in the presence of God. This is how religious hypocrisy, i.e., play acting at biblical faith, works.

Cf. 2 Corinthians 11:7-9,18-21, "11:7 Or did I commit immorality by humbling myself in order that you could be exalted, because I proclaimed the good news of God to you without charge. 11:8 I robbed other churches by taking wages from them in order to serve you. 11:9 Therefore, when I was present with you and in need, I was not a burden to anyone. Instead, when the brothers came from Macedonia, they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you and will continue to do so... 11:18 Because many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also, 11:19 because you, being wise, gladly put up with the foolish. 11:20 You put up with someone if he enslaves you, if he devours you, if he grabs hold of you, if he puts on airs, if he beats you on the face. 11:21 To my shame, I must confess that we have been weak."

The people who are qualified to proclaim the gospel and produce the two kinds of effects (acceptance and rejection) are those who have been granted this responsibility by God, as opposed to the false apostles who claim that those who are qualified are also those who are committed to following the Mosaic Covenant from their own inner resources, because they believed that every human being has the ability to please God simply by outwardly obeying His commandments in the Mosaic Covenant, and that Jesus as the Messiah would confirm this perspective instead of making himself more important than Moses and the Mosaic Covenant.

ἐκ θεοῦ and ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ – an important idea in this letter—

2 Corinthians 3:5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is **from God** (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ)

2 Corinthians 5:1 For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God (ἐκ θεοῦ), a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

2 Corinthians 5:18 Now all these things are **from God** (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ), who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation

κατέναντι θεοῦ and ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ – another important idea in this letter

2 Corinthians 4:2 but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience **in the sight of God** (ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ)

2 Corinthians 7:12 So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the offender nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you **in the sight of God** (ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ)

2 Corinthians 12:19 All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is **in the sight of God** (κατέναντι θεοῦ) that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved.

⁵⁵ ἀρχόμεθα πάλιν ἑαυτοὺς συνιστάνειν; ἢ μὴ χρῆζομεν ὥς τινες συστατικῶν ἐπιστολῶν πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἢ ἐξ ὑμῶν – In this larger section of 3:1-7:16, Paul continues to defend two things, 1) his status as an apostle given to him by God and 2) his "ministry," i.e., the manner in which he serves people, especially these Corinthian Christians, as he presents himself as a fellow-sinner who is desperately in need of the mercy of God and who loves people out of this understanding of God's eternal love and eternal grace which have manifested themselves in his heart which has been changed by the Spirit of God. Thus, he is going to defend very carefully his status and the manner in which he serves people so as not to come across in the same way as the false apostles "who take pride in appearance and not in heart" (2 Corinthians 5:12).

Here Paul is asking if he is coming across as recommending himself as an apostle, rather than promoting Jesus through the simple message of grace and the miracles which God used to affirm his responsibility and the message when he first came to Corinth. When he first spoke to the Corinthians, he probably told them that he was an apostle and authoritative spokesman for Jesus and "commended" himself to them as such by using the signs of a true apostle of miracles that God performed.

2 Corinthians 12:12 The **signs** of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by **signs** and **wonders** and miracles.

Galatians 3:5 So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

It is not that it is immoral for Paul to recommend himself as an apostle, which is to say to put himself forth with his own approval for the specific task of proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah. It is just if he does so like the false apostles of chapter 11 who seem to promote themselves so aggressively that take the focus off Jesus and put it on themselves and their outward obedience to the Mosaic Covenant.

There is nothing like a written reference to promote or put forward a person with others' approval for a particular purpose or

responsibility in his relationship with others. The false apostles must be questioning Paul's and Timothy's credentials and status as "apostles." Do the Corinthians have adequate physical evidence for Paul's apostleship, i.e., actual letters of recommendation from another greater authority, such as the apostles or Sanhedrin (?) in Jerusalem, other "churches," or even themselves (as though the apostles need the approval of others to justify their apostleship)? While justification for believing the NT message partly comes from the status of the apostles as actual eyewitnesses, this justification also comes from the message itself. Does it correspond to self-evident knowledge and knowledge from good evidence that all human beings have or could obtain? In addition, Paul does not feel the necessity to emphasize his apostolic credentials at the expense of the other self-evident criteria that people demonstrate in the midst of their believing the apostolic message. A bit of a circular argument, but it cannot be avoided when we are talking about a transcendent Creator and His work through His Spirit of causing people to believe the truth, so that both the subjective element and the objective element of authentic belief play a necessary role in proving the truth of the message and the authority of Jesus the Messiah and his apostles.

Paul presents the message of the gospel, the Spirit of God performs miracles through him, the same Spirit works in people's hearts, the people respond to the message positively because it genuinely resonates within them, they affirm that the message is true on the basis of the evidence of the miracles and the authority of Paul who presents the message, Paul continues to present the message with miracles, the Spirit continues to work in people's hearts, they continue to respond positively to it, and they continue to affirm the message as true and Paul as an authoritative spokesman for the message. These are all the credentials and "letters of recommendation" which Paul says he needs, and even just the fact that God has appointed him as the unique apostle to the Gentiles is actually good enough for him.

cf. 1 Corinthians 9:16-18, "9:16 If I proclaim the good message, there is no bragging for me, because the necessity imposes itself upon me. For may I be damned if I do not proclaim the good news. 9:17 Now, if I do this willingly, I have a wage. But if I do it against my will, I have been entrusted with the responsibility of managing this role. 9:18 Therefore, what is my wage? That, when I proclaim the good news, I may offer the good news *gratis*, in order that I not make full use of my right within the good news."

A major theme of 2 Corinthians is people commending themselves or others as bona fide apostles or Christians as shown by the following verses—

2 Corinthians 4:2 but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending (συνιστάνοντες) ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

2 Corinthians 5:12 We are not again commending (συνιστάνομεν) ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart.

2 Corinthians 6:4 but in everything commending (συνιστάντες) ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses.

2 Corinthians 7:11 For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated [commended] (συνεστήσατε) yourselves to be innocent in the matter.

2 Corinthians 10:12 For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend (συνιστανόντων) themselves; but when they measure (μετροῦντες) themselves by themselves and compare (συγκρίνοντες) themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.

2 Corinthians 10:18 For it is not he who commends (συνιστάνων) himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends (συνίστησιν).

2 Corinthians 12:11 I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended (συνίστασθαι) by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody.

⁵⁶ ἡ ἐπιστολὴ ἡμῶν ὑμεῖς ἐστε, ἐγγεγραμμένη ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν (ὅμων), γινωσκομένη καὶ ἀναγινωσκομένη ὑπὸ πάντων ἀνθρώπων – Here Paul concedes the possibility that something created and outside him can serve as an actual "letter of recommendation" for him as an apostle. But it happens to be something that has been directly and permanently affected by the inward work of the Spirit of God. In other words, it is the Corinthian Christians themselves who have become authentic believers (Paul and Timothy hope) by virtue of the fact that God has changed their hearts through His Spirit and made them such. This change can be seen by others as the Corinthians continue to believe and obey the NT message of grace and love that Paul and Timothy have presented to them—not that the false apostles have presented them of MC rituals mainly with the mentality that these make a person worthy of God's blessings.

It is helpful to recall 1 Corinthians 1-3, that the message which the Corinthians have believed is naturally offensive to sinful human beings apart from the inner work of the Spirit of God. Therefore, Paul certainly considers the Corinthians to be appropriate letters of recommendation which can be viewed by other human beings even if non-believers would not consider them such because the latter reject the truth of God regardless.

"Your hearts" makes more sense in the light of the context, because in the next clause and verse Paul says that the letter of recommendation, which is the Corinthian Christians, is read by other people as the Corinthian Christians demonstrate that they are a "from the Messiah." In addition, Paul will say that the letter has been written by the Spirit of God on human hearts. In other words, the change of the hearts of the Corinthians by the Spirit of God that produces authentic belief in Jesus as the crucified Messiah and obedience of God is the only "letter of recommendation" that Paul and Timothy need to verify the truth of their message and to submit to other people as a legitimate letter. The Corinthians have believed the truth in their hearts as "written" by the Spirit of God, and they manifest this truth to other people through their loving actions and their pursuit of greater understanding of the truth.

⁵⁷ φανερούμενοι ὅτι ἐστὲ ἐπιστολὴ Χριστοῦ διακονηθεῖσα ὑφ' ἡμῶν – Through their belief in and obedience to the apostolic message of Jesus as the Messiah and not the errors of the message of the false apostles who are focused on the MC, the Corinthians demonstrate that they are authentic Christians. As a result, they are a walking, talking “letter of the Messiah,” i.e., a letter of recommendation from the Messiah to anyone who would want to know if Paul and Timothy are true apostles. It is as though Jesus has written a letter of recommendation through the inward work of the Spirit of God to those who wondering who really are the correct apostolic teachers.

In addition, Paul and Timothy served and continue to serve the Corinthians by presenting them with the NT message of Jesus as the Messiah. And God wrote them as letters by making them believers and continuing to work in them through His Spirit so that they can say that they are “from the Messiah” (cf. Acts 18:1ff.). Their genuine Spirit-caused belief in the truth and in the correct Jesus, along with Paul’s and Timothy’s caring for them is all the recommendation that the two men need from and to the Corinthians. Thus, Paul and the false apostles is the true apostle, and the Corinthian Christians have the promise of eternal life through his message. If the Corinthians want to deny either one of these, they do so to their own eternal peril.

⁵⁸ ἐγγεγραμμένη οὐ μέλανι ἀλλὰ πνεύματι θεοῦ ζῶντος, οὐκ ἐν πλαξὶν λιθίναις ἀλλ’ ἐν πλαξὶν καρδίαις σαρκίναίς – In this clause, Paul segues from one form of “letter of recommendation” to another form. First, he says that the Corinthian Christians as a “letter from the Messiah” are not a letter which has been written with ink, the standard way of marking papyrus in order to communicate a message and information to other people. Therefore, again, Paul is saying that a written-with-ink-on-papyrus letter is recommendation from other human beings is not legitimate or sufficient to identify who are the real apostles in this situation.

Second, Paul says that the Corinthian Christians as a “letter from the Messiah” are not even a letter which has been written on “stone tablets.” Most likely, his use of the phrase “stone tablets” is a reference to the Ten Commandments which God wrote on stone tablets for Moses and the Israelites at Mt. Horeb when He made the Mosaic Covenant with them, as well as a reference to the perspective which the false apostles have on obeying these commandments, that keeping the ritual and ceremonial commandments is primary and makes one worthy of God’s blessings—while holding on to Jesus as the Messiah who will return to destroy Israel’s enemies and restore the Kingdom of Israel.

In other words, the two phrases “not with ink” and “not on stone tablets” refer to two different kinds of “letters of recommendation,” both of which the false apostles are using to verify their apostleship. The first kind of letter is one written on papyrus with ink from some group or Christian community who claim that they can legitimate the false apostles’ authority, but Paul is not explicit as to who is this group. The second kind of letter is the Mosaic Covenant and specifically the fact that God outwardly wrote the most important part, the Ten Commandments, on stone tablets and gave these through Moses to the Israelites at Mt. Horeb, implying that the false apostles believe that Jesus the Messiah would affirm that, because of God’s miraculous writing of the Ten Commandments on stone tablets, Moses and the temple worship are more important than him and that the Messiah is supposed to point people to Moses and the Mosaic Covenant and not to himself per se.

But Paul goes on to point out the only legitimate kind of “letter of recommendation” for apostles, that of God’s miraculous writing of the gospel so to speak on fleshly tablets of sinful human beings hearts within them. This “writing on fleshly heart tablets” is when the Spirit of God causes a sinner’s mind and heart to become open and receptive to the gospel of Jesus and God’s grace and then embraces the gospel and Jesus as more important than Moses and the MC. Thus, the inward miracle on sinners’ hearts overshadows the outward miracle of God’s writing the Ten Commandments on stone tablets and people performing actions of obedience to the MC.

Exodus 24:12 Now the LORD said to Moses, “Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets (לוחות הברית) (τὰ πνεύματα τὰ λιθίνα) with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction (אשר כתבתי להוריתם) (ὅς ἐγγράψα νομοθετησάμεν αὐτοῖς).”

Exodus 31:18 When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony (שני לוחות הברית) (τὰς δύο πλάκας τοῦ μαρτυρίου), tablets of stone (לוחות) (πλάκας λιθίνας), written by the finger of God (כתב אלהים) (γεγραμμένας τῷ δακτύλῳ τοῦ θεοῦ).

Exodus 32:15 Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony (שני לוחות הברית) (καὶ αἱ δύο πλάκες τοῦ μαρτυρίου) in his hand, tablets which were written on both sides; they were written on one side and the other. **16** The tablets were God’s work (מְשֵׁה אֱלֹהִים) (ἔργον θεοῦ), and the writing was God’s writing (כְּתָב אֱלֹהִים) (γραφή θεοῦ) engraved on the tablets.

Ex. 34:1 Now Yahweh said to Moses, “Cut out for yourself two **stone tablets** like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered.

Ex. 34:4 So he cut out two **stone tablets** like the former ones, and Moses rose up early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and he took two **stone tablets** in his hand.

Exodus 34:27 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel. **34:28** So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments. **34:29** It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony (שני לוחות הברית) (καὶ αἱ δύο πλάκες) were in Moses’ hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him. [By not capitalizing the “h” of he, i.e., “he wrote on the tablets...”, the NAS95 makes it seem as though it was Moses who chiseled the Ten Commandments into the stone tablets. But Exodus 34:1 (and Deuteronomy 10:1 below) makes

it clear that Moses cuts out the stone tablets to replace the ones that he shattered in chapter 32, and God does the particular writing of the Ten Commandments, while we can assume that Moses writes down the other commandments and instructions of the Mosaic Covenant — [Exodus 34:1](#) Now the LORD said to Moses, “Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered.”]

[Deuteronomy 10:1](#) “At that time the LORD said to me, ‘Cut out for yourself two tablets of stone like the former ones, and come up to Me on the mountain, and make an ark of wood for yourself. [10:2](#) ‘I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered, and you shall put them in the ark.’”

It is this next to the last passage in Exodus 34 of which Paul mostly thinking will be referring to in v. 7ff. because it includes the description of Moses’ face shining after God has replaced the two stone tablets that he broke when he saw the Israelites worshipping the golden calf in Exodus 32.

Plus, Paul cannot point to any scriptures other than the OT which appear to focus on Moses as the primary leader of all time for the Jews and the Mosaic Covenant as the primary covenant for how to relate to God properly. So while the OT serves as a kind of letter of recommendation for the false apostles because of its apparent emphasis on Moses and the Mosaic Covenant, Paul as an apostle has nothing that corresponds to it to point to—because the NT has not yet been written and collected as scripture.

Certainly it seems to stand to reason that having a set of scriptures (as the false apostles do) is more authoritative and legitimating than not having one (like Paul). All it would appear that Paul can point to is the event of Jesus’ stopping him on the road to Damascus, which he cannot prove. This is why Paul refers to the Corinthians and their changed lives by God’s inward work through His Spirit instead of to any written documents (or commandments written on stones by God). Paul will go on to refer primarily to this second kind of letter by using the example of Moses and his shining face to contrast God’s effect externally (as the false apostles are relying on through their human obedience to the Mosaic Covenant) and internally (as Paul is relying on through the Spirit) with respect to Timothy’s and his laying a claim to being true apostles. The false apostles are relying on strictly external criteria for validating their apostleship while Paul and Timothy are relying on internal criteria to do the same. It is just that the internal is a bit more difficult to substantiate because it cannot be seen by the human eye.

In addition, the two phrases “with the Spirit of the living God” and “on fleshly heart tablets” refer to the same kind of letter which is a proper “letter of recommendation” for an apostle, i.e., God’s internal work in the living, breathing Corinthians Christians instead of His work of writing on inert stone tablets (cf. Exodus 31:18; 32:15-16). It was God, i.e., even the Spirit of God, who wrote on the stone tablets which He presented to Moses and the Israelites, and the false apostles may be pointing to this fact as evidence of the greatness of the Mosaic Covenant. But the greater work of God and His Spirit is when He “writes” on living, human hearts and changes them for the sake of producing genuine belief in Jesus as the Messiah and obedience to God. And Paul will go on to talk about the same internal work of the Spirit of God in Timothy and him to substantiate his own claim to being a true apostle.

Thus, God has written the NT apostolic message on the Corinthians’ hearts through the work of His Spirit, i.e., His activity within the creation (cf. Jeremiah 31:33 – “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My [New] Covenant within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people”—which along with Jesus as priest and offering provides eternal mercy for sinners). This is eternally more important than either any physical letter of recommendation to or from human beings or a sort of spiritual letter by virtue of sinners’ obeying the MC and is entirely sufficient for Paul and Timothy in comparison to what the false apostles are saying. It is thus also more important than God’s miraculously writing the Ten Commandments on the stone tablets so that they are externally available to sinful Jews to try to obey—but without the Spirit of God in the false apostles because they deny the primacy of Jesus over Moses, resulting in the Mosaic Covenant **for them** being that which brings about condemnation instead of life. It also ought to be sufficient for the Corinthian Christians that God has written the apostolic message of the New Covenant on their hearts, if they truly grasp the NT message that Paul and Timothy as genuine apostles have presented to them so as not to be led astray by the false apostles.

Therefore, anyone who focuses on their mere external human obedience to the Mosaic Covenant as a necessary condition or basis for obtaining God’s mercy is wrong in their claim to have a legitimate “letter of recommendation” from God. In contrast, Paul is claiming that what God has done inside the Corinthian Christians by changing their hearts and causing them to be authentic believers in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, who is more important than Moses, is recommendation enough for Timothy and him.

This also makes them a letter of recommendation “from the Messiah,” because they recognize that Jesus as the Messiah is the proper basis for their mercy from God, not obedience to the Jewish Covenant given to the nation of Israel by God.

In our day, we can and should point to only the apostolic documents of the NT in much the same way the false apostles referred to the OT and the Mosaic Covenant. However, the NT message is radically different from how the Jews had interpreted (and still do interpret) the OT with the former’s explanation of Jesus as the Messiah at the very center of God’s plans and purposes (as opposed to the Jews’ understanding that they as a nation and their obedience to the Mosaic Covenant under the leadership of Moses are the center). Plus, our pointing to the NT documents should be accompanied with the focus on Jesus and on the gracious and quantitatively greater work of the Spirit of God in people who hear the apostolic message during this time period between Jesus’ first and second appearances. This is truly the age of the Spirit of God and grace in contrast to the Spirit’s limited work in OT times.

⁵⁹ Πεποιθήσιν δὲ τοιαύτην ἔχομεν διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ πρὸς τὸν θεόν – Still speaking only of the apostolic workers and their authority from God, Paul’s and Timothy’s confidence is really in the light of the Messiah’s appearance, existence, death on the cross, resurrection, and ascension and is directed toward God ultimately and not any human being who could declare them adequately qualified or fit to be apostles. Paul meets the requirements to be an apostle not because of anything having to do with

only him, but because of everything that God has done in him. His suitability and capability for being an apostle is all God's doing, not his. Neither is his confidence going to be in his following the Mosaic Covenant and promoting it in other people's lives at the expense of declaring Jesus to be everyone's focus of attention. Anybody can do the Mosaic Covenant (or Christian religion!) and promote it. But only those whom God has specifically called to be apostles can carry out the responsibility of promoting a crucified Messiah as the basis of and only means to obtain God's complete and eternal mercy and forgiveness.

⁶⁰ οὐχ ὅτι ἀπ' ἐαυτῶν ἱκανοὶ ἐσμεν λογίσασθαι ὅτι ὡς ἐξ ἐαυτῶν, ἀλλ' ἡ ἱκανότης ἡμῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ – Paul and Timothy look to the author of the story, God, for any sense of confidence that they might have in fulfilling Paul's responsibility as the apostle to the Gentiles. Confidence in themselves or any other human being, as is the case with the false apostles, is infinitely less significant than confidence in God. This is the key difference between a biblical understanding of authentic spirituality and a worldly or unbelieving understanding of it.

Paul is fit and qualified to be an apostle solely because of God, not because of himself.

⁶¹ ὃς καὶ ἱκάνωσεν ἡμᾶς διακόνους καινῆς διαθήκης, οὐ γράμματος ἀλλὰ πνεύματος· τὸ γὰρ γράμμα ἁποκτείνει, τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ζωοποιεῖ –

It is not as though the Mosaic Covenant is bad, but the false apostles have made their obedience to it bad. They believe that they are qualified and fit to be apostles (and Christians) on the basis of either some written letter of reference from other human beings, such as an actual letter of reference written with ink and papyrus, or some previously written "letter of reference" that is their outward obedience to the Mosaic Covenant which includes the Ten Commandments that had been written by God on stone tablets (cf. 3:3).

Paul's and Timothy's comment is that relying strictly on anything written as the false apostles are doing, even the miraculously written Ten Commandments and the rest of the requirements of the Old Covenant, which were written by Moses, (or relying on one's outward obedience to the covenant) will bring only eternal condemnation, because it misses the point of God's qualifying true apostles for their task and eternal life on the basis of *the inner work of His Spirit* (which is also the way God qualifies sinful human beings in general for His eternal mercy and life in the Kingdom of God). In other words, Paul's statement here implies that the false apostles are relying on their human ability to follow God's covenant in order to make themselves worthy of His blessings of the promises of Abraham instead of relying on only God for their fitness to the task of being apostles.

Plus, it is within the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 that God says that He really will fulfill His promise to make of Abraham's descendants a great nation by changing their hearts (as originally described in Deuteronomy 30) and also providing them with complete and eternal forgiveness. Thus, the core of the proclamation of the New Covenant is not only Jesus and his priestly role, on the basis of his offering himself to God, but also the duty for his apostles to proclaim this message. And this duty and being fit to accomplish it comes from internal work of the Spirit of God, so that He makes Paul a servant of this New Covenant of both inwardness and complete forgiveness. In other words, it is impossible to be a legitimate servant of the New Covenant apart from the initiating and ongoing work of the Spirit of God and apart from Jesus' being the focus of one's attention and center of one's relationship with God.

This issue boils down to whether people find the legitimacy of their Christianity in what they have done in and of themselves, even in supposed obedience to the Bible (that many times they define mostly as outward religious ceremonies), which is an external criterion, or what God has done within them by means of His Spirit in causing them both to understand and to believe the apostolic message of Jesus and God's grace. The former "kills" by not making a person fit to receive eternal life. The latter "produces life," i.e., eternal life.

Our tendency as human beings is to think that the only proper way to acquire legitimate and justified authority and rights as a church leader is by means of either written authorization from a respected group of leaders or what we have done that we can point to in supposed obedience to the Bible. For example, "Look at how large and vibrant a church I lead with all its wonderful worship service and programs." Our tendency also is to think that by going to church, participating in its religious ceremonies and programs, and fulfilling some sort of unwritten religious requirements, we make ourselves fit and qualified for God's blessings in this life and His blessing of eternal life.

This is also the thinking behind drivers licenses and passports, as well as behind ordination of pastors by denominations. The government authorizes me to drive a car or enter into another country as a citizen of this country after meeting certain humanly attained requirements and criteria, and denominations authorize people to shepherd Christians after meeting certain humanly attained and external doctrinal requirements. But Paul is pointing to only that which God has done within him and for him which gives him legitimacy as an apostle of Jesus the Messiah (and as a Christian), and this is in line with the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34 as he proclaims the core message, the mystery of the centrality of Jesus as crucified Messiah, and retains this core message in its completeness and accuracy.

While it is possible to find life within the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Leviticus 18:5, "So you shall guard My statutes and judgments, by which a man may live if he does them" (cf. Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:2)), this is not achieved through a person's inner sinful resources, but only through the Spirit of God. Plus, it will lead eventually to a Jew's embracing Jesus as his Messiah and Priest which relativizes the Mosaic Covenant.

The false apostles proclaim Jesus as the Messiah but minimize the relevance of him and the New Covenant, claiming to be servants mainly of the Old (Mosaic) Covenant, because they must think that Jesus promoted this approach also similarly to how the kings of Israel ruled alongside the temple and Levitical priests. In contrast, Paul is a servant of the New Covenant and Jesus, not so much of the Old Covenant, especially the way the false apostles are looking at it—as an outward means to earn God's favor and blessings.

If a person relies on his ability to follow what even God has written on stone tablets, i.e., the core of the Mosaic Covenant, the

Ten Commandments, then he will acquire only eternal death and not life. It is in this sense that “the letter kills.” On the other hand, if a person relies on the inward work of God and His ability to move him to belief, faith, and obedience in his sinful state, then he will find life, i.e., eternal life, that the Spirit “produces.”

And obviously to be a “servant of the New Covenant” is to be a servant of Jesus, because he is the focal point of the New Covenant for obtaining God’s complete and eternal mercy and forgiveness along with eternal life (cf. Hebrews).

⁶² εἰ δὲ ἡ διακονία τοῦ θανάτου ἐν γράμμασιν ἐντετυπωμένη λίθοις – The immediate interpretive question here is whether 1) Paul is referring to the MC as a “ministry of death” because it inadequately provides for eternal mercy through animal sacrifices in contrast to Jesus’ sacrifice as the “ministry of the Spirit,” or 2) Paul is referring to the false teachers’ perspective on gaining eternal life through strictly human performance of the MC, therefore lacking an understanding of the importance of the inward work of the Spirit of God? I think that option #2 is correct, even though the false teachers probably lack an understanding of the issues in #1 too.

Thus, Paul and Timothy switch from referencing both written-on-papyrus letters from human leaders or churches and the written-on-stone Ten Commandments of the Mosaic Covenant to referencing only the latter. The similarity is that they both are external to a person’s heart and inwardness, thus providing no help in and of themselves for qualifying someone and making him fit to be an apostle or teacher [or believer] of the apostolic message of Jesus as the Messiah.

As a result, strict human reliance on the MC and mere outward obedience of it without taking into account what God needs to do inside people according to His Spirit and grace will not lead to an accurate assessment of a person’s spirituality or fitness for eternal mercy and life. Indeed, promoting strict human reliance on external matters leads to “death” (“the serving of people of death”), by which Paul probably means eternal death ultimately because of his contrasting this with the work of the Spirit by which people gain eternal life (cf. 3:6 before this verse) through Jesus’ death and advocacy (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:10 always carrying about Jesus’ death in the body so that Jesus’ life may be revealed via our body).

Again, this is the contrast between how Paul serves people and how the false apostles serve people. Paul’s involves and depends solely on the inward work of God’s Spirit with belief in Jesus alone as God’s basis and means to complete forgiveness and blessings. That of the false apostles depends on the human effort and practice of the MC. Thus, the “serving of death” is not the Mosaic Covenant per se (see note above regarding Leviticus 18:5), but that of promoting obedience to the MC to the exclusion of the Spirit’s inwardly qualifying people for God’s eternal blessing of life. Indeed, even Moses could not count on the Israelites’ genuinely believing and obeying God by virtue of a Spirit changed heart. Paul is doing so where people become authentic Christians, which he is hoping is the case for the Corinthian believers. This is why and how God has made him the apostle to the Gentiles.

Nevertheless, historically, the ministry of the Mosaic Covenant was one of death because of the lack of work of the Spirit of God in the Israelites’ hearts (in spite of Leviticus 18:5). Yet, in the light of Deuteronomy 29 & 30, God promises eventually to circumcise their hearts, which is not only in line with the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34, but also what will occur when Jesus returns to set up the millennial kingdom. In the meantime, the tendency on the part of the Jews is to look at the MC as a means to make themselves worthy of God’s blessings, and this is what the false apostles are doing.

So four options for “the ministry of death” as it is translated in the NAS95: 1) Misunderstanding the MC as the false apostles are, thinking they have the inner ability to please God, but which is resulting in eternal death and condemnation; 2) The “Law’s” facing a person into his sin and making him realize he deserves the condemnation of God and cannot escape it in and of himself; 3) The MC’s lacking adequate means to obtain God’s mercy through the Levitical priesthood in contrast to the NC and Jesus’ death; 4) God’s restrictive operation in the midst of Moses’ ministry and the MC because He simply did not work in many hearts of the Israelites with His Spirit to change them and cause them to become authentic believers who would qualify for eternal life instead of eternal condemnation and death.

I think that it is the 1st (with the theological fact that #4 is true also) that Paul means and that is coherent with v. 8 and Paul’s mention of the Spirit that is abundantly given as he proclaims the Messiah according to the New Covenant.

⁶³ ἐγενήθη ἐν δόξῃ, ὥστε μὴ δύνασθαι ἀτενίσαι τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραὴλ εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον Μωϋσέως διὰ τὴν δόξαν τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ τὴν καταργουμένην – Here are the relevant verses – **Exodus 34:29** It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses’ hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him. **30** So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, **and they were afraid to come near him.** **31** Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers in the congregation returned to him; and Moses spoke to them. **32** Afterward all the sons of Israel came near, and he commanded them to do everything that the LORD had spoken to him on Mount Sinai. **33 When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.** **34** But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, **35** the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses’ face shone. **So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with Him.**

Paul and Timothy now reference the event of God’s giving the Mosaic Covenant (for the second time; cf. Exodus 19,20) and how much fanfare and demonstration of God’s greatness accompanied it. It included the skin of Moses’ face acquiring a bright shine whenever he met face to face with God in His theophany on the top of Mt. Sinai. It was as though the glory of God got transferred onto the skin of Moses’ face. Paul admits this was truly glorious, even though the impressive display of God’s glory on Moses’ face would fade over time after he left God. In other words, Moses would have to stay in the presence of God in order for the external shine to persist—the same way that a sinner needs to remain in the presence of God in order for the shine on his heart to persist (cf. v. 3:15, etc.).

Simply making Moses' face shine was impressive. It revealed the glory of God and the glory of the MC, because this was the only time in history where this has happened, except for the change in Jesus' garment on the Mt. of Transfiguration (cf. [Matt. 17:2](#) And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.). However, Paul is arguing that this external shine on the outside of a human being was not as glorious or impressive as the internal (and unseen) glory of the Spirit of God in regard specifically to the issue of eternal forgiveness (cf. 3:15, etc.).

I do not think that in this passage Paul is saying anything negative about Moses himself, for example, that Moses intentionally hid the fading shine on his face because he was ashamed of the fading and therefore of his sins. Instead, Paul is merely referencing an element of the giving of the MC that shows that its external glory cannot be compared to the internal glory of the New Covenant.

⁶⁴ πῶς οὐχὶ μᾶλλον ἡ διακονία τοῦ πνεύματος ἔσται ἐν δόξῃ – Paul and Timothy will now make several statements to contrast the greatness of the New Covenant and the inward work of the Holy Spirit with the greatness of the Mosaic Covenant and its bona fide external displays of God's glory (or any other external display of God's glory, and therefore any external criterion produced by human beings, such as a letter of recommendation, or the external shine on Moses' face, or performing religious ceremonies, if all one does is look at the externally written commandments on the stone tablets or the external shine on Moses' face in contrast to the inward internal writing of the Torah by the Spirit of God (cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Certainly, God worked internally in some of the Israelites, including Moses, under the jurisdiction of the Mosaic Covenant in Old Testament times, which is why I do not think that Paul is criticizing Moses. But it was in only some of the Israelites that the Spirit worked, while the promise of the New Covenant is that the Spirit will be abundantly given within the ministry of the New Covenant—eventually to all living Jews on the land of Israel when Jesus returns.

In addition, even the Mosaic Covenant in Deuteronomy 30 promises that God will change the hearts of the nation of Israel.

Therefore, both this promise and the New Covenant passage of Jeremiah 31 must be implying that the Jews' properly and inwardly keeping the Mosaic Covenant will be in connection with the Messiah and his appearance, i.e., his second appearance when he sets up the millennial kingdom in Israel, and also in connection with the inward work of the Spirit of God.

Therefore, for the false apostles to promote external obedience to the MC and not simply belief in Jesus as produced by the Spirit of God is to lead people towards eternal death instead of toward eternal life.

The contrast here is between external criteria of a strictly human origin and internal criteria of a strictly divine origin for substantiating a person's relationship with God. The latter is in the context of the glory and awesomeness of God. the former is not.

cf. [Jer. 31:33](#) For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares Yahweh: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

⁶⁵ εἰ γὰρ τῇ διακονίᾳ τῆς κατακρίσεως δόξα, πολλῶ μᾶλλον περισσεύει ἡ διακονία τῆς δικαιοσύνης δόξῃ – The MC had a definite glory, but it was external and not permanent as demonstrated by the fading shine on Moses' face. In other words, this shine and therefore this glory was only temporary, because it faded and eventually disappeared without Moses' remaining in God's presence on the mountaintop. The NC and its justification through Jesus (not through bulls and goats) abounds in even more glory. Implied is that the latter is because of the permanent, inner presence of the Spirit of God as His glory transfers to a human being's heart and that results in eternal life, which the former cannot produce.

Another way to say this is that it is necessary for a person to "stay in the presence of God" in order to acquire permanent and eternal glory which does not fade and disappear. And this can happen only if the Spirit of God persists within a sinful human being according to God's choice and not the human's choice.

Therefore, Paul and Timothy's serving and obeying God which results from God's inward work through His Spirit is even more glorious because of its effect of a person's acquiring a good standing of being justified before God and forgiven by Him—through the Messiah (implied) (cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34).

And this is in the midst of the fact that there actually is no external shine on the faces of Paul and Timothy as apostolic workers. Yet, Paul and Timothy inwardly demonstrate a greater awesomeness than Moses did externally, because the New Covenant with its promise of inwardness on an increased basis due to the greater quantity of believers through the work of the Spirit of God is more awesome than the Mosaic Covenant.

⁶⁶ καὶ γὰρ οὐ δεδόξασται τὸ δεδοξασμένον ἐν τούτῳ τῷ μέρει εἵνεκεν τῆς ὑπερβαλλούσης δόξης – Paul is saying that God's fading glory which was manifest on Moses' face is nothing in comparison to the (permanent!) glory and awesomeness which He manifests in Paul's and Timothy's hearts as they proclaim the message of Jesus as the Messiah, belief in which results in eternal mercy and life for them and then their listeners because of the inward work of the Spirit of God vs. the outward performance of the false apostles—in spite of the external glory on Moses' face.

A face made shining by God is definitely glorious, but not as glorious as a heart which has been changed by Him and ends up believing in Jesus as the Messiah, which is the basis for a person being saved and obtaining eternal life. Plus, again, the former fades while the latter remains—implied!

⁶⁷ εἰ γὰρ τὸ καταργούμενον διὰ δόξης, πολλῶ μᾶλλον τὸ μένον ἐν δόξῃ – The key elements between externalities and inwardalities is that they both were sanctioned by the transcendent Creator for the sake of properly worshiping Him. However, while the former look good in the present realm, they do not in and of themselves qualify a person for eternal life, because they are temporary and only external—especially when promoted by a mentality that is focused on the external. Instead, the latter are invisible in a person's heart and mind in the present realm and yet do qualify a person for eternal mercy and life (the ultimate in glory that remains), because they are permanent and properly qualify someone to obtain eternal life.

Paul's mentioning the two ideas of "fading" and "remaining" places the locus of meaning here in the mentality of the false

apostles. The “fading” refers to the “serving of people of condemnation,” while the “remaining” refers to the “serving of people of justification.” The false apostles are counting on their outward obedience to the MC to be glorious and remain and make them fit as both apostles and Christians, while Paul is counting on the inward word of the Spirit of God to make him glorious and remain and make him fit as both an apostle and a Christian. Only the latter works.

⁶⁸ ἔχοντες οὖν τοιαύτην ἐλπίδα πολλῇ παρρησίᾳ χρώμεθα – Again, I do not think that the problem was Moses and his lack of courage, boldness, or confidence. Paul is merely using Moses’ veil as a metaphor for the inability of the OT Israelites’ being able to see God’s glory on his face, even as it was fading. This is in contrast to Paul and Timothy’s knowing that God’s glory resides within their hearts permanently throughout the rest of their lives so that they can speak boldly about it and its permanence and greatness through the work of the Spirit and Jesus’ death and resurrection.

This is also to say that Paul and Timothy have the hope, the certain expectation, that they are justified and not condemned and will receive eternal life through the NC of Spirit and Jesus and not through the MC.

Paul may also be implying that he speaks boldly and openly about the depth of his sin and its problematic nature in the light of God’s grace (unlike the false apostles). He does not hide anything from the Corinthians, including the depth of his sin, which is what Paul is implicitly accusing the false apostles of doing (cf. 4:2 and 6:11-13).

⁶⁹ καὶ οὐ καθάπερ Μωϋσῆς ἐτίθει κάλυμμα ἐπὶ τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἀτενίσαι τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραὴλ εἰς τὸ τέλος τοῦ καταργουμένου – This almost seems presumptuous on Paul’s and Timothy’s part, but they compare themselves and Paul’s apostolic authority to Moses, who had to hide something that faded, while Paul and Timothy reveal something that is permanent. Exodus 34:30 says that Aaron and others were afraid to approach Moses because of the shine on his face. Therefore, the most likely reason for why he covered his face was so that they would no longer be afraid and, once he was finished teaching them God’s instructions, he would live among them without frightening them with God’s glory. Therefore, his keeping the veil on was not because he did not want them to know that the shine faded over time, and he was embarrassed by this so that he needed to hide it. He simply assumed the shine was still there, and he was no longer in the mode of immediately communicating God’s commandments to the people. He was simply in the mode of leading them in obeying the commandments and journeying through the desert.

Here are the relevant verses – Exodus 34:29 It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses’ hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him. **30** So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, **and they were afraid to come near him.** **31** Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers in the congregation returned to him; and Moses spoke to them. **32** Afterward all the sons of Israel came near, and he commanded them to do everything that the LORD had spoken to him on Mount Sinai. **33 When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.** **34** But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, **35** the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses’ face shone. **So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with Him.**

It is somewhat confusing but it sounds as though Moses first leaves the veil off his face when he is speaking to the congregation of the Israelites and instructs them in all that God is commanding them to do, and then he puts the veil on until he goes back up the mountain to speak to God again and takes it off when he does so. I think the text is saying that, as long as he is instructing the people immediately after speaking with God on the mountain, he keeps the veil off. But then he puts it on until he goes back up the mountain to meet with God again.

But how does Paul know that the shine faded, because Exodus 34 does not explicitly mention this fact? Probably from reasoning through the effects of God’s presence externally vs. the effects of God’s presence internally. Once Moses left God’s theophanic presence, the cause of the shine on his face was gone, and would it not seem reasonable that Moses’ face would eventually return to its normal state? Yes, although the people would not be able to observe the actual fading because Moses kept the veil on until he went back up the mountain to speak to God. Was Moses afraid to their knowing about the fading glory of his face? Probably not, but Paul exploits the fading nature of the shine to contrast what is wrong about trusting in one’s outward performance of the MC with what is right about trusting in the Spirit’s inward work according to the NC.

Therefore, the fading nature of the Mosaic Covenant could refer to either 1) the erroneous perspective of the false apostles, or 2) the inadequate provision for eternal mercy of bulls and goats as offerings in contrast to Jesus as the New Covenant. Most likely, #1 is meant here while #2 is certainly also true. Moses’ hiding his face is a metaphor for what Paul is not doing and the false apostles are doing, hiding the fading glory of outward obedience to the MC (and therefore their sin) from the Corinthians, while ignoring the unfading glory of the inner work of the Spirit of God, which faces a sinner into the depth of his sin, as that which is superior.

⁷⁰ ἀλλὰ ἐπωρώθη τὰ νοήματα αὐτῶν – The veil over Moses’ face was not the real problem. It was the hard hearts of the Israelites. In other words, the problem was not outside them. It was inside them. Even though Moses’ hid the glory of God which was being manifested on his face, the real problem for why the Israelites were not being affected positively by God’s glory that shone on his face was their hard hearts. Their own innate rebellion and hardened minds and hearts toward God were keeping God’s glory, even that of Moses’ face (in spite of his veil), hidden from them.

And Paul has been implying that this problem can be solved by only God Himself through the inner work of His Spirit. Thus, the Israelites of Moses’ day were abject rebels against God inwardly. So they may have been afraid of the shine on Moses’ face, and they may not have been able to see the outward evidence of the lack of glory of trusting in their performance of the MC, but they were not properly and inwardly afraid of God. And it is true, too, that this was because the Spirit of God was not working in

Moses' day in their hearts as he is in Paul's day in his and Timothy's hearts, as well as (Paul hopes) in the Corinthians' hearts—but not in the hearts of the false apostles.

⁷¹ ἄχρι γὰρ τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας τὸ αὐτὸ κάλυμμα ἐπὶ τῇ ἀναγνώσει τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης μένει, μὴ ἀνακαλυπτόμενον ὅτι ἐν Χριστῷ καταργεῖται – Paul exploits Moses' keeping the veil over his face to hide God's glory to talk about the Jews' remaining in a state of not seeing both the fading nature of the glory of external obedience to the MC and the permanent nature of the glory of internal obedience to the NC.

being hidden from God's true glory throughout their history up to his own day. In effect, they hid themselves from the fading nature of God's glory which was (and is) the case for people who promote outward obedience to the MC (or any other religion, even the Christian "religion") to gain God's blessings. And they hid from the truth of the fading glory of the MC through the hardness of their hearts (cf. 3:15). And it is as though in Paul's day (and our day) Moses is still speaking to the Jews with a veil that hides the fading nature of promoting the MC, when the real problem is the hardness of (the veil over – cf. v. 15) their hearts. And this is obvious because they refuse to embrace Jesus as the Messiah in a proper manner, i.e., by seeing him through his being a propitiatory offering as the very basis for obtaining God's eternal mercy instead of trying to use their outward obedience to the Mosaic Covenant, along with the propitiatory offerings of the bulls and goats, as either the basis or a necessary condition for doing so.

Paul says that this is clear too from the fact that belief in Jesus, i.e., someone's being in the Messiah, would indicate a soft and changed heart that only the Spirit of God can bring about and that rejects mere outward obedience to the MC as the center of one's relationship with God and pleasing God.

Likewise, the present day (in relation to Paul) Jews do not see the fading nature of promoting outward obedience to the Mosaic Covenant that relies on human ability rather than on the inward work of the Spirit of God. And unfortunately many so-called Christians are of the same mentality as they promote their outward religious behavior as the proper way to define biblical Christianity.

Plus, religious Jews who are focused on the MC fail to recognize the inadequate provision of the covenant for mercy through bulls and goats, and instead rely on it rather than on Jesus and the New Covenant. Only being "in the Messiah" through the Spirit's internal work removes the veil over the Jews' minds so that they can see the wonderful provision for mercy of the crucified Messiah (cf. 5:18-21). This did not happen for the Jews in Moses' day, nor so much in either Paul's day or our day, but it will happen in Jesus' day when he returns to establish the millennial kingdom and God changes the hearts of all remaining Jews on the land of Israel.

⁷² ἀλλ' ἔως σήμερον ἡνίκα ἂν ἀναγινώσκηται Μωϋσῆς, κάλυμμα ἐπὶ τὴν καρδίαν αὐτῶν κεῖται – Paul then moves from the veil over Moses' face to the veil over the hearts of the nation of Israel. He explicitly describes what he means by the The Jews are still mostly hard-hearted with respect to the truth, because they fail to recognize the limited importance of the Mosaic Covenant in comparison to Jesus the Messiah, along with what God had been teaching in the OT regarding the Spirit of God and changing their hearts.

⁷³ ἡνίκα δὲ ἂν ἐπιστρέψῃ πρὸς κύριον, περιαιρεῖται τὸ κάλυμμα (Exodus 34:34, LXX – ἡνίκα δ' ἂν εἰσπορεύετο Μωϋσῆς ἔναντι κυρίου λαλεῖν αὐτῷ, περιηρεῖτο τὸ κάλυμμα ἕως τοῦ ἐκπορεύεσθαι) – Paul paraphrases Exodus 34:34 and exploits what Moses did outwardly to indicate what is necessary for a sinner to do inwardly—as the effect of the Spirit of God. It is as though he is saying, Remember that Moses removed the veil over his face whenever he returned to meet with God on the mountain and listen to His instructions to pass on to the Israelites. In the same manner, when a Jew (or Gentile) returns to the Lord to hear His instructions and respond properly, he must remove the veil from his heart—through repentance and acknowledgement of Jesus as the only acceptable sacrifice to God for eternal mercy. The question, though, is, how can a Jew do this? Paul answers the question in the next verse.

Exodus 34:34 But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take off the veil until he came out (ἡνίκα δ' ἂν εἰσπορεύετο Μωϋσῆς ἔναντι κυρίου λαλεῖν αὐτῷ, περιηρεῖτο τὸ κάλυμμα ἕως τοῦ ἐκπορεύεσθαι); and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, **34:35** the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone. So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with Him.

⁷⁴ ὁ δὲ κύριος τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν· οὗ δὲ τὸ πνεῦμα κυρίου, ἐλευθερία – Rather than climbing up a mountain like Moses to meet with God, God comes to meet with us as His Spirit who works inside us. Therefore, for us "the Lord is the Spirit" within us, not Yahweh outside Moses and us on a mountain top. Plus, where the Spirit of God is, i.e., within us and in our hearts, there is "freedom."

To what "freedom" exactly is Paul referring? The previous paragraph mentioned the wearing of a veil over one's face and having a hard heart over which a veil lies. Therefore, it makes sense that Paul is speaking of a "freedom" from these spiritually detrimental characteristics. This freedom would be the same thing as "lifting off the veil" and having the veil "removed in the Messiah" (cf. vs. 14,15).

Thus, Paul is saying that, just as Moses lifted off his veil when he returned to meeting with the Lord on Mt. Sinai, he, by the Spirit of God, lifts off the veil that is hiding the hardness of his heart so that it becomes soft and accepting of the "Lord" God and His methodology of providing "life" for sinners. And, in line with v. 6, the "Lord" God is the "Spirit" of God who works inside sinners to cause them to be set free from the hardness of their hearts and from seeking to obtain God's blessings through the "fading glory" of either the MC or any other religion/religiosity. Therefore, it is ultimately God and His Spirit who removes the veil from any Jew's heart, i.e., circumcises his heart (cf. Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:1-10; Romans 2:28,29), so that he can hear what God says, especially about the Messiah as the basis of His mercy, and embrace His message with authentic belief. Thus, the Spirit frees the Jew from his veiled heart which is preventing him from being "in the Messiah" (cf. 3:14) and from the glory

which fades, the Mosaic Covenant, into the glory that remains into eternity, the New Covenant. The Jew becomes free from obeying the Mosaic Covenant the way he used to, i.e., from his own sinful resources and only really in an outward manner, to obeying God through the inner activity of the Spirit of God. He is set free from erroneous Judaism, even though it is mixed with a dose of Jesus as the Messiah, into the grace and mercy of the Jesus as the crucified Messiah through the inner work of the Spirit of God.

⁷⁵ ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντες ἀνακακαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ τὴν δόξαν κυρίου κατοπτρίζομενοι – There are two options for the phrase ἀνακακαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ – 1) by virtue of an unveiled face, i.e., that “we all” Christians each have a face (and heart also) that is not veiled whereby we are seeing things correctly, especially the glory of Jesus and the New Covenant which is a “surpassing glory” (v. 10) in comparison to trying to use the MC to gain life from God through outward obedience, so that we are now “reflecting” the eternal glory of God as opposed to the temporary and fading glory of trying to obey the MC, or 2) because Moses has an unveiled face when he is with God on the mountain, thus seeing the possibility of the complete and unfading glory of God that ultimately results in the New Covenant of “surpassing glory” of v. 10.

Option #2 seems a bit trivial, while option #1 makes more sense and is more profound, that it is the “unveiled” nature of authentic Christians Paul is now emphasizing by mentioning the “face” because this is where he started when talking about Moses and ended up actually referring to the heart, too. By means of the inward work of the Spirit of God, a sinful human being can properly “reflect [see below] the glory of the Lord,” so as to recognize and demonstrate the superiority of Jesus over Moses, of the New Covenant over the MC.

Thus, having an unveiled face has allowed Paul and all Christians to meet with God (or rather for God to meet with them), listen to what He says of the Messiah, believe in Jesus as the Messiah, and thereby reflect in their lives the glory and awesomeness of God as they believe and freely confess their sins (which would seem inglorious but instead is the exact opposite because it points to the glorious mercy of God through the crucified Messiah Jesus) and also align their behavior with the moral commandments of God—instead of relying on their outward obedience to the Mosaic Covenant as either the basis or a necessary condition for eternal life. They are moving from the former glory of using the Mosaic Covenant, which is a fading glory by virtue of both not grasping the depth of their sinfulness and relying on their external religious actions, to the eternal glory of the New Covenant which involves a transforming process of becoming more settled in being a “set apart” sinner who is committed to heading towards eternal life and moral perfection, our ultimate glory.

Louw & Nida suggest the meaning “reflect” for κατοπτρίζω, which makes more sense in the light of the reference to Moses’ experience.

⁷⁶ τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμεθα ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν καθάπερ ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος – Two options - 1) Christians are in the process of moving from the initial glory of recognizing the primacy of Jesus and the New Covenant, while “reflecting” this initial glory, to the final glory of eternal life and moral perfection, or 2) Any kind of glory they demonstrate through the Mosaic Covenant that is minus the Spirit of God and Jesus as the acceptable offering for mercy (their old outlook on how to relate to God) to the permanent and ultimate glory of the New Covenant and the Spirit of God in its context (their new outlook on how to relate to God).

#1 is probably correct, that Christians are in the process of being transformed in a sense from strict rebels against God into morally perfect beings that involves a temporary glory for them of believing the truth of God in the midst of their current moral depravity and manifests itself to all other Christians. This will eventually result in a permanent glory of being morally perfect in the eternal Kingdom of God. Their moral perfection will be “the same image” of the glory of God and His inherent moral perfection. And this transformation is all God’s work, i.e., the Spirit’s work, which is His work that is the most important work within the creation with respect to what happens internally to sinful people.

⁷⁷ διὰ τοῦτο, ἔχοντες τὴν διακονίαν ταύτην καθὼς ἡλεήθημεν. οὐκ ἔγκακοῦμεν – God in His grace showed Paul and Timothy mercy by first changing their subjectivity and granting them the promise of eternal salvation, and then by giving them the responsibility to proclaim the NT message to the Gentiles through Paul’s being assigned the role of apostle to the Gentiles. Paul has described and referred to a significant amount of suffering which Timothy and he have experienced because of their performing their responsibility as apostles among people who have been hostile to their message. But nothing that human beings do, whether acting violently towards them and persecuting them or just being disinterested in the gospel due to the influence of the false apostles (as may be happening with the Corinthians), discourages Paul and Timothy from being confident about continuing to fulfill this responsibility to serve people on behalf of God. They simply keep going despite people’s resistance and any other obstacles or hardships, because God has mercifully given them salvation and this job to preach the gospel.

⁷⁸ ἀλλὰ ἀπειπάμεθα τὰ κρυπτά τῆς αἰσχύνῃς μὴ περιπατοῦντες ἐν πανουργίᾳ μηδὲ δολοῦντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ – What are “the things that one hides out of sense of embarrassment?” In this context, they must pertain to either 1) the fading glory of outward religion like that of the false apostles (and being similar to Moses’ hiding the fading of the shine on his face) by tricking people into following their leadership into obeying outwardly the Mosaic Covenant, or 2) sin, the depth of which the false apostles are not willing to reveal about themselves or encourage others to recognize about themselves, or 3) both #1 and #2 together since they most likely go together.

#3 seems to fit the context best, including Paul’s having referred in chapter 2 to the situation of sin within the Corinthian Christian community that needed to be taken care of, but was difficult to do so—for whatever reason, and then referring to this situation again in chapter 7 while speaking of the difference between “sorrow according to God” that leads to repentance vs. “sorrow of the world” that leads to eternal death. It is not easy to admit of one’s sin and can be very embarrassing. Therefore, we typically hide these things from others by putting a veil over our lives. We want to come across as squeaky clean morally and ethically, when we know deep down that there is pride, self-righteousness, impatience, arrogance, selfishness, anger, malice, lack

of forgiveness and indeed a lust for vengeance, etc. within our hearts. It is all this, along with hiding the fading glory of strictly outward obedience to the religion of the Mosaic Covenant, that Paul has renounced and formerly rejected as something worth pursuing.

This is to say that Paul has rejected things that appear to be glorious in connection with the false apostles but which also do not maintain their glory. They are external only and not germane to the issue of authentic belief and genuine inwardness which is brought about by the Spirit of God only. And the false apostles would promote them because they are not willing to understand completely the depth of their own sin and the necessity of the Spirit of God's work within them. Thus, they hide this too, which is the cause of everything else they are doing wrong. They hide the deceitful tactics they are using to influence people and that ignore the truth of just how problematic their sin is and how outward religious behavior does nothing to commend oneself to God and His mercy.

⁷⁹ ἀλλὰ τῇ φανερώσει τῆς ἀληθείας συνιστάνοντες ἑαυτοὺς πρὸς πᾶσαν συνείδησιν ἀνθρώπων ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ – In contrast, Paul and Timothy are saying that they are completely open about the truth and commend to people's understanding and however God wants to use it in their lives. They do not have to manipulate or trick people into following their leadership. God through the inner work of His Spirit will cause people to respond positively to their leadership and the truth of the gospel they express.

Paul is saying that the false apostles should be embarrassed by their manipulation, and they would be if they really understood the truth of the gospel. But like Moses' fading shine, these tactics are not intended to cause people to remain focused on God. The contrasting dynamic is God's grace and Spirit. People need His grace and the fulfillment of His promise of salvation and eternal life through something other than the Mosaic Covenant, i.e., through the New Covenant of Jesus' death and the Spirit's work which bring about the permanent, eternal mercy which is obtained through the crucified Messiah who intercedes on behalf of people.

Whatever the false teachers are hiding and leaving out of their message as they demonstrate the natural, immoral part of their humanity by proclaiming falsehood (the profound evil condition of man), Paul and Timothy are all about the truth in regard to God, themselves, and their audience. The false apostles are in effect tricking people. Paul and Timothy are not. Paul is all about proclaiming the gospel of grace and Jesus in solving the problem of people's sin, including his sin, and then they are all about depending on God's grace also for the effects in people's lives.

Paul is also implying that any attempt to encourage people to worship God by using only external elements such as outward obedience to the Mosaic Covenant or any other religious system that is based on the Bible (or not) is simply an attempt to trick people into following one's own religion rather than being faithful to the biblical truth. This attempt is also just a distortion of the truth.

Instead, Paul and Timothy are completely open and honest as they stand before God and with people about who they are as sinners who need God's gracious and independent mercy that comes through the inward work of the Spirit of God and the outward work of Jesus' death as a propitiation for their sins.

ἀλήθεια – used 8x in 2 Corinthians

⁸⁰ εἰ δὲ καὶ ἔστιν κεκαλυμμένον τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν, ἐν τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις ἐστὶν κεκαλυμμένον – Just as the minds of the Israelites were hardened during the time of Moses and as a veil lies over the hearts of many Jews in Paul's day whenever the Mosaic Covenant is read (cf. 3:14-15) so that they cannot "see" properly the truth, those who are destined for destruction cannot really "see" the truth of the gospel which Paul is preaching and are unwilling to embrace it for the sake of their own salvation. In spite of Paul's and Timothy's making all the important information regarding God's mercy as clear as possible to people, they are aware of the fact that some people, e.g., the false apostles especially, will reject this information and refuse to seek God's mercy as He wants them to. And Paul also knows that if people do reject their message of Jesus as the Messiah, it is because it has been concealed ultimately by God from them and from their fully grasping it. And the purpose of God's keeping them from truly seeing its value so as to embrace it is so that He may justly and rightly destroy them as He has predestined to occur (cf. Romans 9 – vessels of mercy vs. vessels of wrath).

In other words, while it is important for people to be clear when they explain the gospel, the only way others can see it clearly with their minds and hearts and embrace it with authentic belief is if God makes them open to it. Otherwise, it is concealed and hidden. Indeed, Paul cannot even trick people into believing the gospel.

The phrase ἐν τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις refers to the unchanged inwardness of predestined unbelievers who keep the truth concealed from themselves in the sense that they are unwilling to acknowledge God and His truth and go on to embrace it with authentic belief so as to be saved from His eternal condemnation and destruction.

Thus, ἀπολλυμένοις is not just "perishing" as the NAS95 translates it, but is complete destruction.

⁸¹ ἐν οἷς ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου ἐτύφλωσεν τὰ νοήματα τῶν ἀπίστων εἰς τὸ μὴ ἀντάσαι τὸν φωτισμὸν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τῆς δόξης τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὃς ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ – Even though God is writing the story of human history and ultimately is the one who causes the truth of the gospel to be concealed from people, nevertheless Paul says that the created adversary of God, Satan, plays a significant role in the inability of people to see clearly and embrace the truth in the present age, i.e., before the millennial kingdom of Revelation 20 when he will be imprisoned in the abyss and unable to affect the minds and cultures of the world. The Bible is not at all clear on exactly how Satan has access to and operates within sinful human beings. We just know that he definitely influences people away from God and His truth.

Thus, the combination of God's sovereignty, people's own sin and rebellion against God, and the influences of the adversary in the world prevents them from appreciating the salvific and eternal value of the NT message of Jesus as Messiah, who is the very icon and image of God, i.e., God within the created reality as His proxy and ruler over the creation from within it (cf. Colossians

1:15). Jesus is both the Son of God according to the Davidic Covenant as David, Solomon, and the other kings of Israel were, but he is also God in the creation, the human being who is God written into the story of creation, which no other Davidic king could claim. So Jesus is not only the Davidic king who can be called by the title of God as God's proxy on the throne of Israel (cf Psalm 45), but he is also God who can be called God as the person within the story who fully represents the Father in moral quality and conduct like no other human being.

Thus, Satan prevents people from seeing the surpassing glorious nature of Jesus and the New Covenant in comparison to the limited glory of the Mosaic Covenant (and other outward religious systems) so that they continue, like the false apostles, to focus on the Mosaic Covenant (and other religious systems) instead of Jesus, regardless of how many songs they sing about him and to him.

Acts 26:18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.

⁸² οὐ γὰρ ἑαυτοὺς κηρύσσομεν ἀλλὰ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν κύριον. ἑαυτοὺς δὲ δούλους ὑμῶν διὰ Ἰησοῦν – This verse is key.

While God has designed reality such that human beings as apostles and apostolic co-workers be the medium through which the gospel is communicated to other human beings, it is imperative that the medium not get in the way of their listeners' centering their attention on Jesus (and God the Father and the Spirit of God). But this is so hard to do for a variety of reasons—1) the inherent sinfulness of human beings who crave attention and sinfully want that which God deserves; 2) the inherent sinfulness and naiveté of human beings who want to give attention to other prominent sinners in order to derive a sense of worth from doing so that is greater than what they think they have in and of themselves.

In other words, this is Paul's sly way of claiming that the false teachers are promoting more themselves as important leaders than Jesus as the Messiah and themselves as only slaves of the people. The false apostles are also promoting the Mosaic Covenant to the Corinthians by their putting forth themselves as models of true biblical religion which each Corinthian should emulate, while basically ignoring Jesus. But Paul and Timothy are truly the Corinthian Christian's slaves in that they have been doing everything they can to enhance the Corinthians' understanding and belief in God and His grace along with Jesus as the Messiah, while keeping themselves in the background of their faith as much as possible. Thus, Paul and Timothy promote only Jesus, and if there is any reference to themselves, it is because Paul is an apostle, which is easily explained by his story. They should emulate him, too, but not at the expense of following and focusing on Jesus.

But Paul always has to walk a very fine line between exercising his rightful authority as an apostle and promoting his apostleship so much that he sounds demanding and reliant on external matters like the false teachers. He promotes his apostleship, but only to the extent that he still promotes Jesus the crucified Messiah more than his apostleship. The false apostles are doing the opposite, promoting Jesus, but then promoting their "apostleship" more through their obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. Therefore, they keep the spotlight on themselves rather than on either the Mosaic Covenant or Jesus and the New Covenant.

This is like pastors who cleverly keep the spotlight on themselves and their churches. They are holding on so tightly to their positions of power and influence as well as their successful looking institution that they preach Jesus but are more concerned about retaining their status within the Christian and overall community.

⁸³ ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ὁ εἰπὼν· ἐκ σκότους φῶς ᾤλαμψε, ἔλαμψεν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν πρὸς φωτισμὸν τῆς γνώσεως τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν προσώπῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ – This is another way for Paul to say that all that he is about as an apostle is God's doing, not his—in contrast to the false apostles who have the perspective that they in and of themselves can become pleasing sinners to God. Paul wants to state explicitly that whatever he is as an authoritative spokesman for Jesus and a slave of the Corinthians is solely because of God and His inner work within him through His Spirit. He backs up this statement by paraphrasing Isaiah 9:2 with a possible reference also to Genesis 1:3. In Isaiah 9:2, God is said to produce light miraculously where there was formerly darkness, which I think refers to Jesus' first appearance when he announces his role as the Messiah to the Jewish people and to his second appearance when he fulfills his role by restoring the Kingdom of Israel and the Jewish people all become believers in him.

Thus, Paul's heart, before he became a genuine believer in Jesus as the Messiah, was the very definition of darkness—morally, intellectually, and spiritually. He was committed to evil, to rebelling against God, and to an understanding of reality which was false—the Judaism of his day. But just as God at the beginning of the creation miraculously made light shine where there had been only darkness, i.e., no light, and as He said in Isaiah 9:2 that He was going to do for the Jewish people, so also He miraculously caused the moral, intellectual, and spiritual darkness within Paul to turn into the light of the truth of the gospel and he embraced it. And God's purpose for doing so was for Paul to proclaim this truth in the midst of the cultural, intellectual, moral, and religious darkness of the 1st century Roman Empire.

By inference, when any person listens to Paul's presentation of the biblical message, it will be God who miraculously changes the person's inwardness so that he grasps an understanding of God's glorifying Himself by using Jesus as the Messiah and ruler of the eternal Kingdom of God. The glory of God on Jesus' face, which is seen through the message being proclaimed by Paul, is permanent and unfading, unlike the shine of God's glory on Moses' face. Staring (intellectually) at Jesus' face and God's glory on it through hearing and believing the apostolic message of the gospel allows a person to know that Jesus never covers up his face and his glory never fades. He always fully revealed his messiahship and role as the icon of God within the creation, and Paul always fully reveals the facts about Jesus, too—never wandering into the darkness of promoting the MC. Therefore, the light in Paul's (and authentic believers') heart(s) never stops shining, and the glory of the gospel and Jesus as Messiah and propitiation for our sins never fades.

Genesis 1:3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light (καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός γενηθήτω φῶς. καὶ ἐγένετο φῶς).

Isaiah 9:2 The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land (תְּהִי לְנוֹרָא וְיָרֵךְ) (ἐν χώρα καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου), the light will shine on them (φῶς λάμψει ἐφ' ὑμᾶς).

⁸⁴ ἔχομεν δὲ τὸν θησαυρὸν τοῦτον ἐν ὀστροκίνοις σκεύουσιν, ἵνα ἡ ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως ᾗ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ μὴ ἐξ ἡμῶν – Next, Paul refers to God's miraculous light production in Timothy's and his hearts to state its effect on them as they face multiple difficulties in their lives as apostolic co-workers and even look like losers to the false apostles. Thus, the light shining in and out of Paul's and Timothy's hearts (cf. v. 6), which is their enlightened understanding of the NT message as they proclaim it, miraculously resides in their beings by God's power and grace, but their bodies are destructible clay pots and shaped by God as their potter. The "treasure" is the indestructible, divine production of the light of truth in their hearts and minds. The "clay pots" are the destructible and mortal containers of the truth in their hearts and minds. And the purpose of God's arranging these two elements of their beingness is so that He, and not they, can powerfully cause the truth to continue to reside in their hearts and minds in spite of any rough treatment of their clay pot bodies. God brought about their enlightenment in regard to the gospel, and He causes it to persevere in the midst of any destructive treatment they encounter with respect to their mortal bodies.

This also means that God, not they, causes their proclaiming the gospel as well as their enduring and persevering in their faith through all the different kinds of suffering they experience. Sure they may look weak and ineffective in their ministry, but God ensures that there is an effect to what they are doing in spite of themselves. Paul would say that he is nothing, while God is everything, which, even if the false apostles are explicitly saying the same thing, they do not actually believe this and are acting differently from it.

Paul indicates elsewhere in his letters as well as here that God has designed reality such that the apostles are slated for rougher and more oppressive treatment by the world than his believing readers, even though his readers endure very harsh circumstances (cf. 1 Thessalonians & 1 Corinthians 4:9-13; 2 Corinthians 6:4-10; 11:21-33). Thus, those who come closest to understanding, believing, and being able to articulate the apostolic message of the NT will probably find themselves at the greatest risk of being treated by the world as it treated Jesus and the apostles and will have to rely on God's inner work to strengthen them to persevere in their authentic belief and to do whatever work God has assigned them in this world. They will look like losers to the world, but God always ensures they are winners because of His commitment to their biblical inwardness and the responsibility He has given them to proclaim the gospel.

I think that Paul is hinting that the false apostles lack this inward light of the truth of God, so that their "power" to perform what they think is their responsibility to lead people comes from themselves and not from God.

⁸⁵ ἐν παντὶ θλιβόμενοι ἀλλ' οὐ στενοχωρούμενοι, ἀπορούμενοι ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐξαπορούμενοι – Starting with this verse, Paul lists several ways that he is being mistreated externally that requires that God through His power cause his internal faith and obedience to persevere.

The first kind of mistreatment is his being "afflicted," probably just encountering the normal problems of human existence in the present realm that can potentially crush a person's faith. But Paul and Timothy remain believers in the midst of such pressures. The second kind of mistreatment is being "confused" about how to handle certain situations in order to do the right thing in the eyes of God. But Paul and Timothy are never "despairing" that they will ruin their lives with whatever thoughtful decision they make, because it is implied that God continues to work in the midst of the uncertainties of life. He is always leading them in His triumphal parade as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16.

I think that Paul is hinting that the false apostles do not see life this way and would most likely run from their "faith" if they were treated in the same way.

⁸⁶ διωκόμενοι ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐγκαταλείπομενοι, καταβαλλόμενοι ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀπολλύμενοι – The third kind of mistreatment is being persecuted by those who are hostile to the biblical message, but because God is always with them, Paul and Timothy never think that they are completely on their own in dealing with such persecution. They may feel abandoned by God, but this is never true in their inward being and hearts of genuine faith.

The fourth kind of mistreatment is their being physically attacked that has not yet resulted in their being physically destroyed and dying. And even in these circumstances, God powerfully causes their faith to persevere.

Paul will describe all four of these kinds of circumstances in more detail in chapter 11. And, of course, he is implying that not only do the false apostles not encounter such suffering, but also his experiencing these various sources of pain is part of the proof of his being a true apostle.

⁸⁷ πάντοτε τὴν νέκρωσιν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματι περιφέροντες, ἵνα καὶ ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματι ἡμῶν φανερωθῇ – In spite of all the difficult circumstances that Paul and Timothy encounter, the one thing that never leaves them is the message of the crucified Messiah and His resurrection to fulfill His role as Messiah and eternal advocate. This message reminds them of their own sinfulness and inability to do anything good in and of themselves, as well as their calling as apostles to share with Jesus the hostility and mistreatment of unbelievers and the world. Plus, God must and does work miraculously by His grace within them and on behalf of them when He causes them to continue to live in spite of all the mistreatment they are experiencing.

It is in this way that they carry Jesus' death within themselves, either 1) as they constantly repudiate their sinfulness and inherent evil, or 2) as they encounter the same kind of hostility the Jesus experienced that could kill them physically, or 3) both #1 and #2. I think that #3 can make sense in the light of the difference between Paul's message and that of the false apostles. However, #2 in this context where Paul has just talked about being treated by life and the world the way Jesus was—"afflicted," "confused," "persecuted," and "struck down"—is more coherent, yet implying #1 just because this is what the gospel is really all about.

Certainly the false apostles are not facing into the depth of their sin and seeing the value of Jesus' death as a propitiation for their sins. Plus, they are not encountering any hostility to their Mosaic Covenant-dominant message as Paul is because of his Jesus-dominant message. Jesus' death reminds Paul of his incurable sinfulness and gets him in real trouble with those who want to use

the Jewish religion to say that sin is not that great a problem (cf. 1 John 1). Nevertheless, it is the overall message of the gospel and what happened to Jesus himself when he was mistreated and crucified by the worldly leaders and rulers in his specific area of the world which is causing life to look the same for Paul.

This then makes the “life of Jesus” which is revealed in Paul’s body the acceptance of God who is keeping him physically alive for His divine purposes as God raised Jesus from the dead of the same purposes.

So Paul’s grasp of the depth of his sin and the significance of the gospel brings him Jesus-like mistreatment in the world which then allows him to display Jesus’ being raised from the dead and gaining immortal life through his pursuit of genuine morality and proclaiming the message of the gospel instead of religious ceremonies and rituals that mostly characterize the false apostles’ message and lives. Thus, Jesus’ own resurrection from the dead and present eternal life spurs Paul on to live a life commensurate with Jesus’ experience, a life that is all about moral goodness that will go on into eternity, having first endured the hostility of the world. Therefore, God faithfully continues to fulfill His promises to Paul and Timothy while they faithfully endure whatever hardship and suffering God graciously sends their way as they always seek to do the right thing and present the truth of the gospel while heading towards eternal life.

⁸⁸ αἰεὶ γὰρ ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες εἰς θάνατον παραδιδόμεθα διὰ Ἰησοῦν, ἵνα καὶ ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ φανερωθῇ ἐν τῇ θνητῇ σαρκὶ ἡμῶν – Because of Jesus and his association with him, Paul experiences being betrayed and handed over to “death” which is similar to what Judas did to Jesus and is a consequence of living in a world which is hostile to the biblical truth. He grasps the depth of his sin that Jesus’ death portrayed, and as he speaks of Jesus to both Jews and Gentiles, he lives the rejection of the world so that he demonstrates what Jesus was all about in regard to both sin and righteousness, the former being something which cannot be fixed simply by performing the religious activities of the Mosaic Covenant, and the latter being something that is authentically moral and not religious like Jesus’ own love for his people by giving his life for them. Therefore, even though Paul’s beingness is still “mortal” and subject eventually to death, he reveals both Jesus’ rejection by unbelievers (“always handed over to death on account of Jesus”) and God’s approval and acceptance of Jesus when he raised him from the death (“the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our mortal flesh”) as God keeps Paul and Timothy alive for the time being for His specific reasons and purposes and continuing to spread the gospel among both Jews and Gentiles.

This is basically a summary statement of 4:7-10, that God sovereignly, independently, and miraculously brings life and light out of the death and darkness of persecution and hardship which Paul and Timothy experience. Their view of life is that God’s purpose for them specifically as apostolic workers is to take them through suffering in the midst of their own sinfulness, a kind of death and darkness, in order that the eternal existence of Jesus as the Messiah that came through His death and resurrection remains the key element in their thinking and message, as well as in their physical beings that are destined for physical death but display acts of genuine morality and goodness in this life. It seems that they are hardly given a break by God so that they do not rely on themselves but on God only for fulfilling their responsibility as apostolic workers who are required by God to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles.

cf. Romans 8:11, “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” This is to say that God will transform their mortal bodies into immortal and eternal bodies because they have grasped the significance of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, that they are sinners who cannot please God unless He grants them His grace of His own independent free will. So, ultimately, this will be the “life of Jesus” which is “revealed in [their] mortal flesh.”

⁸⁹ ὥστε ὁ θάνατος ἐν ἡμῖν ἐνεργεῖται, ἡ δὲ ζωὴ ἐν ὑμῖν – I think that Paul is pointing out something specific to his being an apostle and the Corinthians’ being recipients of the apostolic message from him (and Timothy). This is similar to what he says in 1 Corinthians 4:9, “I think God has made us apostles last, as those sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the present realm, both to angels and to men.” The apostles initially seemed to attract harsher persecution than the non-apostle Christians, probably because they were the first to proclaim the gospel. So this statement in v. 12 means that harsh treatment from unbelievers like that which Jesus experienced is occurring towards Paul and Timothy.

And then Paul is either saying that God’s acceptance and His approval like that which Jesus also experienced when he was raised from the dead is occurring towards the Corinthians (implying that they are operating on the basis of the correct message—that one from Paul and Timothy and not from the false apostles) or being ironic as he is in 1 Corinthians 4, that the Corinthians are experiencing a kind of “life” devoid of persecution because they are being so influenced by the false apostles.

Of course, Paul is not claiming that the Corinthians are not experiencing hardship as a result of their faith, but he is defending his apostleship in the light of the influence of the false apostles on the Corinthians, hoping to show by the example of his faith’s persevering through all the suffering God has brought into his life (and not into the false apostles’ lives) just how genuine is his calling as an apostle.

Cf. 2 Corinthians 1:5-14 – Paul’s and Timothy’s affliction means encouragement to the Corinthians Christians in the midst of the same kind of afflictions and sufferings.

By the way, sarcasm is to use irony to mock or convey contempt. Irony does not have this last component. Instead, it is the use of language that normally signifies the opposite in order to be humorous or emphatic. It is this latter which Paul is doing here and later in this letter. He would never mock or seek to convey contempt for the false apostles who are his main target with his irony. He is always brutally honest, even to say in Galatians that the ones presenting the different gospel are doomed to God’s condemnation and to say here in 2 Corinthians 11 that they are servants of Satan. This is not to mock someone, which includes a self-righteous component, but only to encourage people to wake up to the truth and embrace it for the sake of their eternal salvations.

⁹⁰ Ἐχοντες δὲ τὸ αὐτὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πίστεως κατὰ τὸ γεγραμμένον ἐπίστευσα, διὸ ἔτάλησα, καὶ ἡμεῖς πιστεύομεν, διὸ καὶ λαλοῦμεν – cf. Psalm 116:10 – I believed when I said, “I am greatly afflicted” (לֵאמֹר אֲנִי מְאֹד מְאֻלָּם). In the LXX, Psalm 116:1-9 is actually Psalm 114:1-9, Psalm 116:10-13 is Psalm 115:1-4, Psalm 116:14 is missing in the LXX, Psalm 116:15-17a is Psalm 115:5-8 (Psalm 116:17b is missing the LXX), Psalm 116:18-19a is Psalm 115:9-10 (Psalm 116:19b is missing in the LXX). Thus, Psalm 116:10 in the LXX is Psalm 115:1 – “Hallelujah. I believed; therefore I spoke. And I have been greatly brought low (αλληλουια. ἐπίστευσα, διὸ ἐτάλησα: ἐγὼ δὲ ἐταπεινώθην σφόδρα).” Therefore, the Hebrew can even be translated in such a way like the LXX that the psalmist is declaring his confidence and willingness to speak. This is who he is—a believer and a speaker of truth, even though or in the midst of his having been greatly humbled by God’s attentiveness and salvation towards him in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Just as the psalmist was delighted that he continued to believe Yahweh for His promises and to speak to Yahweh in the midst of suffering, so Paul and Timothy have believed the NT message of Jesus as the Messiah and speak to people about it in the midst of their own affliction and suffering. If suffering, belief, and speaking to and about Yahweh are good enough for the psalmist as Yahweh remains attentive and faithful to him, Paul and Timothy consider belief and speaking the gospel to be good enough for them because God is being attentive and faithful towards them in the midst of harsh and difficult circumstances, which the false apostles are not experiencing.

By citing the psalmist’s experience of suffering, believing, and speaking in the midst of God’s salvific activity towards him, they hope to defend further their divine calling to be authoritative spokesmen for the Messiah Jesus. It is not by living the easy life of Jewish religion while also claiming to believe in Jesus that affirms the authenticity of someone’s being an apostle of Jesus. It is by living the same kind of life of rejection and mistreatment as Jesus that does.

Thus also Paul and Timothy claim that they have the same “spirit of belief” as the psalmist, i.e., the same inwardness of courage, confidence, and willingness to speak about the truth of God while experiencing affliction and suffering.

Another possibility is that Paul and Timothy are referring to the Spirit of God as the cause of their believing and speaking, i.e., the Spirit of God who works within sinners to accomplish these results. But in the light of the context of Psalm 116 where the Spirit is not mentioned explicitly, the former interpretation makes more sense.

Nevertheless, Paul is implicitly contrasting Timothy and him with the false apostles, who find their confidence and motivation to speak by their supposedly successful outward obedience to the Mosaic Covenant, not by having grasped the centrality of Jesus and the depth of their sin which requires God’s grace to solve, not their human, religious efforts.

⁹¹ εἰδότες ὅτι ὁ ἐγειρας τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν καὶ ἡμᾶς σὺν Ἰησοῦ ἐγερεῖ καὶ παραστήσει σὺν ὑμῖν – It is what God has done and will do, not what they have done by means of their own human effort, that matters to Paul and Timothy. He has powerfully and sovereignly raised Jesus from the dead, which was the prelude to His “raising” (either from the dead or from the earth) Paul and Timothy to be “with Jesus” in order to present them along with the Corinthian Christians to Himself—as those who will live with Jesus into eternity.

This is the gospel which they have believed and which they speak. In addition, the fact that God will present Paul and Timothy to Himself at Jesus’ return along with the Corinthian Christians as those who will all be granted eternal mercy keeps motivating them to proclaim the biblical message—in spite of the affliction and suffering that comes from doing so. This will be the first resurrection of Revelation 20 when God will transform all authentic believers alive or who have already died into immortal and morally perfect beings who will help Jesus reign over the millennial kingdom.

Thus, once again Paul and Timothy indicate the important connection between them as apostolic workers and the Corinthians, implying that the connection between the false apostles and the Corinthians is baseless and worthless.

⁹² τὰ γὰρ πάντα δι’ ὑμᾶς, ἵνα ἡ χάρις πλεονάσασα διὰ τῶν πλειόνων τὴν εὐχαριστίαν περισσεύσῃ εἰς τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ – Everything negative (and positive) which they are experiencing as apostles is worth it to Paul and Timothy and has its purpose in the Corinthians’ existence as authentic believers as a consequence of God’s grace. They cannot say that their sterling religious performance of the Mosaic Covenant has inspired the Corinthians to become Christians. Instead, God has independently and sovereignly worked in them to cause them to be inwardly biblical and believers in the Messiah.

As a result, once God has completely His work of grace in “the many,” the collection of believers throughout all history, they will all be extremely grateful for the mercy and eternal life that God has granted them. In turn, this massive amount of gratitude will demonstrate God’s glory and awesomeness, which is exactly what God wants and is His purpose for the creation’s even existing and being a reality which He has made.

⁹³ Διὸ οὐκ ἐγκακοῦμεν, ἀλλ’ εἰ καὶ ὁ ἕξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος διαφθείρεται, ἀλλ’ ὁ ἕσω ἡμῶν ἀνακαινοῦται ἡμέρα καὶ ἡμέρα – Maybe the false apostles (and the Corinthians who are being influenced by them) are looking at Paul’s and Timothy’s lives and saying, “Who would want to live a life like theirs if that is what it means to be a genuine apostle of Jesus? That has to be very discouraging. Instead, follow us and obey the Mosaic Covenant, and God will bless you and keep you from the affliction and persecution which Paul and Timothy are unnecessarily (!) experiencing.” But Paul does not let his external circumstances which are like those of Jesus get him down, because he is all about what is going on inside of him according to the sovereign grace of God, not what others are doing to him by mistreating him in their hostility towards God and the truth.

Paul and Timothy are saying that a grasp of all this theology that they have been expressing along with the Corinthians’ living out the theology in difficult circumstances is extremely encouraging to them—just as he said in 4:1. In 4:1, it was people’s lackadaisical response to the gospel as they are being influenced by the false apostles that could be discouraging. And yet Paul remains steadfast in his trust and hope in God. In this context, while Paul and Timothy watch their physical bodies get older and beat up by persecution and affliction in preparation for dying, which only enhances their awareness of their mortality. But they

know that God faithfully, lovingly, and powerfully works within them daily to cause them to believe right up to the end of their lives, which manifests the necessary requirement of their changed hearts for their qualifying for eternal life at the judgment.

⁹⁴ τὸ γὰρ παραυτίκα ἡ ἐλαφρόν τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν καθ' ὑπερβολὴν εἰς ὑπερβολὴν αἰώνιον βάρος δόξης κατεργάζεται ἡμῖν – The affliction and difficulties which Paul and Timothy are experiencing in the present age are nothing in comparison to the glory of eternal life starting with Jesus' return. Thus, they are able to put their apostolic suffering in perspective. And eternal life really cannot even have an accurate and precise measurement of its value put on it. In essence the very idea of eternal mercy, life, and moral perfection in the Kingdom of God is ineffable and inexpressible. While Paul can articulate fairly accurately his suffering in this life, he cannot articulate very well the experience of eternal life and moral perfection in the next life. It is simply “an eternal weight,” a kind of burden which they will have to bear, but obviously willingly and joyously.

⁹⁵ μὴ σκοποῦντων ἡμῶν τὰ βλεπόμενα ἀλλὰ τὰ μὴ βλεπόμενα: τὰ γὰρ βλεπόμενα πρόσκαιρα, τὰ δὲ μὴ βλεπόμενα αἰώνια – Everything in this creation is real, from the farthest galaxy to the atoms and molecules that make up our own bodies. And the things which we see and touch and hear sometimes have a huge impact on us—emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. However, the mental energy which we should put into dealing with the immediate elements of our surroundings (“the things which are seen”) should be minimal compared to attention which we pay to what we know and are learning about our eternal futures in the Kingdom of God (“the things which are not seen”). And this is because the stuff and circumstances which we encounter in the experience of the present age will all come to an end at Jesus' return, while those of the Kingdom of God, actually starting with our knowledge and our belief in what we know to be truth, will go on and on and on into eternity. It is not that the millennial kingdom and eternal life exists now as “the things which are not seen,” but one day they will come into existence and will be seen just as Jesus will finally become visible to us when he returns.

The false apostles are all about what they can see of their and others' outward obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. This is the focus of their attention—their external religious institution and actions which appear so spiritual and noble. Paul and Timothy, instead, point to what God is doing within them (and to their stored, new bodies in an invisible vault, cf. 5:1) by having given them understanding of the truth and the motivation to proclaim it in the face of all kinds of opposition and factors that potentially could be discouraging in the present age.

Thus, Paul and Timothy know that they are going to die, but they are not discouraged by it or anything seemingly negative in the present realm, including the high level of suffering which they are experiencing as apostolic workers. They certainly see their affliction, suffering, and everything negative in the present realm that they personally encounter, but these things are so inconsequential in comparison to God's returning Jesus the Messiah to earth to set up his kingdom in Israel and eventually to bring about the eternal Kingdom of God. Thus, Paul and Timothy do not yet visibly see eternal life and their future, morally perfect bodies. However, what they cannot see now is exactly what is most important and worthwhile to them. They pay the most attention to the future Kingdom of God, because everything in the present realm is merely leading up to it and relativized in value by it.

⁹⁶ Οἶδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι ἐὰν ἡ ἐπίγειος ἡμῶν οἰκία τοῦ σκήνους καταλυθῇ, οἰκοδομῇ ἐκ θεοῦ ἔχομεν, οἰκίαν ἀχειροποίητον αἰώνιον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς – The future looks incredibly bright for Paul and Timothy—new, immortal, and morally perfect bodies when Jesus returns. And these are guaranteed and from a fresh creation of God alone (“in the heavens” where God dwells and Himself cannot be destroyed or dissuaded from His eternal plans and purposes). These indestructible and incorruptible bodies will be their “building from God” (interesting metaphor) in contrast to the “earthly, tent-like house” (which actually are “from God” too, but only temporarily) in which they live now as embodied, sinful human beings who can become non-existent in a heartbeat as part of God's plan for people and living things to die and disappear in the present realm.

I think that “not made by human hands” is an idiomatic expression to refer to something which has a strictly human origin through the normal biological process of procreation during this age and that is temporary as opposed to that which God alone out of nothing (*ex nihilo* in the Latin) brings into existence as a permanent element of the next, eternal age. This is the eternal house “in the heavens.”

Paul says the same thing in **1 Corinthians 15:44** [The human body of a Christian] is sown a natural [coming into existence by the earthly biological process of procreation] body, it is raised a spiritual [coming into existence by the immediate creative process of God out of nothing] body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

Thus, without any help from the ability or activity of human beings, God alone through His ability to create things from nothing but His own imagination is going to transform the temporary dwelling places of their bodies into permanent and eternal dwelling places. And God has reserved these in an invisible vault so to speak (His mind) where no human beings can harm or destroy them the way they can their current physical bodies.

All this is in spite of the presence and work of the indestructible Holy Spirit within them who has fortunately enslaved their commitments to God and morality (cf. Romans 6).

⁹⁷ καὶ γὰρ ἐν τούτῳ στενάζομεν τὸ οἰκητήριον ἡμῶν τὸ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ ἐπενδύσασθαι ἐπιποθοῦντες – Even though they have such a firm intellectual, emotional, psychological, and spiritual grasp on the magnificence of their eternal destinies, Paul and Timothy are still human, and they groan over everything which impinges on the comfort and ease of their lives. This probably includes their own personal sin (internal discomfort of a guilt-like nature) and certainly the pain and suffering of their outward, apostolic experiences (external discomfort). They are living neither the victorious Jewish life of the Mosaic Covenant of the false apostles nor the victorious Christian life of modern Christianity. They live in a world hostile to God and truth, and on occasion they personally and individually encounter the effects of this.

The positive side of this earthly, temporary pain is that it leads them to long greatly and unceasingly for eternal life, for an actual new body that is free from any negative elements of the present world which contains sinners, including them as sinners and their

own sin. They want to “be fully clothed with [their eternal] dwelling [bodies]” which God will give them (switching metaphors from a “building” to “clothing.”

⁹⁸ εἴ γε καὶ ἐκδυσάμενοι [MT - ἐνδυσάμενοι] οὐ γυμνοὶ εὐρεθησόμεθα – I suggest that the MT is correct, that Paul and Timothy are referring to putting on (not off) the “dwelling from heaven” of v. 2, which within the clothing metaphor indicates that being naked means being a sinner who is subject to difficulties and afflictions of living in world which is hostile to God and the biblical message that could very possibly end in death (and will anyway as the natural course of events for any sinful human being), whether the affliction comes from within due to one’s own sin or from without due to others’ sin and opposition to the gospel. Thus, nakedness here is the same as being weak in chapter 11. It is to stop unbelievers from causing affliction and suffering in his life.

Option 1 – Paul and Timothy realize the nakedness of their current bodies means that they would experience eternal extinction if God does not grant them eternal life through His grace.

Option 2 – Paul and Timothy do not want to be annihilated and therefore “naked” after the judgment. Instead, they want to be clothed with bodies that are not only immortal but also morally perfect.

Option 3 – Paul and Timothy are naked now as mortal, sinful human beings and do not want to be naked and annihilated for eternity because of their immoral condition.

Paul and Timothy could be offering a warning to themselves regarding perseverance of faith, without which even they will not obtain eternal life. Thus, the translation, would be, “assuming, of course, that we shall not be found naked after having taken off.” However, the context displays their confidence in God’s granting them eternal life and mercy, thus indicating that the MT with ἐνδυσάμενοι is correct as translated above. Paul and Timothy are confident that they will have something to show of which they will not be ashamed, i.e., not being naked and extinct, with respect to their lives as apostolic workers. Moral perfection in the eternal Kingdom of God is what they will show rather than annihilation. Thus, option #2 with an allusion to #3 above is correct.

⁹⁹ καὶ γὰρ οἱ ὄντες ἐν τῷ σκηνῇ στενάζομεν βαρυνόμενοι, ἐφ’ ᾧ οὐ θέλομεν ἐκδύσασθαι ἀλλ’ ἐπενδύσασθαι, ἵνα καταποθῇ τὸ θνητὸν ὑπὸ τῆς ζωῆς – While they live temporarily in a tent-like building (the first metaphor) in the present age as apostles who find themselves afflicted and suffering from their own sin within and others’ sin and hostility without, Paul’s and Timothy’s lives are like carrying a huge burden or weight which causes them to groan and which they really want to get rid of. They do not want to be “unclothed” in their destructible, sinful bodies susceptible to affliction, persecution, suffering, and death, but “clothed” in their eternal, immortal, and morally perfect bodies (the second metaphor). They long for the eternal and permanent transition to the Kingdom of God, this being the focus of their attention, which must be in contrast to the false apostles who remain focused on their religious lives.

This will be the same for Paul and Timothy as their mortality disappearing into the mass of eternal life.

¹⁰⁰ ὁ δὲ κατεργασάμενος ἡμᾶς εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο θεός, ὁ δοὺς ἡμῖν τὸν ἀρραβῶνα τοῦ πνεύματος – Unlike the false apostles who are constantly pointing to their outward obedience to the Mosaic Covenant for what qualifies them for God’s eternal (?) blessing and that they achieve through their own inner, human resources, Paul and Timothy point to only God and the work of His Spirit within them. God has made them fit and qualified. They themselves have not, just as Paul said back in 3:4-6– “3:4 And such confidence we have toward God in the light of the Messiah, 3:5 not that we are fit in and of ourselves to consider anything as from ourselves, but our being fit is from God, 3:6 who, indeed, has made us fit as servants of the New Covenant, not that which is based on a piece of writing but on the Spirit, because the piece of writing kills, but the Spirit produces life.”

Thus, God has done so not by making them outwardly obedient to the Mosaic Covenant but by making them inwardly believing and obedient to the gospel of Jesus as the Messiah. In this way, God has given His Spirit to them as a down payment, resulting eventually in life and participation in the eternal Kingdom of God.

Cf. 1:22.

¹⁰¹ Θαρροῦντες οὖν πάντοτε καὶ εἰδότες ὅτι ἔνδημοῦντες ἐν τῷ σώματι ἔκδημοῦμεν ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου – Based upon what God alone has done within them through His Spirit, Paul and Timothy are confident of their eternal destinies in the Kingdom of God. And this is while they know too that they are currently stuck in their earthly, destructible, and mortal bodies instead of present with Jesus who has an immortal and morally perfect body. The latter is coming even though the former looks a bit unsuccessful and problematic.

This implies that the false apostles’ confidence is in their bodies—“Look at how well we are obeying the Mosaic Covenant,” similar to “Look at how big and vibrant our church is and how God is obviously blessing us.”

¹⁰² διὰ πίστεως γὰρ περιπατοῦμεν, οὐ διὰ εἶδους – Just as they said in 4:18 that they do not pay any heed to the things which they see, because these are only temporary, Paul and Timothy operate in their lives on the basis of belief in the invisible God and the invisible future Kingdom of God which He has promised through Jesus the Messiah.

The false apostles are all about outward appearance as that which is valuable to them and which they believe is pleasing to God, even as a means to earning His blessings—perhaps even now. Paul and Timothy are all about the invisible—the work of God within them through His Spirit and the coming eternal Kingdom of God, which will become visible when Jesus returns and first sets up the millennial kingdom on the land of Israel.

¹⁰³ θαρροῦμεν δὲ καὶ εὐδοκοῦμεν μᾶλλον ἐκδημήσαι ἐκ τοῦ σώματος καὶ ἐνδημήσαι πρὸς τὸν κύριον – Paul and Timothy see nothing in their experiences as apostolic co-workers that makes it ultimately desirable to remain in the condition in which they find themselves as persecuted and mistreated spokesmen for the truth of the gospel—even though this is exactly what is valuable and fulfilling about their life through the inner work of the Holy Spirit. As Paul has said in 1 Corinthians 9:17 For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me (οἰκονομίαν πεπίστευμαι). Thus, they prefer to be dwelling with Jesus in his messianic kingdom. This is their fundamental desire.

¹⁰⁴ διὸ καὶ φιλοτιμούμεθα, εἴτε ἐνδημοῦντες εἴτε ἐκδημοῦντες, εὐάρεστοι αὐτῷ εἶναι – Just because God is the one who has made them for their apostolic responsibilities so that they cannot take credit for them themselves, Paul and Timothy nevertheless understand their existential, moral accountability to God. Implied, too, is that God has made them desirous of pleasing Him, which then is what they pursue, knowing that this is an eternal condition for them as those in whom God has worked and will continue to work. And this is whether they describe themselves as “at home” in their current mortal bodies or “away” from their future eternal bodies (versus interpreting this as “at home” in their current bodies or “away” in their future bodies). Paul and Timothy obviously correctly connect the existence of their fundamental desire for eternal life with a desire to pursue moral obedience to God as long as they participate in the present realm. Therefore, whether they take the perspective that they are “at home” in their current, physical body, or they are “away” from the Lord, their desire is to obey God, because this demonstrates their having been set apart by the Spirit of God within their inner being. In other words, “at home” and “away” refer to the same thing—their still existing in the present realm.

¹⁰⁵ τοὺς γὰρ πάντας ἡμᾶς φανερωθῆναι δεῖ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ βήματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἵνα κομισῇται ἕκαστος τὰ διὰ τοῦ σώματος πρὸς ᾧ ἔπραξεν, εἴτε ἀγαθὸν εἴτε φαῦλον – Again, moral accountability is the reason that Paul and Timothy want to be “good” people who do “good” things, not “evil” people who do “evil” things without acknowledging that they will be judged for the moral quality of their lives. The *bayma* of the Messiah is the combination of Jesus’ return with the first resurrection of Revelation 20 and the end the millennial kingdom with the second resurrection. “Good” people will be judged “worthy” of eternal life at the first, while “evil” people will incur God’s wrath and condemnation at the second.

Thus, Paul and Timothy provide a teleological basis for their pursuing obedience to God in the present realm. This basis is to reach the goal of surviving the final judgment. If a person does what is “good,” i.e., is a persevering believer in the truth of the NT message who demonstrates this belief by pursuing morality, he will receive what is “due” to him, eternal life, even though he does not deserve it. It is simply graced to him by God. If a person does what is “evil,” i.e., remains a rebel against God all his life, he will receive what he is due, eternal condemnation, and he will actually deserve it. This will occur at God’s judgment seat so to speak where the Messiah will provide his personal advocacy, and he will appeal for God’s eternal mercy for those who lived with persevering faith in the present realm. In Revelation 20, we learn that mercy comes with the first resurrection at the beginning of the millennial kingdom, while condemnation comes with the second resurrection at the end of the millennial kingdom.

As a result, we see that Paul and Timothy use business language, that normally includes working and earning a wage as part of its meaning, to communicate the truth of God’s grace, which does not include earning eternal life. This demonstrates the inherent difficulty of biblical interpretation.

¹⁰⁶ εἰδότες οὖν τὸν φόβον τοῦ κυρίου ἀνθρώπους πείθομεν – Very simply, God is to be feared as our Judge with eternal consequences for how we live our lives, and Jesus is to be feared as Lord of whether or not he advocates on our behalf. Because Paul and Timothy have a firm intellectual grasp of the eternal consequences of these two different kinds of lives which will become apparent at the judgment, they seek to persuade and work at persuading people of these and the value of belief in Jesus as their Messiah and advocate at the judgment. This is part of their apostolic drive and motivation.

People will encounter either mercy or condemnation at the judgment, either life that never ends or complete destruction, and Paul and Timothy feel the responsibility to inform them of not only these two possibilities, but also the means to escape eternal destruction, by believing that Jesus will be their mediator at the judgment.

This would be in contrast to the false apostles who are most likely promoting the sacrifices and offerings of the Mosaic Covenant as the basis for mercy.

¹⁰⁷ θεῷ δὲ πεφανερῶμεθα: ἐλπίζω δὲ καὶ ἐν ταῖς συνειδήσεσιν ὑμῶν πεφανερῶσθαι – Paul’s main concern is always to do the right thing before God, even if people believe that he is doing the wrong thing. Consequently, he knows that by proclaiming the importance of escaping the judgment of God through only Jesus and his death, he and Timothy are very “well-known to God” and therefore doing the right thing. However, they hope that this message gets through to the Corinthians also so that they understand as well as Paul does and thereby benefit from it for the sake of obtaining eternal salvation. This obviously would be in contrast to being influenced by the false apostles.

This is what counts most to Paul and Timothy, that they are fulfilling their responsibility to God and that He knows it. And as he mentioned in chapter 4 about his extensive and bold openness about himself as a sinner being mistreated by the world and God as merciful through Jesus, even keeping him alive so that he can continue fulfilling his responsibility of proclaiming the gospel, he says so again. This openness is in God’s presence and the Corinthians’ presence. He has nothing to hide as everything about him with the Spirit’s work within him is for the sake of proclaiming the gospel and seeing others acquire eternal life. Thus, Paul would want the Corinthians to recognize his purpose and actions in obedience to God, because it will work out to their benefit by their obtaining God’s mercy and eternal life if they listen to him instead of to the false apostles.

¹⁰⁸ οὐ πάλιν ἑαυτοὺς συνιστάνομεν ὑμῖν ἀλλ’ ἀφορμὴν διδόντες ὑμῖν καυχήματος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, ἵνα ἔχητε πρὸς τοὺς ἐν προσώπῳ καυχωμένους καὶ μὴ ἐν καρδίᾳ – Paul and Timothy are always walking a fine line between promoting themselves, which would more than likely cause people to focus on them and not on Jesus, and saying nothing about their qualifications, which could lead to people ignoring them and their message, for the sake of keeping the spotlight on Jesus.

Yet, they have been “promoting” themselves of sorts, even by mentioning all the afflictions, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties they have experienced, along with their “persuading men” as a result of their understanding that God is their judge (v. 11). If Paul wants to be known for something external in his life, it is not for his obedience to the Mosaic Covenant but for his faithfulness to proclaim the gospel of Jesus as the Messiah and seeking to persuade people of its truth. This is so that they can provide the Corinthians with some kind of tangible handle on why they are apostles and the false apostles are not. And this is partly because the latter are all about how they appear as servants of God and Jesus through their outward obedience to the

Mosaic Covenant, while, again, Paul and Timothy point to what God has done on the inside of them through His Spirit to make them fit the requirements of a true apostle. The false apostles brag about “appearance”—outwardness. Paul brags about the “heart”—inwardness.

Ultimately, no strictly human act of recommendation works for Paul and Timothy as apostolic workers. Only God’s recommendation does, e.g., through the miracles that they perform to affirm their authority and the subjective resonance that their message of Jesus as the Messiah causes. This may seem counterintuitive to us as human beings, even Christians, who in our age are used to hearing and seeing the justification and rationalization of a level of obligation and deference that we are encouraged to give speakers such that they deserve to be heard by us. For example, someone who has graduated from seminary and received ordination from a seminary, who has acquired a particular degree as a result of his studies, e.g., Ph.D., who has written books, etc., etc.

But Paul is saying that the only people who deserve to be heard are the authentic apostles and only on the basis of their having been given this responsibility by God as well as the fact that their message will resonate with a heart that has been changed by God’s Spirit.

The pseudo-apostles like to brag about the effect they are having by producing prolific external performance of the Mosaic Covenant by many people, with an emphasis most likely on the ritual commandments (dietary laws, etc.), while all Paul and Timothy can offer as an ongoing sign of the success of their efforts is their proclaiming the message of Jesus as the Messiah to persuade people and then the very people who will brag about Paul and Timothy because they have recognized the truth of their message. This does not exactly fit with the world’s definition and requirement for objective evidence, but it is nevertheless rational because of the dynamic that exists between the transcendent Creator and the reality of the story which He is telling in this created existence.

καυχάομαι – used 20x in 2 Corinthians

¹⁰⁹ εἶτε γὰρ ἐξέστημεν, θεῷ εἶτε σωφρονοῦμεν, ὑμῖν – If some people, e.g., the false apostles, think that Paul and Timothy are crazy, because they keep encountering persecution and hardship by proclaiming their message of Jesus the Messiah instead of changing it so that they avoid persecution, then Paul is fine with this. It is the right thing to do before God. If other people, e.g., the Corinthians, think that they are sober and sane, because the gospel makes sense to them and they are believing it, then also so be it. This is exactly what happens with those who become authentic believers. They correctly believe that the apostles with their lives and their message are spot on.

Therefore, here with a bit of irony is also what the Corinthians can brag about with respect to how Paul and Timothy “appear” outwardly in comparison to the outward appearance of the false apostles’ obedience of the Mosaic Covenant. They appear crazy to the false apostles, because they are not putting the Mosaic Covenant first and are being treated as losers by emphasizing Jesus. But hopefully they appear sane to the Corinthians by presenting the truth of God.

Looking crazy to the unbelievers is part of the role that God has assigned them as apostolic workers. On the other hand, if they appear to be the smartest people in the world to authentic believers, then this is what God has also planned as part of the process of collecting sinful human beings for His eternal kingdom by changing them inwardly through the work of His Spirit and convincing them of the absolute, rational truth of the gospel. Only genuine believers will recognize that Paul’s continued sinfulness, lack of moral “perfection” (as the false apostles are probably claiming to have through their obedience to the MC), and being mistreated by the world are all good signs of authentic Christianity.

¹¹⁰ ἡ γὰρ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ συνέχει ἡμᾶς, κρίναντας τοῦτο, ὅτι εἰς ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν, ἄρα οἱ πάντες ἀπέθανον – While the false apostles are motivated by the show they can put on through their outward obedience to the Mosaic Covenant, Paul and Timothy are motivated by Jesus’ outward demonstration of his love for sinners when he was crucified. Thus, they recognize the significance of the Messiah’s loving them through his death.

In addition, they have thought through exactly what Jesus’ death means for believers. They, too, have gone through a kind of death by denying their need to remain completely safe and free from persecution.

¹¹¹ καὶ ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν, ἵνα οἱ ζῶντες μηκέτι ἑαυτοῖς ζῶσιν ἀλλὰ τῷ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἀποθανόντι καὶ ἐγερθέντι – Authentic believers grasp the significance of Jesus’ dying for them all. It is that they have died to themselves so that they recognize that their own human resources to obey and please God cannot bring life but only death. This leads to their showing their appreciation for Jesus’ willingness to suffer death for them by dedicating their lives to him. Whatever they do now, they do for him in obedience to him as their leader and rabbi. They are not following Moses as the false apostles do. They follow Jesus. For Paul and Timothy, this even means experiencing affliction and persecution from hostile unbelievers. If Jesus suffered for them, then they are willing to suffer for him and his people whom they discover through proclaiming the gospel. This is in contrast to the false apostles who are living for themselves.

It is one thing to live for God through one’s own self-efforts. It is another to live for a crucified Messiah who has demonstrated through his death that all self-efforts on the part of evil human beings deserve God’s eternal condemnation. As a result, those people who have repudiated their sinfulness and inability to please God and now are alive so to speak to the truth of Jesus as the Messiah and God’s eternal mercy through him will also commit themselves to behaving in such a way that they show that they are serving Jesus—through their belief, their moral lifestyles, and their willingness to experience opposition from the world.

¹¹² ὥστε ἡμεῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν οὐδένα οἶδαμεν κατὰ σάρκα· εἰ καὶ ἐγνώκαμεν κατὰ σάρκα Χριστόν, ἀλλὰ νῦν οὐκέτι γινώσκομεν – In contrast to the false apostles who are putting all their emphasis on the “flesh,” i.e., their outward and external attributes which they believe qualify them for God’s blessings, Paul looks past these outward elements that make up who Christians are and considers only their inner attributes as what are important for identifying genuine Christians. Paul uses Jesus as an analogy. When he was on earth, he was a mortal human being. But now he has been changed by God into someone new, an

immortal human being.

Philippians 3:2 Watch out for the dogs. Watch out for the evil workers. Watch out for those who are the badly circumcised. **3:3** For we are the well circumcised, those who serve by means of the Spirit of God and who boast in the Messiah Jesus and who put no confidence in the flesh, **3:4** even though, indeed, I could have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks that he could have confidence in the flesh, I more so—**3:5** circumcised on the eighth day, from the ethnic group of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew from Hebrews, according to the Torah a Pharisee, **3:6** according to zeal, someone a persecutor of the gathering, according to the righteousness that is in the Torah, one who has become blameless.

Because of their apostolic understanding of God, Paul and Timothy do not bother with a person's external credentials for their being authentic Christians as the false apostles do in connection with the Mosaic Covenant, even though Jesus as the Messiah acquired his credentials through the physical act of dying on the cross after God verified his messiahship through his miracles and his teaching. However, after Jesus' resurrection, he became a different being through the Father's giving him an immortal body to replace the mortal one that he had when he was crucified. Likewise, the authenticity of a person's belief is inward, not outward. Yet, his outward commitment to the things of God plays a vital role in his demonstrating his true belief. But all of this is in contrast to the false apostles who are so focused on people's outward actions that conform to the commandments of the Mosaic Covenant, believing that these actions are what qualify a person for God's promise of eternal life.

Paul and Timothy are not saying that they actually saw Jesus during the three years of his first appearance on earth (even though it is highly possible that Paul did), but they are saying that Jesus was physically present on earth and is not now so that his being invisible is a significant aspect of reality just as the invisible and intangible reality of a changed heart and authentic belief in believers is more significant than any outward obedience to the Mosaic Covenant that they could demonstrate.

¹¹³ ὥστε εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις· τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρῆλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονεν καινὰ – Just as God changed Jesus as the Messiah into an immortal being from a mortal being, so God changes each of those who is “in the Messiah” into “a new creation,” someone who has a new heart and new desires of belief in Jesus and obedience to him. His old orientation towards sin and away from God “have passed away.” “New things have come into existence,” new things are authentic belief, repentance, and obedience without focusing on the Mosaic Covenant and external qualifications in order to acquire God's blessings.

People do not remain the same when they engage in true spirituality, as the false apostles are claiming, i.e., that you simply take who you are and apply it to obeying the Mosaic Covenant, thus pleasing God quite easily. Instead, God makes them different people, who are boldly open about their sinfulness and God's grace as Paul and Timothy are. As a result, their oldness of being closed and blind to their immoral condition and in desperate need of God's initiating grace and mercy goes away.

Just as Jesus became a new, immortal creation after his resurrection, God has recreated a important element of those human beings who are authentic believers—their hearts and minds. Their old fundamental rebellion and enslavement to their sinfulness has been changed into an enslavement to the things of God and a fundamental desire for eternal life, mercy, and moral perfection at the level of their hearts and minds. This is what authenticates their belief instead of outwardly obeying the Mosaic Covenant as the false apostles are claiming.

¹¹⁴ τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ καταλλάξαντος ἡμᾶς ἑαυτῷ διὰ Χριστοῦ καὶ δόντος ἡμῖν τὴν διακονίαν τῆς καταλλαγῆς – Here Paul begins an argument to the effect that there are always four parties involved in the process of people relating to God properly and acquiring salvation. They are 1) God, 2) Jesus the Messiah, 3) Paul (and his co-workers such as Timothy), and 4) Paul's audience, in this case the Corinthians. The process obviously begins with the storyteller, the transcendent God, and He as the creator is the ultimate source of the rest of the process.

Thus, “everything [pertaining to salvation] is from God,” the first party in the process.

Then, He has “reconciled Paul and Timothy to Himself through the Messiah,” through Jesus, the second party, and his death and resurrection which are integral to the process (in contrast to the false apostles who want to make the Mosaic Covenant the integral part at this point).

Then, He has “given to [Paul and Timothy] the service of reconciliation,” that they, the third party, are to proclaim “the message of reconciliation” to “the world” whom God “was reconciling...to Himself by means of the Messiah” (in contrast to the false apostles who consider themselves those who are proclaiming the correct message of Jesus of obeying the Mosaic Covenant in order to become reconciled as sinners to God and His friends).

Then, in the next verse, v. 20, Paul and Timothy become “ambassadors for the Messiah as God exhorts people through [them], ‘We beg you on behalf of the Messiah, be reconciled to God’” so that the Corinthians are the fourth party in this process, the same as in the case of the false apostles.

In contrast to the false apostles who always want to point to Moses and something they have done according to the Mosaic Covenant in and of themselves to qualify for eternal life, Paul and Timothy claim that God is the One who brings about what He desires in regard to His plans and purposes of salvation for them *through Jesus*, even giving them the responsibility to serve people by announcing that they can be reconciled to God *through Jesus* (and by implication the New Covenant, not the Mosaic Covenant). This is to say that “everything” that ends up contributing to a person's acquiring God's blessing of eternal mercy and life comes from God and not from the individuals who qualify for and earn this blessing through the obedience to the Mosaic Covenant and their external qualifications.

And Paul is implying that of course it is God's sovereign grace which has resulted in Timothy's and his being changed from the status as God's enemies to the status as His friends. Thus, God Himself is the ultimate credential for anyone who wants something to point to outside himself as that which proves that he is a Christian, because God is the final source of this. Paul and

Timothy can confidently say that God is the One and the only One who has brought about forgiveness for them *through Jesus*, not through Moses. In addition, they can say with equal confidence that God has officially commissioned Paul, and therefore Timothy as his associate and apostolic co-worker, to carry out the responsibility of being the sole apostle to the Gentiles and serving people by proclaiming His gospel of the correct Jesus (in contrast to the Jesus of the Jewish false apostles).

¹¹⁵ ὥς ὅτι θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ κόσμον καταλλάσσειν ἑαυτῷ, μὴ λογιζόμενος αὐτοῖς τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν καὶ θέμενος ἐν ἡμῖν τὸν λόγον τῆς καταλλαγῆς – Paul defines reconciliation as God’s making His enemies His friends through forgiving them *by means of Jesus’ death and qualifying to be people’s high priest and intercessor*. And God has literally put inside Paul and Timothy the responsibility and understanding of the message of Jesus to serve people by announcing this to them as clearly and lovingly as possible, waiting upon God to work His magic of grace so to speak in their hearts of opening them up to this truth and moving them to embrace it with genuine belief and obedience.

Paul’s and Timothy’s specific responsibility as apostolic workers is to announce in every Gentile setting the fact that God has turned His enemies into His friends through the mercy acquiring actions of Jesus as the crucified Messiah. And this Paul and Timothy do with the authority and accuracy given to apostles, which God has placed inside them and entrusted into their care. Again, this is all in contrast to the false apostles and their message of outwardness in accordance with the Mosaic Covenant.

¹¹⁶ ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ οὖν πρεσβεύομεν ὥς τοῦ θεοῦ παρακαλοῦντος δι’ ἡμῶν δεόμεθα ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ, καταλλάγητε τῷ θεῷ – Still speaking of only themselves, Paul and Timothy, the third party in the process of salvation, want people to respond positively to the apostolic message which they present, because it is actually God Himself who is appealing through them to sinners to be saved and escape His condemnation and destruction. And all this is on the basis of the messianic work of Jesus, the second party—not Moses and the Mosaic Covenant, which supposedly Jesus promoted as the center of a sinner’s relationship with God according to the false apostles. Paul goes on to describe the work and effect of Jesus in the next verse.

¹¹⁷ τὸν μὴ γνόντα ἁμαρτίαν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς γενόμεθα δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ – This verse is parenthetical. It explains the role of Jesus in his death in demonstrating the consequences of being condemned by God for human beings who are sinners, i.e., death, in order that through their belief (implied) they acquire a position to be forgiven and gain eternal life, i.e., justified before God.

God caused Jesus to go through the experience of the punishment for disobedience of dying that he did not deserve in order that Jesus could successfully appeal at the judgment to Him for mercy on behalf of sinful human beings who do deserve eternal death. This was his propitiatory offering which God used to establish the basis for our salvation.

Paul and Timothy are still referring to themselves as the “we” who “are justified before God in [Jesus],” even though the obvious implication is that all genuine believers acquire this good standing before God through belief in Jesus and by being associated with him as those who are “in Jesus.” Thus, Jesus becomes the solution to man’s biggest problem, finding the means to escape God’s wrath and condemnation and to acquire His forgiveness with moral perfection and eternal life instead.

Another option for δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ is “those whom God changed from being sinners to righteous and morally perfect people in eternity.” In this way, Paul would be pointing to their future and eternal destiny. However, I think it is more consistent with the whole context to understand Paul to be talking about acquiring a good standing before God now through belief in Jesus as opposed to through obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. In other words, I assume the false apostles heard Jesus refer to eternal life in his teaching and are claiming that he said that sinners acquire it through their obedience to the Mosaic Covenant.

Here are statements from Jesus which the false apostles might claim they heard and are applying to their “gospel”—

Matthew 5:17 “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. **18** For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. **19** Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. **20** For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹⁸ συνεργοῦντες δὲ καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν μὴ εἰς κενὸν τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ δεῖξασθαι ὑμᾶς – Continuing with his argument that he began in 5:18, “because [Paul and Timothy] work with” God (the first party) on behalf of Jesus (the second party) by being his authoritative spokesmen as apostles, they (the third party) are encouraging the Corinthians (the fourth party) to shun the message of the false apostles and grab on (as they did originally) to the true message of God’s grace, His undeservedly working within them, so that their original belief was not for nothing. In other words, if they embrace the false apostles’ message, then they are forfeiting the right to receive God’s eternal mercy, salvation, and life.

Paul and Timothy (not the false apostles) are working with God in line with Jesus’ death that proclaims man’s sinfulness and inability to please God, and thus they encourage the Corinthians not to reject the message of God’s undeserved grace after hearing it from them and then switch to a mentality of obeying the Mosaic Covenant in order to make themselves worthy of God’s blessings—as the false apostles are promoting.

Paul’s and Timothy’s job is to be examples of God’s gracious stance towards sinful human beings who deserve only His condemnation and destruction by encouraging them to embrace the message of the Messiah regarding God’s kindness and mercy, and to do so with all sincerity and perseverance so as to obtain eternal life. Thus, they work with God as Jesus’ apostolic workers and ambassadors, so that their goals are the same as those of God and Jesus.

Paul and Timothy, however, are concerned about the Corinthian Christians’ faith because they seem to be so influenced by the false apostles who basically deny the fact that is God’s grace alone that causes a person inwardly to meet the necessary condition of a changed heart first and then belief and moral obedience which follow afterwards. If the Corinthians buy into the message that their obedience to the Mosaic Covenant is the primary condition and it also makes them worthy of God’s blessing, even His mercy, then they risk abandoning the truth and missing out on God’s blessings.

¹¹⁹ λέγει γάρ καιρῷ δεκτῷ ἐπήκουσά σου καὶ ἐν ἡμέρᾳ σωτηρίας ἐβοήθησά σοι – LXX, καιρῷ δεκτῷ ἐπήκουσά σου καὶ ἐν ἡμέρᾳ σωτηρίας ἐβοήθησά σοι (תָּהִי לְבָרִית עִם לְהַקִּים אֶרֶץ לְהַנְחִיל נַחֲלֹת שְׁמִינֹת) – Here is the basis for Paul’s argument that the Corinthians must remain true to his apostolic message and not that of the false apostles. According to Isaiah 49:1-13, especially v. 8, Jesus the Messiah, the second party, as a human being needed help from the transcendent creator and storyteller to complete his mission and role as the Messiah, and God gave him the assistance that he needed.

Isaiah 49:7 Thus says Yahweh, the Redeemer of Israel and its Holy One, to the despised one, to the one abhorred by the nation, to the Servant of rulers, “Kings will see and arise, princes will also bow down, because of Yahweh who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen you.” **8** Thus says Yahweh, “In a favorable time I have answered You, and in a day of salvation I have helped You; and I will keep You and give You for a covenant of the people, to restore the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages; **9** saying to those who are bound, ‘Go forth,’ to those who are in darkness, ‘Show yourselves.’ Along the roads they will feed, and their pasture will be on all bare heights.”

Verse 7 immediately precedes the one Paul quotes, and it shows that the Servant of the people of Israel was “despised” by them. Yet God will cause him to be worshiped by “kings” and “princes” of the Gentiles. But I think that the fact that he is “despised” by his own people, the Jews, had to be discouraging to him and indicates that he is going to need some help in fulfilling his role and bringing about “salvation” for them and Gentiles such that he actually seeks help from Yahweh in order to do so.

God in Isaiah does not specify exactly when the servant, i.e., Jesus, becomes despised by his people, but we know that the Jewish leadership opposed him during his entire three-year ministry and especially his last night before the day of his crucifixion. Thus, God’s point in Isaiah is to say that this servant is not well treated by the nation of Israel, and as a human being needs His help to endure the hostility towards him and accomplish his goal of dying for the nation that he might qualify to be their savior.

Three options for whom this quote is meant by Paul – 1) The Corinthians as they face into the help they need to embrace God’s grace and reject the false apostles’ message; 2) Paul and Timothy as they face into the criticisms of the false apostles and some of the Corinthians in order to continue proclaiming the true gospel; 3) Both #1 and #2.

Probably #3 is the correct option—that just as the very human Jesus, the Servant of God named Israel in Isaiah 49, needed help to fulfill his mission and responsibility in the face of adversity, even the rejection of the his own people, so all of his followers, both the apostles and their audiences, should look at every day as an acceptable time and a day of salvation whereby they need God’s assistance and grace to remain faithful to the apostolic message.

Therefore, as God listened to Jesus and helped him to endure his crucifixion and raised him from the dead, God listens to bona fide followers of Jesus and helps them endure such things as the error of the false apostles and any suffering they endure like that of Paul’s and Timothy’s in 6:4-10 in order to persevere in their belief in the crucified and resurrected Messiah, Jesus. This goes along with Paul’s saying that God is renewing them day by day in their inner being (4:16).

¹²⁰ ἰδοὺ νῦν καιρὸς εὐπρόσδεκτος, ἰδοὺ νῦν ἡμέρα σωτηρίας – Thus, to finish the argument which Paul began in 5:18, “now” when Paul, Timothy, and the Corinthians really need God’s help to persevere in their faith in the truth of the apostolic message because of the criticism and pressure from the false apostles, which is analogous to the pressure of rejection and hostility that Isaiah 49:8 says that the Messiah experiences from his own people, he believes that God really will help them all—if they, like the servant of Isaiah 49, cry out to Him for the same kind of help (implied – cf. Isaiah 49:4&7).

In other words, as God gave the very human servant of Israel help to complete his responsibility in the midst of hostile people, God will give the very human Paul, Timothy, and Corinthian Christians help to complete their task of persevering in belief in the Jesus in the face of the criticism and pressure from the false apostles to make Moses and earning God’s blessing through their obedience to the MC the focal point of their relationship with God. As God helped the second party, Jesus, in the process of salvation, God will also help the third and fourth parties, Paul, Timothy, and the Corinthians.

¹²¹ μηδεμίαν ἐν μηδενὶ διδόντες προσκοπήν, ἵνα μὴ μοιμηθῇ ἡ διακονία – In the face of criticism from the false apostles for not emphasizing the Mosaic Covenant, Paul and Timothy can honestly say that there is nothing about what they are doing that can be criticized, because they are merely following God’s and Jesus’ instructions to be true apostolic workers while even they cry out to God for help for their belief and obedience just as Jesus did and the Corinthians should and experience everything that Jesus himself even told Paul he would have to endure as he fulfilled his role as the only apostle to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 9:15,16 where Jesus says to Ananias concerning Paul, “...**Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.**” As a result of what they have endured as consistent with their roles, Paul’s and Timothy’s consciences are clear. Thus, they work hard to do what is right before God and the Messiah, and in their consciences they believe this is exactly what they are doing.

¹²² ἀλλ’ ἐν παντὶ συνιστάντες ἑαυτοὺς ὡς θεοῦ διάκονοι ἐν ὑπομονῇ πολλῇ, ἐν θλίψεσιν, ἐν ἀνάγκαις, ἐν στενοχωρίαις – In the light of everything they have said and are experiencing (as they will go on to explain in detail in the following verses, and then come back to this whole subject in chapters 10-13), Paul and Timothy recommend themselves to the Corinthians as God’s servants—and thereby de-recommend the false apostles—in the midst of extensive enduring of suffering with authentic faith, in afflictions (such as the one in Asia they mentioned in chapter 1), hard times that must be very unpleasant, and stressful circumstances that all could crush their faith. Thus, they recommend themselves differently from the false apostles. The latter do so from their obedience to the Mosaic Covenant, while Paul and Timothy do so by starting with the suffering they have been experiencing and the perseverance of their belief and fulfilling their role as apostolic workers in the midst of their suffering. But all this will be by God’s grace that they endure any and every circumstance in which God places them. Anything negative refers to something that could potentially crush their faith in God as loving and faithful to them as His adopted sons.

¹²³ ἐν πληγαῖς, ἐν φυλακαῖς, ἐν ἀκαταστασίαις, ἐν κόποις, ἐν ἀγρυπνίαις, ἐν νηστεαῖς – Paul now continues with describing the various aspects of his life as a defense of his apostleship.

Beatings and imprisonments – [Acts 16:22](#) The crowd [in Philippi] rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. [23](#) When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; [24](#) and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Experiencing riots by people who oppose them – [Acts 19:40](#) “For indeed we [in the theater in Ephesus] are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today’s events, since there is no real cause for it, and in this connection we will be unable to account for this disorderly gathering.”

The hard work travel to continue to spread the gospel, many nights where Paul’s concern for Christians keeps him up praying for them, and even times when food is scarce in their travels (especially when imprisoned probably).

¹²⁴ ἐν ἀγνότητι, ἐν γνώσει, ἐν μακροθυμίᾳ, ἐν χρηστότητι, ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ, ἐν ἀγάπῃ ἀνυποκρίτῳ – These are all positive and describe Paul and Timothy’s inwardness and demeanor.

In the midst of single-minded commitment to God, His salvation by His grace, and their task of proclaiming the message of Jesus.

Having the true and correct knowledge of the gospel.

Being patient with people as they try to come to grips with the gospel.

Acting kindly towards all people as representatives of God’s kindness towards them

Having a changed inwardness that is always necessary to exist in conjunction with the things Paul lists in this verse

Loving others not as a mere act in order to get their approval (cf. Galatians 1) but out of genuine care and concern for people’s eternal destiny based upon God’s love for Paul and Timothy.

¹²⁵ ἐν λόγῳ ἀληθείας, ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ διὰ τῶν ὅλων τῆς δικαιοσύνης τῶν δεξιῶν καὶ ἀριστερῶν – These also are all positive and not that much different from what Paul said in the previous verse.

Acting in their lives on the basis of the biblical truth as opposed to the false ideas of the pseudo-apostles.

Acting as a result of God’s power through His Spirit who performed miracles to affirm their apostleship and keeps their faith persevering within them.

Powerfully fighting off the error of the false apostles with the weapons of the truth through the message in one hand and the miracles in the other hand (?).

¹²⁶ διὰ δόξης καὶ ἀτιμίας, διὰ δυσφημίας καὶ εὐφημίας, ὡς πλάνοι καὶ ἀληθεῖς – Now a series of dichotomies which describes Paul’s and Timothy’s experience as apostolic teachers of the gospel of Jesus.

Through glory and dishonor – circumstances where some people think Paul and Timothy are great, while the false apostles think they are awful.

Through slander and praise – circumstances where the false apostles slander and lie about them and others talk about them with glowing reports.

As deceivers and true – as those who are looked upon as deceivers by the false apostles and men of truth by those who genuinely embrace the gospel.

These are the effects of encountering both believers and non-believers who respond differently on the basis of what kind of heart they have—either one committed to God or one not committed to Him. There are two kinds of people in this world. Those who think the biblical message is basically nonsense, and those who embrace it as the most valuable information and, therefore, the truth. Compare Paul’s description of Timothy and himself in 5:13.

¹²⁷ ὡς ἀγνοούμενοι καὶ ἐπιγινώσκόμενοι ὡς ἀποθνήσκοντες καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶμεν, ὡς παιδευόμενοι καὶ μὴ θανατούμενοι – More dichotomies.

As those who are ignorant and those who are very knowledgeable – as those who are said to be absolutely ignorant and stupid by the false apostles and those who are seen as possessing the only true and accurate truth of reality by others.

As those who are dying and yet, behold, we live – as those who are actually dying and yet, behold, they are still alive. Paul spoke of this in chapter 1.

As those who are being trained and yet we are not dying – as those who are being disciplined by God through others’ mistreatment and yet they are not being put to death (or going to experience eternal death?).

The first part of this verse continues the description of responses from the two kinds of people in this world as in the previous verse.

Plus, Paul says that Timothy and he are constantly being trained by God to continue to know and believe the NT message of Jesus as the Messiah, and, regardless of their natural process of heading towards physical death or how intent people are in getting rid of them by killing them, they stand to acquire eternal life and avoid eternal death and destruction. This is the gospel for Paul and Timothy, that they know they will inherit eternal life.

¹²⁸ ὡς λυπούμενοι ἀεὶ δὲ χαίροντες, ὡς πτωχοὶ πολλοὺς δὲ πλουτίζοντες, ὡς μηδὲν ἔχοντες καὶ πάντα κατέχοντες – More dichotomies.

As grieving but always rejoicing – grieving over all the losses they experience but always rejoicing in the gain they stand to acquire of eternal life through God’s love.

As poor and yet making many rich – as poor financially and yet making many rich with eternal life through the gospel.

As having nothing while also possessing everything – as having nothing in terms of earthly possessions while also possessing everything that will culminate in the greatest possession of all—the eternal Kingdom of God.

Paul and Timothy have experienced a tremendous amount of loss in their lives as well as sheer poverty at times. They feel like men who have been stripped of everything. However, none of this dissuaded them from grasping and believing the NT message. If anything, these experiences strengthened their resolve to be patient for the eternal Kingdom of God, because they knew that it would be there that they would be permanently rich and the owner of all the wealth, especially moral perfection, with which God planned to shower on them as authentic believers in Jesus as the Messiah.

Taking into account this whole list of experiences that Paul and Timothy have endured, certainly they look like losers, which the false teachers must have taken advantage of by challenging the Corinthian Christians as to whether or not they really want to follow such men. But Paul is saying that all the negative and positive things in his life are what God through Jesus told him he would have to experience as His servant and apostle to the Gentiles. So the Corinthians should not look at these things as that which demonstrates they are losers, but as that which reveals they are winners for Jesus.

The implications of this is that if any other Christian in history goes through the same kind of experiences, he can know that he is in good company with both Jesus and Paul and as a result willingly submit to God's sovereignty for his life just as these men did while they look forward to a magnificent future in the eternal Kingdom of God.

¹²⁹ τὸ στόμα ἡμῶν ἀνέωγεν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, Κορίνθιοι, ἡ καρδία ἡμῶν πεπλάτυνται – Paul and Timothy have been completely forthright and honest with the Corinthians. There is no pretense in their efforts and life, as they are implying that there is in regard to the false apostles, who, by definition, must be living a kind of hypocrisy because of their erroneous view of the Mosaic Covenant and God's grace. Paul's point in this letter and in describing his own life is that it really is only the grace of God that has made him an apostle and continues to cause him to operate in a genuine apostolic manner towards all those whom God has given him to proclaim the gospel. And because he firmly believes this, he has nothing to hide in describing what his qualifications are for being a true apostle of Jesus the Messiah.

¹³⁰ οὐ στενοχωρεῖσθε ἐν ἡμῖν, στενοχωρεῖσθε δὲ ἐν τοῖς σπλάγχνοις ὑμῶν – The false apostles must be saying that Paul and Timothy are less than true apostles and Christians because they are not obeying God correctly and completely, i.e., through the Mosaic Covenant. As a result, the Corinthians have become less than open and truthful with Paul and Timothy about their lives. However, it is the Corinthians (and the false apostles by implication) who are less than true Christians. Paul and Timothy have been completely open with the Corinthians about their sin, their suffering in the same manner as Jesus, and the gospel of Jesus/grace, while the Corinthians are putting restrictions on what they are willing to share with Paul and Timothy because of what they are experiencing within their own guts—perhaps concern that by letting Paul lead them they are going in the wrong direction (according to the false teachers), or concern about not living up to the standards of the false teachers and of even themselves because of how much they have bought into the message of performing for God to obtain, indeed make themselves worthy of, His blessings through the Mosaic Covenant.

The Corinthians are the problem in the relationship between Paul/Timothy and them. Paul and Timothy are not the problem.

¹³¹ τὴν δὲ αὐτὴν ἀντιμισθίαν, ὡς τέκνοις λέγω, πλατύνθητε καὶ ὑμεῖς – Paul and Timothy encourage the Corinthians to be as open about their sin, their afflictions, and the gospel of Jesus/grace as they are in order to demonstrate genuine belief in the gospel vs. the direction they are thinking of going by being influenced by the false teachers.

If there is an even exchange of information about God and experiences, then the Corinthians will see that they should be on the same page as Paul and Timothy (but mainly Paul as the one truly called to be the apostle to the Gentiles; notice the first person singular “I”), believing the NT message and experiencing both the approval and disapproval of other people while depending solely on God's grace through the Messiah to obtain His blessings. Ironically, this allows people to be completely open and honest about who they are as sinners and recipients of the world's hostility towards God so as to be in need of God's grace because of their complete inability to do anything to save themselves from God's condemnation and as those rejected by the world and in need of God's inner strength to persevere in their belief during their suffering and afflictions.

¹³² μὴ γίνεσθε ἑτεροζυγοῦντες ἀπίστοις τίς γὰρ μετοχή δικαιοσύνης καὶ ἀνομίας, ἢ τίς κοινωνία φωτὶ πρὸς σκότος – This paragraph is Paul's way of saying that the false teachers are accursed in the same way that he says of those against whom he has written in Galatians. Thus, Paul and Timothy urge the Corinthians as authentic believers not to work at their Christianity with the false apostles who are unbelievers, because it makes for an uneven working relationship—the Corinthians will be doing most of the work by virtue of (hopefully) their authentic faith. This is in contrast to an even working relationship that they already have with Paul and Timothy, even though they are apostles, because genuine belief naturally produces this kind of relationship among all believers. Together, Paul, Timothy, and the Corinthians will pull the yoke of growing in their faith towards eternal salvation, encouraging one another and being supportive of one another. Thus, getting mixed up with the false teachers is like trying to mix righteousness (moral purity) with lawlessness (sin) and light (truth) with darkness (lies).

Paul uses the metaphor of a yoke on the shoulders of two oxen who are plowing together. If one oxen is stronger than the other, then it will pull the plow away from a making a straight furrow. Cf. Deuteronomy 22:10, “You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.” Paul wants the Corinthian Christians to yoke themselves to someone (or those) who will cause their furrow to be straight and in line with the truth and not veer off into the error of promoting the Mosaic Covenant at the expense of the centrality of Jesus and God's grace. Likewise, he wants someone, i.e., the Corinthians, to be yoked to him so that they are walking together evenly, consistently, and straight towards the eternal Kingdom of God.

In this context, it is the false apostles who are the unbelievers whom Paul and Timothy are exhorting the Corinthians to avoid hitching their yoke to. The NT message and one that promotes the “lawlessness” and “darkness” of following the Mosaic Covenant (or any other religious system that might even be based on the Bible but ignores the simplicity and purity of belief in God's independent grace and Jesus as a crucified and resurrected Messiah) in order to earn God's blessing and at the expense of

the centrality of Jesus and his death and resurrection are like oil and water. They cannot mix together in any biblically appropriate way so as to lead people properly towards God's promise of eternal mercy and life.

¹³³ τίς δὲ συμφώνησις Ἰησοῦ πρὸς Ἑβελίαν, ἢ τίς μερίς πιστῶ μετὰ ἀπίστου – Speaking more explicitly, does it make sense to mix the Messiah (his goodness and the goodness of the Corinthians with their belief in the centrality of Jesus) with a false god (the false apostles' evil with their supposed belief in God but which is so erroneous that it is actually evil and rebellion against God). Or what makes sense about combining belief of the Corinthians with the unbelief of the false apostles? Obviously, none.

Cf. Psalm 18:4,5 and the use of Belial to refer to wickedness and evil. בְּעִלְזָבוֹ is used 26x in the OT, referring to those who act in a way that is contrary to God's moral commandments and to moral wisdom. In Psalm 18:4 for example it is translated with ἀνομίας.

Paul is asking what agreement does the goodness of Jesus as the Messiah, properly understood, have with the evil of the false apostles who are completely missing the significance and importance of God's grace through him in contrast to attempting to obtain God's blessings through a person's meritoriously following of the Mosaic Covenant.

Thus, Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to to stay away from the false apostles.

¹³⁴ τίς δὲ συγκατάθεσις ναὶ θεοῦ μετὰ εἰδώλων ἡμεῖς γὰρ ναὶ θεοῦ ἐσμεν ζῶντος, καθὼς εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς ὅτι ἐνοικήσω ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ ἐμπεριπατήσω καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτῶν θεὸς καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔσονται μοι λαός – And does it make sense to be a temple of the one, true God (the Corinthians along with Paul and Timothy) and a temple of false gods (the false apostles), in the manner as God claimed to dwell among the Israelites and not among the pagan idolators of the Ancient Near East?

The erroneous message of the pseudo-apostles, even if it is all about the Bible, i.e., the Mosaic Covenant, is as much idolatry as that of the pagans who reject the Bible and God outright by making figurines which are representative of.

Exodus 29:45, LXX, καὶ ἐπικληθήσομαι ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτῶν θεός; Leviticus 26:12, LXX, καὶ ἐμπεριπατήσω ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ ἔσομαι ὑμῶν θεός, καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔσεσθέ μοι λαός. So Paul's is not an exact quote. But the Hebrew does say that, even though God dwelt in the OT temple, He also dwelt among the people of Israel. In addition, just as OT Israel were God's people and were supposed to keep themselves separate from falsehood, immorality, and unbelief, Paul and Timothy are saying that so should the Corinthians be with respect to the false apostles, especially because God is dwelling and working among and in the Corinthians.

cf. Deuteronomy 23:14, "Since Yahweh your God walks in the midst of your camp to deliver you and to defeat your enemies before you, therefore your camp must be holy; and He must not see anything indecent among you or He will turn away from you."

The irony of Paul's using these quotes is that they originally were addressed to Jews who were to separate themselves from Gentile pagans, and he is now using them to exhort the mostly (?) Gentile Corinthian Christians community to separate themselves from Jews who are teaching such an erroneous message that he considers them to be unbelievers and idolators.

¹³⁵ διὸ ἐξέλθατε ἐκ μέσου αὐτῶν καὶ ἀφορίσθητε, λέγει κύριος, καὶ ἀκαθάρτου μὴ ἄπτεσθε· καὶ ἐγὼ εἰσδέξομαι ὑμᾶς – Just as God promised in Isaiah 52 to separate the Jews as authentic believers from all other peoples and unbelievers when He brings about the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel at the return of Jesus, so God through Paul is urging the Corinthian Christians to separate themselves from the false apostles and all other unbelievers.

Isaiah 52:11, Depart, depart, go out from there, touch nothing unclean; go out of the midst of her, purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of Yahweh (LXX, ἀπόστητε ἐξέλθατε ἐκείθεν καὶ ἀκαθάρτου μὴ ἄπτεσθε, ἐξέλθατε ἐκ μέσου αὐτῆς ἀφορίσθητε, οἱ φέροντες τὰ σκεύη κυρίου). In Isaiah 52, God is exhorting the Jews, those who have the responsibility to hold and use the sacred instruments of worship in the temple (the Levites), as they depart from the midst of the earth (the feminine noun of reference in the Hebrew text for the "her"), i.e., from other nations, and return to the land of Israel, to keep themselves separate from all other people who are not willing to obey Him. Paul and Timothy are saying that the Corinthians should do likewise in relationship to the false apostles.

Cf. Ezekiel 20:34, "I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you (καὶ εἰσδέξομαι ὑμᾶς = welcome you) from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out."

Again, there is the irony of the Jews' eventually leaving the lands of the Gentiles being compared to the Corinthians leaving the Jews who are promoting lies about God.

¹³⁶ καὶ ἔσομαι ὑμῖν εἰς πατέρα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔσεσθέ μοι εἰς υἱοὺς καὶ θυγατέρας, λέγει κύριος παντοκράτωρ – 2 Samuel 7:14, LXX, ἐγὼ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ εἰς πατέρα, καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι εἰς υἱόν.

Isaiah 43:6, "I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' And to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the ends of the earth (LXX, ἄγε τοὺς υἱοὺς μου ἀπὸ γῆς πόρρωθεν καὶ τὰς θυγατέρας μου ἀπ' ἄκρων τῆς γῆς)."

II Samuel 7:8, "Now therefore, thus you shall say to My servant David, 'Thus says Yahweh of hosts (LXX, λέγει κύριος παντοκράτωρ), 'I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people Israel.'"

Hosea 1:10, "Yet the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered; and in the place where it is said to them, 'You are not My people,' it will be said to them, 'You are the sons of the living God.'"

Just as God has chosen David's descendant, Jesus, to be His Son and ruler over the Kingdom of Israel and the eternal Kingdom of God, and just as He has chosen the Jews to be His people who will eventually fully embrace the truth of the NT message and follow Jesus as their king in the temporal Kingdom of Israel of Revelation 20, so God has chosen the Corinthian Christians, who are probably mostly Gentiles, to be His people and rule with Jesus over the Jews and the Kingdom of God, i.e., the millennial kingdom.

Paul is implying that this is in contrast to the *Jewish* false apostles and anyone who would follow them. They cannot call God their Father as though they are the adopted children of God, even though the gospel is for the Jew first and also for the Gentile as Paul writes in Romans 1:16.

¹³⁷ Ταύτας οὖν ἔχοντες τὰς ἐπαγγελίας, ἀγαπητοί, καθαρίσωμεν ἑαυτοὺς ἀπὸ παντὸς μολυσμοῦ σαρκὸς καὶ πνεύματος, ἐπιτελοῦντες ἀγιωσύνην ἐν φόβῳ θεοῦ – As I pointed out above, “these promises” of which Paul says that he and the Corinthians have are actually ones made solely to the nation of Israel. But just as God will be faithful to fulfill all His promises to the Jews, so also will He do the same for any authentic believer in human history, specifically grant them eternal life and existence in the Kingdom of God. Again, there is great irony here because Paul is implying that God will not grant these promises to the Jewish false teachers but to the (mostly) Gentile Corinthian Christians.

Paul is using a Mosaic Covenant-like phrase, “let us cleanse ourselves from all polluting of the flesh and spirit,” to encourage the Gentile Corinthians to separate themselves from the Jewish false apostles and their erroneous pursuit of the Mosaic Covenant, while living their lives and finishing their current existences on this earth “in the fear of God,” i.e., properly fearing God through Jesus/grace and the New Covenant, and in the light of God’s promises to be among them and in them for His eternal purposes. Thus, the false apostles are people of the height of gross immorality and sin.

cf. Leviticus 16:30, “for it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you will be clean from all your sins before Yahweh.”

cf. Jeremiah 51:4, “Yet I sent you all My servants the prophets, again and again, saying, “Oh, do not do this abominable thing (τὸ πρᾶγμα τῆς **μολύνσεως** ταύτης = this practical action of this defilement/polluting) which I hate.”

Paul switches to the first person singular to highlight his individual love for the Corinthian Christians, and by doing so, includes them in the “we” of those who possess all the promises of God pertaining to His being the Father of those who reject error and embrace truth as stated in the previous three quotes from the OT at the end of chapter 6. Paul also encourages the Corinthian Christians and himself to live their lives in a moral manner that is separate from that of people who are committed to error and evil, especially the pseudo-apostles who say that they are followers of Jesus as the Messiah, but who clearly are not because of how they treat the Corinthians and how they present the Mosaic Covenant by emphasizing it above the New Covenant of the Messiah.

Thus, the “polluting of flesh and spirit” comes from pursuing the biblical message, in this case the Mosaic Covenant, with a false and self-centered perspective of how to please God, i.e., by outwardly following the commandments in order to make oneself worthy of God’s blessings, just as much as from pursuing abject immorality of any pagan kind. The purity of relying on God’s sovereign grace and believing that Jesus alone is the basis for one’s salvation and receiving God’s blessing is imperative in a sinner’s life in order to be pleasing to God and to receive His promises as He stated to Israel in the previously quoted three verses from the OT at the end of chapter 6.

So Paul urges the Corinthian Christians along with Timothy and himself to finish their lives this way as those who have been separated by God out of the world of unbelievers and in the fear of God, i.e., in the context and sphere of fearing God’s condemnation if they were to attempt to obtain salvation by any other methodology than God’s independent grace, mercy, and Jesus as their crucified and resurrected advocate. This is how important it is to get this part of one’s theology correct and to live it persistently while being confronted with all sorts of other ideas that could derail one’s biblical understanding of God.

¹³⁸ χωρήσατε ἡμᾶς οὐδένᾳ ἡδικήσαμεν, οὐδένᾳ ἐφθείραμεν, οὐδένᾳ ἐπλεονεκτήσαμεν – Here is Paul’s direct appeal to the Corinthian Christian community to let him into their lives as their authoritative source of the truth of God and Jesus. He tells them that they have certainly do done anything wrong that would cause harm to their relationships with God, unlike the false apostles, who are eternally hurting them by corrupting their understanding of God. The false apostles are also using them for their own self-promotion and self-aggrandizement, while Paul knows and says that his motives have been to promote God, Jesus, and the Corinthians’ eternal salvation while hopefully drawing the least amount of attention to himself and Timothy.

As a result, Paul and Timothy urge these Christians to open their hearts and minds to them as authentic apostolic workers (with Timothy as an authentic apostolic co-worker of Paul). Because of the influence of the false apostles, at least some of the Corinthian Christians had closed their minds and hearts to Paul and his authoritative message of Jesus as the Messiah. But Paul has been arguing his defense as a true apostle and hoping that it is sufficient to convince these Christians to change their loyalty back to him, and therefore to Jesus correctly. He will say in a moment, though, that he is actually convinced of this because of Titus’ report about the Corinthians.

¹³⁹ πρὸς κατὰκρισιν οὐ λέγω· προείρηκα γὰρ ὅτι ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν ἔστε εἰς τὸ συναποθανεῖν καὶ συζῆν – Two options – 1) Paul is referring to his statement in 3:2 that the Corinthians are his letter of recommendation written in his heart (different from my translation); 2) During the second visit especially, Paul had said they are in his and Timothy’s hearts. Cf. 12:14; 13:1 My guess is that #2 is correct in the light of my interpretation of 3:2 and the persevering love of Paul for the Corinthian.

Thus, he in no way would want to come across as indicating that the Corinthians are now subject to God’s condemnation, as the false apostles would if they abandon their emphasis on the Mosaic Covenant, because, just as he has communicated, the Corinthians are dear to them.

Two options – 1) The Corinthians are suffering the hostility of the world with Paul and also still alive with persevering faith like Paul; 2) The Corinthians will eventually die physically like Paul and Timothy in order to live eternally in the Kingdom of God with them.

While it seems easier to choose #2, I think the immediate context of vs. 4-7 and the rest of the letter leads towards #1. In other words, this like 4:12 is Paul’s way of saying that he and the Corinthians do have a common faith that experiences the hostility and mistreatment of the world while God is also currently keeping everyone alive for His own purposes.

Notice that Paul switches to the first person singular. I think this is to highlight that these thoughts are coming mainly from him as the uniquely appointed apostle to the Gentiles. His whole purpose is to encourage the Corinthians in their genuine belief, not to condemn them for their false belief. This is because he is convinced that they are “in their hearts” so to speak, which is to say that they share hearts that have been changed by God in order to be committed to God and Jesus as the Messiah as the basis for their salvation.

¹⁴⁰ πολλή μοι παρρησία πρὸς ὑμᾶς, πολλή μοι καύχησις ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν πεπλήρωμαι τῇ παρακλήσει, ὑπερπερισσεύομαι ἢ τῇ χαρᾷ ἐπὶ πίσει τῇ θλίψει ἡμῶν – Paul has been and still is (as evidenced by this letter) concerned about the authenticity of the Corinthians’ faith. But he is becoming more and more confident and convinced that it is genuine. Indeed, he is even “bragging” about their faith to others. This has all made him more encouraged and joyful over the condition of their Christianity—that it is genuine. And this in the midst of whatever “affliction” he is currently experiencing (which is what? Criticism from the false apostles and *some* of the Corinthians? Or just speaking generally, because Paul is basically always bumping into the hostility of the world towards God and the gospel? Or see the next verse).

Thus, the Corinthians’ being Christians helps make Paul’s suffering bearable, probably because it allows him to feel good about all the work which he put into them to educate them in the faith (over 18 months worth).

¹⁴¹ Καὶ γὰρ ἐλθόντων ἡμῶν εἰς Μακεδονίαν οὐδεμίαν ἔσχηκεν ἄνεσιν ἢ σὰρξ ἡμῶν ἀλλ’ ἐν παντὶ θλιβόμενοι ἔξωθεν μάχαι, ἔσωθεν φόβοι – Paul has traveled from Ephesus to Macedonia, i.e., northern Greece, on his way to Corinth. But when he arrived there, he encountered more afflictions.

He talks about two kinds. The first is “battles without,” probably direct persecution from unbelievers. The second is “fears within,” probably concern for how people such as the false apostles are undermining his work within the Christian communities which Paul had seen come into existence because of his proclaiming the gospel.

¹⁴² ἀλλ’ ὁ παρακαλῶν τοὺς ταπεινοὺς παρεκάλεσεν ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ Τίτου – In the nick of time, God had Titus show up in Macedonia with good news (for the most part) about the Corinthians. Not only were Paul and Timothy able to see his friendly face, but...

We remember that Paul stated at the beginning of this letter that any true encouragement for those who are suffering in the midst of their faith comes from God, and He will indeed bring encouragement in the form of the truth of the gospel ultimately so that believers can persevere in their faith and not give up on God’s love, grace, and mercy for the sake of their eternal salvations. The result may not be that the difficult and painful feelings of sadness, confusion, or anxiety completely go away. But they are counterbalanced by the truth in the believer’s mind as it is used by God’s Spirit.

¹⁴³ οὐ μόνον δὲ ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῇ παρακλήσει ἢ παρεκλήθη ἐφ’ ὑμῖν ἀναγγέλλων ἡμῖν τὴν ὑμῶν ἐπιτόθησιν, τὸν ὑμῶν ὁδυμῶν, τὸν ὑμῶν ζήλον ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ ὥστε με μᾶλλον χαρῆναι – Not only was it just great to see Titus, another firm believer in Jesus the Messiah, but also he brought a good report about the Corinthians, that they had responded well to Paul’s “letter of sorrow” and longed to continue to have him lead and teach them (thus this long letter of both).

While it was great for Paul and Timothy to be encouraged simply by meeting up with Titus, another true believer, it was even more encouraging for them to hear from Titus about the authenticity of the Corinthians’ belief which manifested itself in how much they were thinking of Paul and longing to see or hear from him with respect to the true truth of his apostolic message while also genuinely mourning over their sin (because of his previous letter, i.e., 3 Corinthians technically) which he will speak about more in a moment—all of which we can assume is in contrast to the false message of the pseudo-apostles. This naturally led Paul to rejoice even more in the midst of his suffering because it further confirmed God’s work within the Corinthians and the worthwhile effects of his hard work among them of educating them in the gospel.

Here in chapter 7, Paul is expressing how delighted he is that the Corinthians have responded so well to his letter and to Titus in regard to the former sin issue, but he is still concerned about the influence of the false apostles, which must be why he takes so much time to defend his apostleship and message, especially in chapters 10-13.

I wonder if Paul sent Titus because he would be the least intimidating of the three of them since, maybe, he had not yet been to Corinth (?).

¹⁴⁴ ὅτι εἰ καὶ ἐλύπησα ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἐπιστολῇ, οὐ μεταμέλομαι· εἰ καὶ μετεμελόμην, βλέπω γὰρ ὅτι ἡ ἐπιστολὴ ἐκείνη εἰ καὶ πρὸς ὥραν ἐλύπησεν ὑμᾶς – Paul states categorically that he is not a sadist who enjoys causing people pain and suffering by confronting them about their sin. While it is true that he cannot help making sinners feel guilty and sad about their sin (if God so allows through the inner work of His Spirit), Paul does not derive any personal pleasure from this process or thrive on it. In the case of his last letter to the Corinthians that made them sad in regard to their sin, it made him sad that they were sad, because he is such an empathetic and compassionate person. And his regret was real even if their sorrow over their sin did not last for a long time and was only for a little while.

As in chapter 2, Paul says that in spite of how sad his previous letter made the Corinthians and him in turn, he does not regret having written it.

Continuing with the first person singular “I,” Paul takes full responsibility for what he and his associates wrote in the previous letter that caused the Corinthians to grieve. This would have been actually 3 Corinthians, a letter which we have lost. But the sorrow and grief of the Corinthians was worth it in Paul’s opinion.

¹⁴⁵ νῦν χαίρω, οὐχ ὅτι ἐλύπηθητε ἀλλ’ ὅτι ἐλύπηθητε εἰς μετάνοιαν ἐλύπηθητε γὰρ κατὰ θεόν, ἵνα ἐν μηδενὶ ζημιωθῆτε ἐξ ἡμῶν – If guilt and sorrow over sin results in true repentance before God so that a person turns from his sin and pursues righteousness and goodness instead, then it is worth confronting them about their sin, and this is what Paul rejoices in. Paul labels this as “sorrow according to God,” i.e., that which happens because of the inward work of God through His Spirit to move a sinner to authentic belief and obedience which includes repentance. And Paul knows that there is a long-term effect of this

biblical repentance, that it prevents a person from missing out on what God has offered and promised to sinners, which he will go on to mention explicitly in the next verse.

According to Titus, they actually repented of their sin, and Paul identifies their repentance as having been caused by God. Thus, Paul can see that God used Timothy and him as instruments of repentance in the Corinthians' lives. The theoretical possibility was that the Corinthians' faith was not genuine all along. In other words, God's sovereign grace assures that people whom He has chosen and in whom He has worked by His Spirit to change their hearts will repent and persevere in their belief until the end of their lives.

¹⁴⁶ ἡ γὰρ κατὰ θεὸν λύπη μετάνοιαν εἰς σωτηρίαν ἀμεταμέλητον ἐργάζεται· ἡ δὲ τοῦ κόσμου λύπη θάνατον κατεργάζεται – There are two kinds of sorrow and sadness when a person realizes that he has done something wrong and sinful.

One kind is in the midst of God's inward work during a person's life and producing authentic repentance that leads eventually to eternal salvation.

The other kind lacks God's inward work and, while the sadness itself appears genuine, it results in eternal condemnation ("death") instead of salvation. Typically, this latter sadness is because of simply getting caught doing something wrong and wishing that one could have gotten away with it. The first occurs because of genuine guilt in the face of a person's sin and evil. Therefore, unless a person is a complete sociopath, he can and will feel bad about his immorality, sin, and its effects in his life and the lives of others. And his sorrow and grief may even look like Christian sorrow and grief. But without God's inward work through His Spirit, this person's sorrow and grief is only in the light of its effects in this world and not in regard to its possible effects pertaining to eternal life and God's condemnation.

¹⁴⁷ ἰδοὺ γὰρ αὐτὸ τοῦτο τὸ κατὰ θεὸν λυπηθῆναι πόσῃν κατειργάσατο ὑμῖν σπουδὴν, ἀλλὰ ἀπολογίαν, ἀλλὰ ἀγανάκτησιν, ἀλλὰ φόβον, ἀλλὰ ἐπιπόθησιν, ἀλλὰ ζῆλον, ἀλλὰ ἐκδίκησιν ἐν παντὶ συνεστήσατε ἑαυτοὺς ἀγνοῦς εἶναι τῷ πράγματι – Paul wants the Corinthians to notice for themselves how much earnestness and diligence this sorrow which was triggered by his letter and ultimately brought about by God for good purposes has produced in them. Apparently it is a great amount.

And it includes even their clearing themselves of blame for false belief by distancing themselves from the false apostles—I assume.

Also, their proper self-directed anger and reproach (disapproval and disappointment) for not having done this sooner.

Also, their proper reverence and respect for God and His judgment if they were to continue listening to and obeying the lies of the false apostles.

Also, their zealous longing for goodness and moral perfection which they will eventually obtain from God in eternity.

Also, their strong motivation to deal with their sin properly, doing whatever they can to right any wrongs in their lives, all of which have provided clear evidence that they are genuine believers—much to Paul's delight, because this is all that really matters to him, not his being a popular apostle among them. Thus, they have recommended themselves (!) to be pure and genuinely intent on obtaining God's salvation through His grace and Jesus only, not through the Mosaic Covenant.

Paul is truly excited to see what God has done in their lives through the sorrow which He has caused in relation to their sin which Paul exposed in his previous letter. It has resulted in all the elements which a Christian should experience in response to their sin. First, there is "earnestness," i.e., an intense conviction to deal with the sin before God in a manner that is pleasing to Him and in line with having a heart that is oriented towards Him and committed to Him.

Second, there is "vindication," i.e., not a getting defensive which could be the meaning of the word, but a willingness to defend the genuineness of one's belief by performing what is true repentance before God that recognizes how wrong one's sin is and the need for God's forgiveness and mercy if someone is going to escape His eternal condemnation.

Third, there is "indignation" or "anger," i.e., a valid self-reproaching and irritation at being a sinner who longs to be different and morally perfect, which of course will be the case in the eternal Kingdom of God.

Fourth, there is "fear," i.e., a sober realization that without God's eternal mercy, a person will experience His wrath and destruction, which would be the most unpleasant experience possible for a human being. Thus, this is not a paralyzing fear, which certainly fear can be, but a motivating fear to rush into the loving arms of God and appeal to Him for mercy and look forward to it for all eternity through Jesus' advocacy.

Fifth, there is "longing," which must be a deep and persistent desire to be free of sin and made morally perfect in the eternal Kingdom of God. This is like the beatitude of hungering and thirsting for righteousness that is an important characteristic of an authentic believer.

Sixth, there is "zeal," which is similar to the previous element, i.e., a strong motivation to deal genuinely with one's sin before God for the sake of obtaining His forgiveness and eventually eternal life and moral perfection. But it also probably involves the strongest of desires to avoid this and any other sin again in one's life—if this were at all possible. While it is not, nevertheless, we can pursue avoiding it as much as God's grace permits in the present realm.

Seventh, there is "avenging" of oneself, which is doing whatever one can to make things right if one's sin has harmed or hurt another person. Perhaps this is just saying, "I'm sorry." Or it is more, depending upon what the other person says would help to make things right.

By engaging in all these elements of authentic Christianity and repentance, all the hardship that the Corinthians are going through from several sources (the false apostles, Paul's letter that has exposed their sin, God's inward work of pushing them into repentance, etc.) is unveiling the authenticity of their belief, as it is intended to do by God. And Paul here is definitely making it sound as though they (or at least some of the Corinthians) had willfully and intentionally abandoned the apostolic message for a while and ignored the sin in their midst while also very possibly starting following the false apostles, which would constitute sin in their lives of which they needed to repent.

¹⁴⁸ ἄρα εἰ καὶ ἔγραψα ὑμῖν, οὐχ ἕνεκεν τοῦ ἀδικήσαντος οὐδὲ ἕνεκεν τοῦ ἀδικηθέντος ἀλλ' ἕνεκεν τοῦ φανερωθῆναι τὴν σπουδὴν ὑμῶν τὴν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ –

Notice though the variant in the MT, “our earnestness on your behalf could be revealed to you before God.” This makes more sense for two reason. In chapter 2, Paul claimed that he did not return to Corinth so as not to appear heavy-handed to them, but he was criticized probably by the false apostles for not caring about them. Instead, he wrote his “letter of sorrow” as the means to show his love, care, and concern, and this is what he is saying here. Plus, he could not be absolutely certain that the Corinthians would respond positively to his letter and urging them to deal with the sin among them in an appropriate way, especially because they had not done so yet on their own. He just knew that before God he needed to write the letter, or he would not be acting responsibly as an apostle of Jesus the Messiah.

Thus, he states here that his purpose for writing the previous letter was not strictly so that the one who was committing sin could be confronted and change his ways and to defend the one who was wronged by him, but so that the entire Corinthian Christian community could have the opportunity to demonstrate the authenticity of their Christianity on behalf of what Paul and Timothy had taught them about the gospel and in God’s presence (cf. 2:9).

It is hard not to see the two people mentioned here as the father and son of 1 Corinthians 5 where “the son has his father’s wife,” and the Corinthians are not paying any attention to the immorality of the situation. Same as in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11. But didn’t Paul deal with his issue in his very first letter before 1 Corinthians? So this must be some other problem.

¹⁴⁹ διὰ τοῦτο παρακεκλήμεθα. Ἐπὶ ὃδὲ τῇ παρακλήσει ἡμῶν περισσοτέρως μᾶλλον ἐχάρημεν ἐπὶ τῇ χαρᾷ Τίτου, ὅτι ἀναπέπτανται τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ πάντων ὑμῶν – Paul and Timothy found great encouragement first in Titus’ report about the Corinthians when they all met up in Macedonia in northern Greece, and even more that Titus himself found such refreshment in his own spirit from the genuineness of the Corinthians’ faith and the way they responded to Paul’s letter and treated him. It has been good for them to see how well Titus is doing after visiting the Corinthians.

When Christians really connect in regard to the gospel of God’s grace, mercy, and promise of eternal life in the midst of life’s hardships and suffering, there is nothing better for a person’s soul and spirit. It is truly refreshing, invigorating, encouraging, and satisfying. You can just take a deep breath and say, “Yes, God is good.”

¹⁵⁰ ὅτι εἴ τι αὐτῷ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν κεκαύχημαι, οὐ κατησχύνην, ἀλλ' ὡς ᾠάντα ἐν ἀληθείᾳ ἐλαλήσαμεν ὑμῖν, οὕτως καὶ ἡ καύχησις ἡμῶν ἢ ἐπὶ Τίτου ᾠλήθεια ἐγενήθη – The Corinthians have not let Paul and Timothy down with respect to what they have bragged about to Titus that is right in line with Paul’s having proclaimed the truth of the gospel to them and their having genuinely embraced it. Paul just knew that they were authentic believers, and he had “bragged” to Titus that this was the case so that he could go to them and experience their faith for himself—especially in regard to the sin in their midst which they needed to deal with. But this also had to be in conjunction the problem with the false apostles and with their promise to send a financial gift to the Jewish Christians in Judea.

Before Titus left Paul and Timothy to go to Corinth, they must have bragged about the Corinthians’ belief, because they had experienced it more recently than Titus (cf. 8:6 – Titus had begun the process of the Corinthians’ collecting a donation for the Judean Christians). Fortunately, Titus found the Corinthians to be genuine in their belief when he arrived to engage with them in the issues that were going on amongst them in Corinth and in the midst of the effect of Paul’s previous letter where he had confronted their sin (the “just as we spoke all things to you because of the truth”).

¹⁵¹ καὶ τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτοῦ περισσοτέρως εἰς ὑμᾶς ἐστὶν ἀναμνησκομένου τὴν πάντων ὑμῶν ὑπακοήν, ὥς μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου ἐδέξασθε αὐτόν – Plus, Titus has grown in his appreciation for and desire to be with the Corinthian Christians as he experienced their reverential reception of him as Paul’s (and the gospel’s) envoy and observed their obedient response to Paul’s letter and the gospel, that it was truly genuine. This may be because this was his first time visiting them as Paul’s way of providing them with truth without his and Timothy’s intimidating presence since they were there during the second visit and had to confront the sin issue rather aggressively.

It was not that Titus himself caused them to be afraid and tremble, but he was representing God and the truth of the NT and apostolic message which they had first heard from Paul. This is what engendered fear in the Corinthians and which was so heartwarming for Titus.

Philippians 2:12,13 – “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

¹⁵² χαίρω ὅτι ἐν παντὶ θαρρῶ ἐν ὑμῖν – Paul is very happy that, to the extent a human being can know other people’s inwardness, he knows that the Corinthians are authentic believers and followers of the apostolic message because of their response to Titus, to his letter, and therefore to him.

Thus, all the defense of his apostleship which he has presented in this letter is not only in the light of the influence of the false apostles of chapter 11, but also in the light of these things in chapter 7 pertaining to his “letter of sorrow.” Here, too, he has expressed that he is convinced of the authenticity of their faith. Consequently, at this point, 2 Corinthians appears to be a softer defense than that in Galatians, because Paul has confirmation of the Corinthians’ zeal for the gospel in the light of the possible influence from the false apostles. But he is still quite critical of the false apostles in that he will label them as servants of Satan (11:15).

¹⁵³ γνωρίζομεν δὲ ὑμῖν, ἀδελφοί, τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν δεδομένην ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Μακεδονίας – Paul and Timothy (notice the switch to the first-person plural) are saying that, ultimately, God’s grace caused the Macedonian Christians of the cities in northern Greece to do what they did and perform their own gracious acts toward others, which they go on to explain in the next verses.

The purpose of these next two chapters is to encourage the Corinthians to follow through on their promise from a year earlier to send a financial gift to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and Judea who are experiencing at least a famine, of not also persecution that is preventing them from acquiring enough food for themselves. But I think that this is always another way by which Paul is defending himself as an apostle by showing the false apostles that he is not interested in obtaining money from the Corinthians, but in their being charitable with their money towards other Christians. This is much more important to him than receiving their financial support. He is probably also aware through Titus' report that the Corinthians have been distracted by handling the situation of sin among them and by the influence of the false teachers, so that he wants to rekindle their desire to be charitable and to finish what they had originally desired to do.

And it may seem a little manipulative on Paul's part to use the Macedonians as an example of charity in order to persuade the Corinthians to do likewise. But in the light of all that Paul is combatting because of criticisms from the false apostles and the sin(s) within the Christian community in Corinth, we should allow him to be loving towards the Macedonians by applauding them publicly for their moral goodness and loving towards the Corinthians by pointing out how God is working in other Christians.

¹⁵⁴ ὅτι ἐν πολλῇ δοκιμῇ θλίψεως ἡ περισσεΐα τῆς χαρᾶς αὐτῶν καὶ ἡ κατὰ βάθους πτωχεΐα αὐτῶν ἐπερίσσευσεν εἰς τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς ἀπλότητος αὐτῶν – In the midst of affliction, which was probably persecution for their Christianity, the people of Macedonia, Thessalonians and Philippians, in spite of how great a painful ordeal they were experiencing, were nevertheless extremely charitable. This is what the grace of God caused in them.

Indeed, this is the purpose of suffering in a Christian's life, to provide God with the opportunity through the inward work of His grace to reveal the goodness and kindness of Christians.

Paul and Timothy got to experience God's grace working within the Macedonian Christians when they saw that they not only rejoiced in the NT message of eternal life, but also, in spite of their own economic poverty, chose to be charitable to other Christians who were in need. In other words, their economic poverty was no hindrance to their being rich in their resolve to remain committed to the gospel and God.

¹⁵⁵ ὅτι κατὰ δύναμιν, μαρτυρῶ, καὶ παρὰ δύναμιν, αὐθαίρετοι – This last word, αὐθαίρετοι, literally means self-choosing, i.e., of one's own accord without coercion from anyone else. In the midst of great suffering and economic poverty, rather than becoming paralyzed in their ability to do what was good and right, the Macedonian groups of Christians remained capable of making independent and moral choices that benefited others who were in need. This can be only by means of God's grace.

¹⁵⁶ μετὰ πολλῆς παρακλήσεως δεόμενοι ἡμῶν τὴν χάριν καὶ τὴν κοινωνίαν τῆς διακονίας τῆς εἰς τοὺς ἁγίους – Not that they had to ask Paul's and Timothy's permission, but they truly desired to help their fellow believers (the Jewish believers in Jerusalem; cf. Romans 15:25-27) even though it would put a strain on their own financial situation. They begged Paul and Timothy for the opportunity of serving the Jewish Christians, i.e., for the privilege of being charitable and gracious to them as part of their appreciation for being fellow believers with the Jews at the center of Christianity, Jerusalem.

¹⁵⁷ καὶ οὐ καθὼς ἠλπίζαμεν ἀλλὰ αὐτοὺς ἔδωκαν πρῶτον τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ ἡμῖν διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ – It seems that Paul and Timothy were certainly hoping that the Macedonian Christians would embrace the apostolic message and give themselves to God in authentic faith as a result of God's choosing to work within them and change their inwardness. But then they also experienced was the Macedonians' wonderful love toward Paul and Timothy and other needy Christians by their being so willing to be charitable. It sounds as though Paul and Timothy made mention of the great need among these other Jewish Christians, and the Macedonian believers jumped at the opportunity to respond to this need. And all this happened in the light of what God desires for how His people act and what He Himself causes by means of His grace and inward work of the Spirit of God.

¹⁵⁸ εἰς τὸ παρακαλεῖσθαι ἡμᾶς Τίτον, ἵνα καθὼς προενήρξατο οὕτως καὶ ἐπιτελέσῃ εἰς ὑμᾶς καὶ τὴν χάριν ταύτην – So Paul has sent Titus back to the Corinthians with this letter and with the goal of receiving the collection of financial aid from them to pass on to Paul. Certainly, Titus had originally hoped that the Corinthian Christians would also contribute to the needs of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, and they had agreed, but without following through yet during his first visit. Now, Titus has all that much more reason to persuade the Corinthians to complete their commitment, because of being able to report on the exceeding charitableness of the Macedonian Christians as Paul is describing it here.

¹⁵⁹ ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ἐν παντὶ περισσεύετε, πίστει, καὶ λόγῳ, καὶ γνώσει, καὶ πάσῃ σπουδῇ, καὶ τῇ ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐν ἡμῖν ἀγάπῃ, ἵνα καὶ ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ χάριτι περισσεύητε – Paul and Timothy have now seen the Corinthians excel in belief, speech, knowledge, and enthusiasm for the NT message, and they have seen them excel in authentic Christian love that comes from the apostolic message and Paul's and his companions' demonstration of it toward them, especially by not being a burden to them financially (as an important part of Paul's defense to them of his being an apostle).

Thus, they encourage them to be just as enthusiastic about demonstrating their faith by completing their commitment to help the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

The word σπουδῇ is used three times in this chapter to refer to the Corinthians' enthusiasm for the gospel (8:7), the Macedonians' enthusiasm to provide the Jerusalem Jews with a financial gift (8:8), and Titus' enthusiasm to care for the Corinthians (8:16). Paul also used it in 7:11 and 7:12.

Another word that seems synonymous, προθυμία, i.e., willingness, is used four times in this context (8:11,12,19; 9:2).

¹⁶⁰ οὐ κατ' ἐπιταγὴν λέγω, ἀλλὰ διὰ τῆς ἐτέρων σπουδῆς καὶ τὸ τῆς ὑμετέρας ἀγάπης γνήσιον δοκιμάζων – Paul has no intention of actually commanding the Corinthians to comply with his request to be charitable to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Instead, he has no problem citing the example of other followers of God (especially Jesus!! – cf. v. 9) to motivate them to do the same kind of thing *of their own accord*. This, then, will provide clear evidence of the authenticity of their faith for both them and him—in contrast to their providing evidence to the false apostles by obeying the ritual commandments of Mosaic

Covenant.

It makes sense that Paul use the first person singular here to emphasize that he ultimately is the apostle in contrast to Timothy and Titus. Nevertheless, he is being very careful not to be coercive, but instead to respect the freedom and individuality of the Corinthian Christians as they consider their responsibility with respect to the financial gift which they originally chose to make. He truly wants it to be of their own freewill and out of their understanding of the gospel and the grace of God. Because then it will be by means of the grace of God.

¹⁶¹ γινώσκετε γὰρ τὴν χάριν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅτι δι' ὑμᾶς ἐπτώχευσεν πλούσιος ὢν, ἵνα ὑμεῖς τῇ ἐκείνου πτωχείᾳ πλουτήσητε – The greatest example that Paul can cite is that of Jesus' graciously giving, out of his wealth as the icon of God, the ruler of the creation within the creation, and the permanent anointed king of Israel his life for sinful human beings, in order to make them rich with eternal forgiveness, salvation and life. In this example, then, poverty is first Jesus' death on the cross, the complete absence of physical life, and wealth is his status and role as the Son of God and king of the eternal Kingdom of God. Then, wealth for the Corinthian Christians is receiving God's blessing of eternal life and mercy—in their midst it is assumed of their financial poverty.

So at least the Corinthians are not experiencing the same kind of poverty as Jesus, i.e., death, in their giving of their financial "wealth" to the Jerusalem Christians. However, neither does their wealth include being God in the creation and ruler of the universe. They are simply saved from God's eternal condemnation and destruction for the sake of eternal life, which is certainly wealth enough for any sinful human being.

Most commentators interpret the transition from wealth to poverty of Jesus to be his leaving heaven as the 2nd person of the Trinity and becoming a man on earth.

¹⁶² καὶ γνώμην ἐν τούτῳ δίδωμι – Paul has no intention to strong-arm the Corinthians into doing what is good and right. Yet, there is always the example of Jesus, and Paul offers his thoughts as an apostle on this whole issue.

¹⁶³ τοῦτο γὰρ ὑμῖν συμφέρει, οἵτινες οὐ μόνον τὸ ποιῆσαι ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ θέλαιν προενήρξασθε ἀπὸ πέρυσιν – The Corinthians had agreed with Paul a year ago to help the Jerusalem Jewish Christians. While he is not commanding them to follow through on their commitment, he is saying that doing so, i.e., doing good towards others and fulfilling one's commitment to them, is better for them than not doing so, especially when they had originally decided and were eager to make this gift so long ago. The benefit is that they are proving out the authenticity of their belief. Cf. Acts 20:35, "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Cf. **2 Corinthians 8:9** You know about the grace of our Lord Jesus the Messiah, that, while being rich, he became poor on your account, so that you may become rich by means of his poverty.

He also points to the desire that arose within them to act in this loving way. In other words, their actions were not going to occur simply because they were choosing to act, but also because there was a genuine desire and earnestness within them to do something that would be incredibly loving and charitable towards their fellow believers in the far distant land of Israel and who were even for the most part different ethnically. And they should still listen to this desire as itself a good thing within them brought about by the grace of God through His Spirit and His work within them.

¹⁶⁴ νυνὶ δὲ καὶ τὸ ποιῆσαι ἐπιτελέσατε, ὅπως καθάπερ ἡ προθυμία τοῦ θέλαιν, οὕτως καὶ τὸ ἐπιτελέσαι ἐκ τοῦ ἔχειν – Even though Paul is merely giving his opinion (v. 10), nevertheless he can still use the imperative mood to urge them to follow through on their year-old desire to help the Jerusalem Christians. Why? Because this is better than not doing so (cf. v. 10), especially because their desire was in line with what God desires for all Christians, to love one another by meeting each other's needs. The phrase "out of what you have" identifies that Paul is not concerned with the amount of their gift, but with their hearts and their motivation to do so, as he goes on to explain.

¹⁶⁵ εἰ γὰρ ἡ προθυμία πρόκειται, καθὼς ἐὰν ἔχη εὐπρόσδεκτος, οὐ καθὼς οὐκ ἔχει – Ultimately, inwardness and the action that ensues from it are more important than the impact of the good deed, i.e., that the Corinthians' could possibly solve all the financial problems of the Jewish Christians in Judea. This is to say that the size of the gift is not important. It is merely the giving the financial gift itself from a heart of authentic belief that is.

Nevertheless, it is also true according to Paul's argument in these verses that if a Christian has an eager desire to meet another Christian's need, then he should follow through on this desire as part of what constitutes righteousness and proper obedience to God and proves out the authenticity of his belief.

Cf. the story of the widow and her two mites in Luke 21:1-4 where the greatness of her gift was really in her inwardness and the action that resulted from it, not in the two coins that she gave. Nevertheless, authentic inwardness permits someone to give from poverty, not just from wealth. Indeed, to give when the world would assess someone's situation as preventing them from giving is the result of authentic inwardness, which actually is like Jesus' situation, who gave out of the wealth of his status and role (cf. v. 9). Thus, Christians give whatever they can like Jesus—out of their status and role as saved, sinful human beings.

¹⁶⁶ οὐ γὰρ ἵνα ἄλλοις ἄνεσις, ὑμῖν θλίψις, ἀλλ' ἐξ ἰσότητος – Here is an interesting point that Paul is making. He is saying that one of the goals of God's grace *within the Christian community* is to motivate Christians to meet the basic needs of other Christians, not so that the latter will not suffer while the former suffer, but so that both may have their needs met to the extent possible by the sharing of resources. And Paul will go on to point out that these basic needs are both physical (money, food, clothing, etc.) and spiritual (the gospel message which can result in authentic belief and eternal mercy and salvation).

Romans 15:25 But now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. **26** For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. **27** Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.

Thus, the “equity” in this verse refers ultimately to Christians’ recognizing that they have equal value and significance before God and therefore an equal right to be loved by one another, even if their financial resources or spiritual resources never happen to be equal within the body of Christ. This is to say that they should all value each other with fairness and impartiality to the extent that they are willing to share their resources with one another so that no one has to live in a state of deprivation, that there is an equal foundation before God that constitutes a lack of deprivation. And this state of deprivation could involve financial deprivation (that translates into a lack of food that could lead to physical death—as in the case of the Judean Christian Jews in comparison to the Macedonian and Achaian Christians or the poor families attending the “Lord’s Supper” in 1 Corinthians 11 in comparison to the wealthy families in the Corinthian Christian community) or an intellectual/spiritual deprivation (that translates into a lack of the important ideas of the gospel that could lead to eternal destruction—as in the case of the Gentiles in Greece in comparison to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, which Paul talks about in Romans 15:25-27).

Therefore, this equity does not refer to an equality of total financial or intellectual/spiritual resources among Christians. The Greek Christians may still have more money than the Judean Christians, and the Judean Christians may still have more intellectual understanding of the gospel than the Greek Christians. But the point is that no one is so lacking that they can be considered to be deprived and “starving” when it comes to these resources and that could lead to “death.” Plus, the real issue is that they are sharing their resources with one another from hearts of authentic faith and obedience to God and His Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

¹⁶⁷ ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ τὸ ὑμῶν περισσεύμα εἰς τὸ ἐκείνων ὑστέρημα, ἵνα καὶ τὸ ἐκείνων περισσεύμα γένηται εἰς τὸ ὑμῶν ὑστέρημα, ὅπως γένηται ἰσότης – Two different abundances or one? Physical and then spiritual resulting in equality of hearts and value; or, physical and then physical, resulting in equality of physical needs being met? While the second option is attractive, I think that the first option is actually correct. Paul is saying that the financial “abundance” (even though it is not much) of the Corinthian Christians exists for the financial need of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, while the original abundance of the gospel message among the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem exists for the spiritual need of the Corinthians, which will result in their eternal salvation because they have embraced this message.

As I suggested above, Paul says the same kind of thing in Romans 15:25-27 after having collected all the gifts to the Jerusalem Christians from the Christian communities in both northern and southern Greece, **15:25** “However, I am going to Jerusalem to serve the saints, **15:26** because Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a certain contribution to the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. **15:27** They were well pleased, and they are indebted to them, because, if they contributed to the Gentiles from their spiritual things, then the Gentiles are obligated to serve them by means of material things.”

¹⁶⁸ καθὼς γέγραπται ὁ τὸ πολὺ οὐκ ἐπλεόνασεν, καὶ ὁ τὸ ὀλίγον οὐκ ἡλαττόνησεν – cf. Exodus 16:18, οὐκ ἐπλεόνασεν ὁ τὸ πολὺ, καὶ ὁ τὸ ἔλαττον οὐκ ἡλαττόνησεν. Except for the word order, these are the same. When the Israelites gathered the manna (first use of the word in OT – Numbers 11:6, “There is nothing at all to look at except this manna (מַן) (τὸ μαννα); cf.

Exodus 16:15, “When the sons of Israel saw it, they said to one another, ‘What is it (מַה זֶה) (τί ἐστὶν τοῦτο)?” off the ground, they did so according to God’s instructions that they should gather an omer per person in their tent. By doing so, the amount fit their physical needs so that large families had enough and small families did too. EBC – an omer = approximately two quarts or one-tenth of a bushel. [This would be a little less than one gallon (231 cubic inches), because a bushel is approximately 2150 cubic inches.]. Thus, the ratio of manna/person was the same, meaning that each person had an equal right to survive in God’s eyes. God was being fair to the Israelites. He thus brought about equity within their nation.

Paul uses this example in the OT to encourage the Corinthian Christians to give financially to the Jewish Christians in Judea so that neither they nor the others are in need physically, because this was God’s intent for the Israelites when taking them through the desert. It is not that Paul is advocating a kind of Christian communism but that no one is suffering deprivation within the Christian community when there are people within it who could help make this the case, i.e., that no one is suffering deprivation—physical or spiritual. Each Christian has an equal right to live, and everyone in the Christian community should love his brothers and sisters with this in mind—sharing what he has and as much as he can, even if it is out of his own poverty. Thus, the total wealth of each Israelite family in the Sinai desert may have been different, and the total wealth of each Christian might be different. But God made sure every member of every family had enough food for each day so that no one was in a condition of deprivation or starving, and Christians should make sure that every individual within the Christian community has enough food and shelter for each day. Cf. the Lord’s Prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread,” the implication being that God’s gift to meet the needs of His people may come through His people—as a gift, although the laborer is worthy of his wages.

¹⁶⁹ χάρις δὲ τῷ θεῷ τῷ δόντι τὴν αὐτὴν σπουδὴν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ Τίτου – Again, it is God’s grace who has even motivated Titus by working inwardly in him to be eager to help the Corinthians follow through on their commitment to send a gift to the Judean Christians. Thus, the earnestness that the Corinthian Christians originally had to meet the needs of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem is the same earnestness that Titus has to encourage the Corinthian Christians to follow through on this original desire. God, therefore, is making everyone eager to help all those who are involved in this mutual love which Christians are showing one another. This is part of the working of His grace in individuals that affects the group at large.

¹⁷⁰ ὅτι τὴν μὲν παράκλησιν ἐδέξατο, σπουδαιότερος δὲ ὑπάρχων αὐθαίρετος ἐξῆλθεν πρὸς ὑμᾶς – Two options – 1) The encouragement is God’s; 2) The encouragement is Paul’s. I think that it is #2, that Paul has encouraged Titus to return to the Corinthians with the earnestness from God to help them complete their desire to give to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. αὐθαίρετος (=on the basis of one’s own free and independent agency, literally his self-choosing) is the same word that Paul used of the Macedonians’ decision to be charitable (v. 3). Thus, there is the importance of human beings’ making good decisions apart from being compelled to do so by other human beings, while they also are being caused to make these good decisions by God and

His sovereign control of all reality while also being encouraged by other sinful humans to be obedient to God and do what is good and right.

Thus, we have here the multiple dynamics which are involved in being and living as a Christian. The sovereign author of the story granting people earnestness, the encouragement of the apostles which people receive and embrace, and the choices of those who are thus influenced to do what is good and right.

¹⁷¹ συνεπέψαμεν δὲ μετ' αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀδελφὸν οὗ ὁ ἔπαινος ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ διὰ πασῶν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν – Paul goes back to the first-person plural to say that there was another Christian who had become well-respected among all the Christian groups in the Macedonia and who was being sent by Paul and Timothy to accompany Titus to Corinth to urge them to follow through on their eager desire to provide the financial gift to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

¹⁷² οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ χειροτονηθεὶς ὑπὸ τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν συνέκδημος ἡμῶν σὺν τῇ χάριτι ταύτῃ τῇ διακονουμένῃ ὑφ' ἡμῶν πρὸς τὴν αὐτοῦ τοῦ κυρίου δόξαν καὶ προθυμίαν ἡμῶν – The Christian groups in Macedonia handpicked this man to be Paul's, Timothy's, and Titus' traveling companion. They did so in order that this man could glorify Jesus by helping with the administration of the financial gift from the Macedonian groups to the Jerusalem Jewish Christians and with the enhancing of Paul's and his apostolic workers' willingness and eagerness in serving God.

There is also probably the issue of maintaining financial propriety by including even one more well-trusted individual to help Paul, Timothy, and Titus in the transportation of the money—as Paul goes on to mention in vs. 20-21.

¹⁷³ στελλόμενοι τοῦτο, μή τις ἡμᾶς μωμήσῃται ἐν τῇ ἀδρότῃ ταύτῃ τῇ διακονουμένῃ ὑφ' ἡμῶν – Paul and Timothy figured that the more respected people they had traveling with them with the large gift from the Macedonian Christians, the less likely others would be tempted to accuse them falsely of financial malfeasance.

Handling money matters well, openly, and honestly within the community of believers is of utmost importance to Paul for the sake of the truth of the gospel.

¹⁷⁴ προνοοῦμεν γὰρ καλὰ οὐ μόνον ἐνώπιον κυρίου ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐνώπιον ἀνθρώπων – Even though, ultimately, it is only God who matters in terms of who knows whether or not Paul is doing what is right, he realizes that appearance of good as opposed to appearance of evil is still a good thing. Yes, God is determinatively in control of human actions, relationships, and opinions formed by what people see going on around them, but it still makes sense for us to care about helping people with respect to what they think about the truth on the basis of what they see and experience when relating to us.

And the additional help is wise not only for eliminating any suspicions from people, but also for pleasing God, i.e., that more people have the opportunity to be obedient to Him.

¹⁷⁵ συνεπέψαμεν δὲ αὐτοῖς τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶν ὃν ἐδοκιμάσαμεν ἐν πολλοῖς πολλάκις σπουδαῖον ὄντα, νυνὶ δὲ πολὺ σπουδαιότερον πεποιθήσει πολλῇ τῇ εἰς ὑμᾶς – This is a second person appointed by Paul and the others to accompany Titus to Corinth. Like the first person, this one has demonstrated great faithfulness to the NT message and morality, as well as understanding of it. Therefore, he too will add to the confidence that people can have that nothing immoral is going to happen with respect to the large financial gift that the Corinthians will be giving to Titus and the two men to take to Paul who with them will then transport it to Jerusalem.

Besides, this second person has become very encouraged by Titus' visit to Paul and Timothy in Macedonia in regard to the genuineness of the Corinthians' belief and therefore the increased likelihood that they will actually follow through on making their gift to the Jerusalem Jews. Thus, he himself is eager to participate in encouraging them to do so.

¹⁷⁶ εἴτε ὑπὲρ Τίτου, κοινωνὸς ἐμὸς καὶ εἰς ὑμᾶς συνεργός· εἴτε ἀδελφοὶ ἡμῶν, ἀπόστολοι ἐκκλησιῶν, δόξα Χριστοῦ – Titus' participation in Paul's carrying out his responsibility of proclaiming the NT message speaks for itself. Paul considers him to be one of his apostolic co-workers, someone who understands the gospel entirely correctly and has the integrity not to change it regardless of the circumstances.

The other two men are envoys of the Christian gatherings throughout Macedonia who are the very glory and brilliance of the Messiah. Paul means that by the miracle of the grace of God, there truly are people in this world who are genuine followers of the Messiah, thus representing him and thereby being a source of glory to him by their existence and common faith and destiny.

In this way, Paul assures the Corinthians that Titus is an authentic apostolic companion and co-worker of his. Thus, all three of them can be trusted implicitly with not only the gospel but also a large amount of money which they will be conveying to Paul and then on to Jerusalem with Paul.

¹⁷⁷ τὴν οὖν ἐνδειξίν τῆς ἀγάπης ὑμῶν καὶ ἡμῶν καυχήσεως ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν εἰς αὐτοὺς ἐνδεικνύμενοι εἰς πρόσωπον τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν – Without trying to coerce the Corinthians, Paul is nevertheless pulling out all the stops and setting the Corinthians on a stage in front of Titus, the two men who are accompanying him, and the Christian gatherings from which they come as he exhorts them to follow through on their original commitment to help the Jerusalem believers financially. He wants their love for their fellow needy believers to be genuine and his bragging about them not to be empty and in vain.

¹⁷⁸ περὶ μὲν γὰρ τῆς διακονίας τῆς εἰς τοὺς ἀγίους ἵππερὶ σόν μοι ἐστὶν τὸ γράφειν ὑμῖν – Paul continues using the first person singular and encourages the Corinthian Christians by way of appealing to them on the basis of what he is really hoping is the case with respect to their being motivated to follow through on their gift, that he actually does not have to say anything to them about it. And yet in his own careful and humble apostolic way, he is.

¹⁷⁹ οἶδα γὰρ τὴν προθυμίαν ὑμῶν ἣν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καυχῶμαι Μακεδόσιν, ὅτι Ἀχαΐα παρεσκεύασται ἀπὸ πέρυσι, καὶ τὸ ὑμῶν ζῆλος ἠρέθισεν τοὺς πλείονας – By reminding the Corinthian Christians of their year old "willingness" for sending a financial gift to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem, Paul kindly comments that he thinks that it is actually unnecessary for him write to them about this issue and exhort them to follow through on their commitment. Indeed, their willingness has motivated

most of the Macedonian Christians to send a gift also. So all the more reason for the Corinthians to do the same because they have been a good example just with their commitment to do so.

¹⁸⁰ ἔπεμψα δὲ τοὺς ἀδελφούς, ἵνα μὴ τὸ καύχημα ἡμῶν τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν κενωθῇ ἐν τῷ μέρει τούτῳ, ἵνα καθὼς ἔλεγον παρεσκευασμένοι ἦτε – Even though Paul has just commented that it is unnecessary for him to write about the Corinthians' getting their gift ready, he nevertheless tells them that he is sending Titus and the other two brothers to collect the Corinthians' donation. And this is so that Timothy's and his bragging about their willingness to be so charitable to the Judean Christians is not an empty one and so that when he shows up, they have already collected the gift from everyone in the Corinthian Christian community.

¹⁸¹ μὴ πως ἐὰν ἔλθωσιν σὺν ἐμοὶ Μακεδόνες καὶ εὐρωσιν ὑμᾶς ἀπαρασκευάστους καταισχυρθῶμεν ἡμεῖς, ἵνα μὴ ῥέλω ὑμεῖς, ἐν τῇ ὑποστάσει ταύτῃ – Apparently there is the likelihood that some of the regular Macedonian Christians will accompany Paul and Timothy to Corinth, and he does not want the Corinthians to be embarrassed by not having their gift all ready to present to Paul to take to Jerusalem. Paul and Timothy have spoken so highly to the Macedonian Christians of the Corinthians' willingness to be charitable in their gift, that it would be a rather embarrassing situation if it turned out otherwise when they all arrived in Corinth.

¹⁸² ἀναγκαῖον οὖν ἡγησάμην παρακαλέσαι τοὺς ἀδελφούς, ἵνα προέλθωσιν εἰς ὑμᾶς καὶ προκαταρτίσωσιν τὴν προεπηγγελμένην εὐλογίαν ὑμῶν, ταύτην ἐτοίμην εἶναι οὕτως ὡς εὐλογίαν ὅκαὶ μὴ ὡς πλεονεξίαν – Notice that Paul contrasts εὐλογίαν with πλεονεξίαν. I think that he is referring more to their motivation than to the amount of money, so that εὐλογίαν is better translated "praiseworthy," while πλεονεξίαν is better translated "grudgingly granted with greed." While Paul does not feel that it is necessary to exhort the Corinthians to follow through on their commitment, he does feel it necessary to send Titus and the other brothers ahead of Timothy and him to make sure the Corinthians have prepared their gift for Paul to take to Jerusalem. In this way, he is more certain that the Corinthians will give out of their own God-given sense of being charitable (regardless of the amount) than reluctantly or grudgingly if Paul himself were to show up to collect the gift. He does not want them to give strictly out of a sense of obligation to his apostolic authority. He truly wants it to be of their own desire simply to be loving and charitable.

¹⁸³ τοῦτο δέ, ὁ σπείρων φειδομένως φειδομένως καὶ θερίσει, καὶ ὁ σπείρων ἐπ' εὐλογίας ἐπ' εὐλογίας καὶ θερίσει – As a result of what I think Paul means by εὐλογίαν and πλεονεξίαν in the previous verse, it seems good to translate φειδομένως similarly to πλεονεξίαν, as referring to a heart which is not properly motivated to give to others such that a person has genuine faith in God and is looking forward to his gracious gift of eternal life. Therefore, ἐπ' εὐλογίας means "in a praiseworthy manner."

Proverbs 11:24 – There is the one who sows, and he adds all the more. And there is the one who refrains from uprightness. It will result only in his being in need.

Proverbs 22:9 – He who shows mercy will be blessed, because he gives from his bread to the poor.

Probably referring to principles expressed in Proverbs 11:24 and 22:9 to the effect that a wise person of authentic belief is willing to be charitable to people in need for the sake of demonstrating his fundamental desire for eternal life, Paul uses this principle here for the Corinthians.

It would be easy to use this verse to teach Christians that generous financial giving (e.g., of a large amount to a church) will result in God's increasing their financial wealth, but this is neither what Proverbs 11:24/22:9 nor what Paul means here. Because he is tying the Corinthians' willingness and eagerness to give financially to their God-given change of heart, he is also tying their pursuit of morality to the eternal outcome of their lives.

¹⁸⁴ ἕκαστος καθὼς προῆρται τῇ καρδίᾳ, μὴ ἐκ λύπης ἢ ἐξ ἀνάγκης· ἱλαρὸν γὰρ δότῃν ἀγαπᾷ ὁ θεός – To the extent possible for a sinful human being who also has a changed heart, each Corinthian should be charitable toward the Jerusalem Christians freely and willingly, not grieving over the loss of what he is giving and thereby doing so grudgingly. His sole motivation should not be simply because he feels compelled to give. Willingness to let go of earthly material means in order to demonstrate that one ultimately desires eternal life is what pleases God. Thus, the giving should be done cheerfully as a sinner looks forward to the final gift of God of eternal life, mercy, and salvation.

¹⁸⁵ δυνατεῖ δὲ ὁ θεὸς πᾶσαν χάριν περισσεῦσαι εἰς ὑμᾶς, ἵνα ἐν παντὶ πάντοτε πᾶσαν αὐτάρκειαν ἔχοντες περισσεύητε εἰς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθόν – Just as Paul said in 8:1, the ultimate cause of any human being's good choices is God's grace. And, indeed, God can and does freely cause as much of His grace as is necessary to work in a person to motivate him to make good and moral choices that correspond to the person's commitment to obtaining His eternal mercy and life. It is just that His grace does not make a person morally perfect in the present realm.

αὐτάρκεια = self-sufficiency, contentment which is internal and therefore leads to making good choices.

¹⁸⁶ καθὼς γέγραπται· ἐσκόρπισεν, ἔδωκεν τοῖς πένησιν, ἡ δικαιοσύνη αὐτοῦ μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα – cf. Psalm 112:9, עָרַבְתָּ אֶת־כֶּסֶףְךָ כֶּסֶף־עָרִיב, וְעָרַבְתָּ אֶת־כֶּסֶףְךָ כֶּסֶף־עָרִיב; ἐσκόρπισεν, ἔδωκεν τοῖς πένησιν· ἡ δικαιοσύνη αὐτοῦ μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος. The psalmist is speaking of both the generous morality of the true follower of Yahweh and his existence lasting into the next age and beyond—all as a result of God's abundant grace to this human being. This godly man and follower of Yahweh has distributed and given his wealth to the poor [pl.] who are possibly being oppressed by those who are committed to evil, and thus his (not the poor person's) righteousness and good works towards the poor will endure into the age of the age, i.e., eternally. This means that the one who is fundamentally committed to God and demonstrates it by his being charitable will obtain eternal life.

Therefore, although the Macedonians (and some of the Corinthians to a degree) lack great wealth to make a financial gift to the

needy Jews in Jerusalem, nevertheless, Paul is convinced that God will work graciously in all them as His ultimate people destined for eternal life to motivate them to be charitable and make some gift to them.

¹⁸⁷ ὁ δὲ ἐπιχορηγῶν σπῶρον τῷ σπείροντι καὶ ἄρτον εἰς βρῶσιν χορηγήσει καὶ πληθυνεῖ τὸν σπῶρον ὑμῶν καὶ αὐξήσει τὰ γενήματα τῆς δικαιοσύνης ὑμῶν – Paul continues with the agricultural metaphor of a farmer’s obtaining seed from a generous source in order that he may sow the seed generously and reap a great harvest from his efforts.

Thus, God provides both the seed and the bread of food that results from the harvest. Paul says through this metaphor that God will multiply the seed (the sense of being charitable) for the Corinthians Christians and the results (which he will go on in vs. 11-12 to identify as gratitude on the part of those who hear about the Corinthians’ charity and who receive their charity) from their righteousness, which is their doing that which is good *as a result of the inward working of the grace of God*. In other words, inwardness is the main issue here, not the size of the financial gift.

Thus, by His grace, God will supply enough motivation for the Corinthians to make their financial gift to the Jerusalem Christians, and He will increase the effect by causing others to thank God for His grace in the Corinthians and for their charity.

¹⁸⁸ ἐν παντὶ πλουτιζόμενοι εἰς πᾶσαν ἀπλότητα, ἥτις κατεργάζεται δι’ ἡμῶν εὐχαριστίαν τῷ θεῷ – In this immediate context and within the agricultural metaphor which Paul has been using, God is making the Corinthians wealthy with respect to their single-minded commitment to do what is right and charitable in every situation, and this is producing thanksgiving to God in others through Paul’s and Timothy’s sharing this information.

So the “seed” that God provides is single-minded commitment that results in the “bread for food” of charitable giving to the Jerusalem Christians, so that the results from the Corinthians’ “righteousness” will be many people giving thanks to God for His grace towards the Christians who have been so charitable so that they have done what they can to meet the needs of other Christians. The “bread for food,” the charitable financial gift, of the Corinthians has been distributed to the poor in Jerusalem and produced also a great sense of gratitude to God in all Christians who learn of their charity, especially those who receive their gift.

¹⁸⁹ ὅτι ἡ διακονία τῆς λειτουργίας ταύτης οὐ μόνον ἐστὶν προσαναπληροῦσα τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν ἁγίων, ἀλλὰ καὶ περισσεύουσα διὰ πολλῶν εὐχαριστιῶν τῷ θεῷ – The effect of the Corinthians’ choice is twofold—it is not only meeting the physical needs of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and Judea (Paul hopes as he contemplates the entirety of the financial gift from both the Macedonian Christians and Achaian Christians), but it is also bringing praise and thanksgiving to God as people recognize that He and His grace are causing people to be so charitable as part of His inner work of properly moving people towards their ultimate goal of eternal mercy and life.

¹⁹⁰ διὰ τῆς δοκιμῆς τῆς διακονίας ταύτης δοξάζοντες τὸν θεὸν ἐπὶ τῇ ὑποταγῇ τῆς ὁμολογίας ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἀπλότητι τῆς κοινωνίας εἰς αὐτοὺς καὶ εἰς πάντας – Again, Paul describes the theological and human interrelationship between the Corinthians’ choice to be charitable and the meeting of the financial needs of the Jerusalem Christians. By virtue of the Corinthians’ manifesting clear evidence that they are genuine believers in God, other Christians who hear about this will give praise and admiration to God for their submitting to the truth of the good news of salvation of the NT message of Jesus as the Messiah. They will also praise God for the Corinthians’ dedication and commitment to participate with them and all others who have the same kind of belief in the Messiah. This is to say that those who are giving are participating in the faith of those who are receiving.

¹⁹¹ καὶ αὐτῶν δεήσει ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐπιποθούντων ὑμᾶς διὰ τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐφ’ ὑμῖν – Other Christians who hear about the Corinthians’ charity and the Jewish Christians who receive the Corinthians’ gift will long to be in the eternal Kingdom of God with them, i.e., with those who are presently experiencing the extraordinarily great grace and mercy of God. Thus, they will all pray for them that they may persevere in their faith and meet them in eternity.

Thus, they all understand properly the principle that God’s active work of grace in people throughout their lives as Christians is what ultimately causes and motivates people to do what is right and is clear evidence of the unity which God has created among them all. God holds all Christians together by His having changed their hearts and continuing to work within them. Then, when people reveal God’s inward work through their righteous, moral, and loving actions, everyone, especially those who are the recipients of their actions, praises God and rejoices that they will all meet each other in the eternal Kingdom of God, thus leading even to prayer for each other to persevere in belief and arrive at their goal together.

Do the Corinthians finally collect and send a financial gift to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and Judea? Yes —

[Romans 15:25](#) but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. [26](#) For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. [27](#) Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.

¹⁹² χάρις τῷ θεῷ ἐπὶ τῇ ἀνεκδιηγῇ αὐτοῦ δωρεᾷ – Paul is grateful for God’s gift of the Messiah, inner grace, eternal mercy, and salvation (God’s whole package), and it is all this that motivates even him to act charitably and mercifully toward others, as exemplified by this letter.

¹⁹³ αὐτὸς δὲ ἐγὼ Παῦλος παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς διὰ τῆς πραΰτητος καὶ ἐπεικειᾶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὃς κατὰ πρόσωπον μὲν ταπεινὸς ἐν ὑμῖν, ἀπὼν δὲ θαρρῶ εἰς ὑμᾶς – Paul now returns to his main purpose in this letter—to defend himself against the false apostles whom he will explicitly mention in chapter 21. We also notice that he identifies himself as the main spokesman in this letter.

He restarts his defense by telling the Corinthians that he is encouraging them with the same kind of gentleness and kindness that Jesus the Messiah used. Just as Jesus gently and kindly through his words and actions sought to teach the people of Israel that he is the Messiah, so is Paul presenting the same message while defending himself against the false accusations of the pseudo apostles and even the Corinthians. In other words, Paul in no way intends to be heavy-handed and harsh towards them. A little later in v. 10, he will mention that people are criticizing him for being weak when present with the Corinthians and heavy-handed

in his letters. These people must be primarily the Corinthian Christians who have been influenced by the false apostles of chapter 11 and agree with them. Plus, the false apostles, who consider Paul's message and style of operation to be quite inappropriate, are have been criticizing him too.

Paul puts it here in these terms—that he is humble in their presence, literally “according to the face,” and yet bold in his letters, i.e., when he is absent. Or at least this is the way the Corinthians view him. But, to a degree, he agrees. He is encouraging and persuasive toward them with genuine gentleness and kindness that is like that of Jesus the Messiah, which must be on the basis of God's grace and mercy toward him in choosing to grant him a changed heart and the responsibility of being the one and only apostle to the Gentiles. In addition, of course, he desires to imitate his Lord, Jesus, since he is being obedient to him. Yet, he always speaks quite boldly and forthrightly about sin and biblical theology in his letters to make sure that he is clear and communicating with the utmost importance for the sake of the Corinthians' own faith and ultimately their salvation which requires the perseverance of genuine faith in order for them to obtain it. Thus, Paul is always walking a fine line between being authoritarian on the one hand in order to be as encouraging and persuasive as possible of the truth and uncaring on the other in order in order to be both authoritative and caring as an apostle.

¹⁹⁴ δέομαι δὲ τὸ μὴ παρὼν θαρρῆσαι τῇ πεποιθήσει ἢ λογίζομαι τολμῆσαι ἐπὶ τινὰς τοὺς λογιζομένους ἡμᾶς ὡς κατὰ σάρκα περιπατοῦντας – The Corinthians already consider Paul to be quite intimidating when he writes his letters in contrast to a meekness that he displays in their presence. In this situation, some of them have become convinced by the false apostles to evaluate him on the basis of his “walking according to the flesh,” i.e., by what he is doing outwardly and the effects that his actions are producing, which is a lot of opposition, persecution, and suffering (cf. 10:7). But, similarly, he does not want to have to treat them with the same outward boldness with which he will have to rebuke them as he seeks to persuade them to reject the false apostles and their message while embracing him and the truth of the gospel of Jesus the Messiah.

Therefore, Paul does not want to come to them this third time (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:1) and have to change the way he typically is in their presence so as to take on a boldness that could look intimidating, while trying to convince them that he is a true apostle. Notice, also, that the phrase “walking according to the flesh” does not mean the same as what Paul means in Romans 8 where he contrasts it with “walking according to the Spirit.” It is not that the Corinthians think that Paul is basing his life on his natural-born sinful humanity while they are doing so on the Spirit of God. They simply are looking at true obedience from only an external perspective and observing that Paul's life looks like a mess, especially because of mistreatment by those who oppose his message, while the lives of the false apostles seem quite orderly and unopposed.

It may very well be that the false apostles are asking the question, “Why would God cause so much suffering in those who proclaim His truth as Paul and his co-workers are experiencing? Wouldn't it seem, even on the basis of the OT, that it would be the other way. God brought destruction, exile, and suffering on the nation of Israel for their disobedience, not for their obedience. And He promises shalom for those who obey Him.”

¹⁹⁵ ἐν σαρκὶ γὰρ περιπατοῦντες οὐ κατὰ σάρκα στρατευόμεθα – Paul admits that, for Timothy and him, there is an inherent participation in the world of external realities. They are embodied human beings who naturally have an external component to what they do as apostles and the effects which they produce in others, even in those who react in a hostile and abusive manner towards them.

However, their battle with all unbelievers, especially the false apostles and the Corinthians who have become convinced by them, is definitely not on the basis of the external realities of their lives and appearance, which is how the false apostles fight against what they believe are lies, i.e., ignoring or rejecting the Mosaic Covenant as that which is central of any sinful human being's relationship with God. Thus, the latter urge only outward obedience to this covenant and ignore the inner work of the Spirit and the significance of Jesus through his death and resurrection.

¹⁹⁶ τὰ γὰρ ὄπλα τῆς στρατείας ἡμῶν οὐ σαρκικὰ ἀλλὰ δυνατὰ τῷ θεῷ πρὸς καθαίρεσιν ὀχυρωμάτων – Paul's weapons do not come from what human beings make up in the present realm to produce what they think is a proper relationship with God, e.g., the Judaism of his day which was focused on outward obedience to the MC. Instead, he uses the power of the truth of the gospel of Jesus as the Messiah to destroy the “fortresses” of false religion which people build and within which they can live securely so as to repulse any attack by the truth.

[Romans 1:16](#) For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Paul is implying that people can derive their authority for arguing what is true from two sources, either strictly from the created reality and their own inherent sinfulness which produces a false religion or from God who has either commissioned someone to be His spokesman as a prophet or an apostle or moved a person to be in the process of deriving as best he can the truth from the divinely appointed prophets and apostles. Paul is saying the latter case is true of Timothy, his other co-workers, and him.

Paul likens people's erroneous worldviews to which they are committed to fortresses and bastions, the walls of which that they will protect to the death to prevent from being breached by the truth. They will use their whole being to fight off the truth in order to hold on to their lies. However, Paul, Timothy, and the others employ the biblical truth (along with his authority as an apostle) that he has learned from the Scriptures and taught to them to breach other people's defenses against the truth and demonstrate their understanding of reality to be false and a lie.

The fortresses of false ideas to which Paul is mainly referring are those of the false apostles who are negatively affecting the Corinthian Christians. These are the ideas that following the MC and making oneself worthy of God's forgiveness and blessings (not Jesus, the Spirit, and God's grace which He independently gives to sinners) are central to a person's Christianity.

¹⁹⁷ λογισμοὺς καθαίρουντες καὶ πᾶν ὕψωμα ἐπαίρομενον κατὰ τῆς γνώσεως τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ αἰχμαλωτίζοντες πᾶν νόημα εἰς τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ – In their sinfulness and rebellion against God, people think that they are being very clever by

devising ideas, reasonings, and arguments in their heads that they “lift up” and believe represent absolute truth when they are, perhaps, part truth but also part (or mostly) lies, thus making them lies altogether which will mislead people. And they use these fallacious reasonings, arguments, and sophistries to battle against God’s truth in order to justify their rebellion against Him. Yet, even if people are not willing to admit their lies, Paul and Timothy still destroy these falsehoods with the truth of the good news of Jesus as the crucified Messiah.

Thus, they continue with the military metaphor, declaring that they as apostolic workers, with the responsibility to obey the Messiah who commissioned specifically Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles, fight against, conquer, and capture falsehood, thus demonstrating that it is weaker intellectually and rationally than God’s truth.

Again, the main target of Paul’s battle against false ideas is the MC teaching of the false apostles of chapter 11.

¹⁹⁸ καὶ ἐν ἐτοίμῳ ἔχοντες ἐκδικῆσαι πᾶσαν παρακοήν, ὅταν πληρωθῇ ὑμῶν ἡ ὑπακοή – Paul, as an apostle, along with Timothy as an apostolic worker, stand ready to participate in and see all rebellion against God punished and avenged by God at the final judgment when also the Corinthians’ obedience will be literally made full and, therefore, brought to its completion. The latter will humbly receive eternal salvation and entrance into the eternal Kingdom of God through God’s grace and mercy. Paul does not know exactly when this will happen. He just knows that it will. And he is implying that the Corinthians must persevere in their genuine belief in the apostolic message while giving up completely the ideas of the false apostles.

¹⁹⁹ τὰ κατὰ πρόσωπον βλέπετε εἰ τις πέποιθεν ἑαυτῷ Χριστοῦ εἶναι, τοῦτο λογίζεσθω πάλιν ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῦ, ὅτι καθὼς αὐτὸς Χριστοῦ, οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς – Here is the crux of the issue – outward religion (of Jewish nature here) with its origin in one’s natural-born sinful humanity vs. inward divine grace that produces authentic belief and obedience through the Spirit of God. This is like what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:12 – We are not again recommending ourselves to you, but we are giving you an opportunity to brag about us, in order that you may have something for those who brag about appearance instead of about the heart (πρὸς τοὺς ἐν προσώπῳ καυχώμενους καὶ ‘μὴ ἐν’ καρδίᾳ).

Paul wants the Corinthians who are being persuaded to engage in MC religious practices to compare their sense that they are followers of the Messiah to his also being a follower along with Timothy. Paul and Timothy are just as convinced as the Corinthians that they are genuine disciples of Jesus—especially because of what God has done to them inwardly.

Cf. **John 7:23** “If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath so that the Law of Moses will not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath. **24** Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”

Thus, Paul refers to the erroneous message of the false apostles in contrast to the truth of the gospel. That gospel and biblical truth are about whether or not the inwardness of sinful human beings has been changed by the Spirit of God such that they face into their sinfulness and humbly appeal to God for His mercy *through Jesus as their crucified Messiah*. However, because no one but God can see a person’s actual inwardness, the measurement of it by other people is impossible, making an evaluation of even an apostle’s success in his serving God impossible.

On the other hand, falsehood is about human beings’ focusing on and dressing up their external actions, especially their religious actions, in order to appear good and acceptable to God and/or other people, while failing to face completely into the depth of their sinfulness. Plus, external, religious actions and their effect on motivating others to perform the same make it easy to evaluate someone’s success, which is what the false apostles are claiming that they can do. Paul clearly does not look as successful as they are in getting people, i.e., Gentiles, to follow God, especially because they have the whole Mosaic Covenant to use as a measuring stick, which, by definition, is unavailable to Paul (because he is looking mainly to what the Spirit of God has done in a person’s heart). Plus, the Gentiles are not obligated at all the Mosaic Covenant, including its religious, ceremonial, and ritual commandments, and the Jews demonstrate their desiring to be pleasing to God mainly through their belief in Jesus. Therefore, the MC cannot be used as a measure of spirituality or religious success for Paul’s effect on Corinthian Christians.

This is why ceremonies, rituals, and religious practices with the number of people performing them have been such an attractive way to measure the success of Christianity down through the centuries, and is certainly still popular today.

²⁰⁰ ἔάν τε γὰρ περισσώτερόν τι καυχῆσθαι περὶ τῆς ἐξουσίας ἡμῶν ἢς ἔδωκεν ὁ κύριος εἰς οἰκοδομὴν καὶ οὐκ εἰς καθαίρεσιν ὑμῶν, οὐκ αἰσχυνθήσομαι – This whole letter is one long defense of Paul’s apostolic role and unique authority to proclaim the NT message of Jesus as the Messiah with 100% accuracy and completeness in the light of the influence that the false apostles of chapter 11 are having on the Corinthian Christians. Paul is hesitant to brag about this authority and his role, but he is going to do so as appropriately as possible so as not to feel ashamed, either by doing that which he knows really is not right (because it could appear as though he is more concerned about himself and his reputation that he is about Jesus and the Corinthians’ faith), or by eliciting the criticisms of the false apostles and the Corinthians. He knows who he is (and even more importantly, God knows who he is). This applies to Timothy as well.

Thus, his whole purpose is to build up the Corinthians in their belief and obedience to the apostolic message as opposed to the false apostles who are destroying and tearing down their faith with lies in regard to the Mosaic Covenant. In 10:4 he used the same word to talk about his intent to destroy with the gospel the fortresses of lies and falsehood that the pseudo-apostles have built. This is all that he wants to destroy.

οἰκοδομή - used 4x in 2 Corinthians – in 5:1 it refers to a building, while the other three times it means upbuilding in the faith

²⁰¹ ἵνα μὴ δόξω ὡς ἂν ἐκφοβεῖν ὑμᾶς διὰ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν – Paul switches to the first person singular to highlight that he, personally, has never intended to be intimidating in his co-authored letters. Indeed, he only wants to be loving and informative so that the Corinthians have the complete freedom from him to make their own decisions. This is respecting their individuality and responsibility before God. Paul is not their God. God is their God.

From what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 11:20-21 (**11:20** You put up with someone if he enslaves you, if he devours you, if he

grabs hold of you, if he puts on airs, if he beats you on the face. 11:21 To my shame, I must confess that we have been weak.), it certainly seems that the false apostles have used an intimidating strategy in their dealings with the Corinthians, even to obtain money from them (cf. 11:5-9). Unlike the false apostles, Paul is simply attempting to present truth in the most forceful and yet careful way—without being authoritarian, manipulative, and coercive. He is always acting out of humility, gentleness, and kindness as Jesus did (cf. 10:1).

²⁰² ὅτι αἱ ἐπιστολαὶ μὲν, φησὶν, βαρεῖαι καὶ ἰσχυραί, ἡ δὲ παρουσία τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενὴς καὶ ὁ λόγος ἐξουθενημένος – There is at least one person who does think that Paul is trying to be intimidating in his letters, while this person also thinks that his personal appearance is not only the opposite. It's offensive. He is it seems both physically weak and a really poor speaker. And we have to wonder if much of these limitations are because of the persecution and bodily injuries he has sustained as an apostle.

Paul was not a person whom anyone looked forward to seeing or listening to, because his body was pretty beat up and he was such a poor speaker, which was especially noticeable in a Greek culture that had focused on physical prowess and oratory with respect to their leaders and philosophers, especially the sophists who sold their speaking skills and knowledge in order to teach others.

Cf. Luke 18:9 and Romans 14:3 for other uses of ἐξουθενέω = to view or treat with contempt; does not merit paying attention to.

²⁰³ τοῦτο λογιζέσθω ὁ τοιοῦτος, ὅτι οἱοί ἐσμεν τῷ λόγῳ δι' ἐπιστολῶν ἀπόντες, τοιοῦτοι καὶ παρόντες τῷ ἔργῳ – Paul wants this critical person to know that he admits that he is “weighty and strong” (but not intentionally intimidating and authoritarian) in his letters, implying that he really cares about the genuineness of their faith and the morality of their obedience, and that he is “weighty and strong” in his loving (implied here – he has not demanded to be paid by them; cf. 11:5-9) actions towards to Corinthians (in spite of being weak in his personal, physical appearance and having poor speaking skills).

He genuinely cares for their faith and obedience towards God and not demanding that they support them financially or acknowledge how great they are on the basis of their multiple religious deeds in line with the MC. His sole interest is in the Corinthians' following the Jewish Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, with authentic belief from God through His Spirit and obedience to His moral commandments.

²⁰⁴ οὐ γὰρ τολμῶμεν ἐγκρίναι ἢ συγκρίναι ἑαυτοὺς τισιν τῶν ἑαυτοὺς συνιστανόντων ἀλλὰ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἑαυτοὺς μετροῦντες καὶ συγκρίνοντες ἑαυτοὺς ἑαυτοῖς οὐ συνιάσιν – Paul declares unequivocally that he is not going to get into a competition with the false apostles based upon outward, religious actions and their effects, as this is exactly what the latter are using to recommend themselves to the Corinthians as genuine apostles of Jesus. Indeed, the fact that the false apostles compete with one another on the basis of their outward, religious demonstrates that they do not grasp the truth of God's grace and the gospel.

Thus, Paul starts to get into the major difference between the false apostles and him in understanding what a relationship with God really is. For Paul, it is what God has done and is doing inside him through His grace. For the false apostles, it is what they are doing outwardly with respect to especially the ritual commandments of the MC through their natural-born sinful humanity by which they believe that they can earn God's blessings. The latter can put themselves forward as apostles by pointing to their religious actions and lives. Paul can put himself forward by pointing to what God has done within him and the miracles which God has performed through him (cf. 12:12). But it seems that the effect on the Corinthians of the miracles has worn off, and the false apostles' religion is sounding and looking very attractive.

Another way to say this is that by using obvious, external elements of the created reality to measure their success, the false apostles are not grasping the truth of God's reality and of the primary importance of what He is doing inside people by opening them up to the truth of the gospel of grace through Jesus the Messiah—and not by making them thoroughly religious people.

²⁰⁵ ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐκ εἰς τὰ ἄμετρα καυχώμεθα ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ μέτρον τοῦ κανόνος οὗ ἐμέρισεν ἡμῖν ὁ θεὸς μέτρον, ἐφικέσθαι ἄχρι καὶ ὑμῶν – Here is another issue that is a bone of contention between Paul and the false apostles. The latter are taking credit for the Corinthians' being genuine Christians and on the right road to obtaining eternal life by making the MC, not Jesus, the center of their relationships with God. The false apostles are also claiming greater success than Paul by having influenced people beyond where they have even traveled, that is, through Jews who are like-minded with them. Again, they are really bragging about what human beings (like them) have done and not in what God has done. It may something like, “Look what these other Jews, who are just like us, have done in making successful disciples of Jesus, so that we can take some credit in their success, too.”

Paul and Timothy are perfectly willing to give God and others credit for proclaiming the gospel where they have not and then only want to encourage the Christians whom they truly know because of their own ministry and these other new Christians to stay true to the apostolic message and Jesus and not to them per se. Examples of this is Colossians where Paul mentions that Epaphras taught them the gospel and Romans where Paul wants only to bear some fruit among them personally.

²⁰⁶ οὐ γὰρ ὡς μὴ ἐφικνούμενοι εἰς ὑμᾶς ὑπερεκτείνουμεν ἑαυτοὺς, ἄχρι γὰρ καὶ ὑμῶν ἐφθάσαμεν ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ – The false apostles seem to be taking credit for the Corinthians' genuine Christianity, especially if they are persuading at least some to them to become focused on the MC and its ritual practices instead of on Jesus, but Paul gently reminds them that he was the first to present to true gospel to them.

Thus, Paul and Timothy refuse to measure the success of their work by claiming that people have become Christians through them because of the labors of others.

²⁰⁷ οὐκ εἰς τὰ ἄμετρα καυχώμενοι ἐν ἀλλοτρίοις κόποις ἐλπίδα δὲ ἔχοντες ἀύξανομένης τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν ἐν ὑμῖν μεγαλυνθῆναι κατὰ τὸν κανόνα ἡμῶν εἰς περισσεῖαν – Nevertheless, while not bragging about the work of others who proclaiming the apostolic message (that would be similar to the bragging of the false apostles), Paul does hope that the growth in

faith and understanding of the Corinthians will leave him free to travel beyond them and proclaim the gospel where it has not been preached yet.

Thus, in contrast to the pseudo-apostles, Paul and Timothy consider it appropriate to talk about only the influence that they have had directly on people. The false apostles cannot help themselves but claim credit for influencing people where they have never been.

Paul's and Timothy's expectation is that God will mature the Corinthians in their understanding of the NT message, which in turn could be said to make Paul and Timothy more successful in what they have done after God assigned specifically to Paul the work of proclaiming the NT message to the Gentiles, which may take them beyond the geographical location of the Corinthians as they grow and become more established and secure in their belief in the NT message.

Perhaps Paul is hinting that, if the Corinthians can get a better and more permanent handle on the gospel, especially by jettisoning the message of the false apostles, then he can direct his attention to other Gentiles beyond them geographically and proclaim the gospel to them.

This also sounds like the same kind of issue when a group of Christians or leaders plant a church right in the middle of other existing churches and then claim that God called them to do this. How does this really make sense in the light of God's call for believers to be unified in their faith which comes from the inner work of the Spirit of God?

²⁰⁸ εἰς τὰ ὑπερέκεινα ὑμῶν εὐαγγελίσασθαι, οὐκ ἐν ἄλλοτρίῳ κανόνι εἰς τὰ ἔτοιμα καυχήσασθαι – Again, Paul's and Timothy's desire is never to brag about God's work in another place as though they have some sort of claim to it. Instead, they expect that the maturation of the Corinthians in their understanding of the NT message will then enable them to focus their attention on other regions beyond them. This will be in line with their desire to "boast" about only what they have done and not take credit for what others have done. If God has assigned other Christians to speak to unbelievers in other places and who have been prepared to hear the gospel and respond with authentic belief, then that is God's business and prerogative. And Paul would encourage these other teachers to go for it. The issue is God and Jesus and not the teachers and their popularity or success in getting more people to become either genuine believers or followers of their man-made religion that might even try to use the Bible as its basis.

²⁰⁹ ὁ δὲ καυχώμενος, ἐν κυρίῳ καυχάσθω – [Jeremiah 9:23](#) Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; [24](#) but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD (ἀλλ' ἢ ἐν τούτῳ καυχάσθω ὁ καυχώμενος, συνίειν καὶ γινώσκειν ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι κύριος ποιῶν ἔλεος καὶ κρίμα καὶ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅτι ἐν τούτοις τὸ θέλημά μου, λέγει κύριος).

Ultimately, this as Paul implied above is the issue—God and what He is doing in which people can and should boast so as not to brag about anything which they have done as human beings.

Thus, the only basis for any human bragging is in what God has accomplished with respect to His ultimate project of securing for Himself forgiven immoral human beings who will live in the eternal Kingdom of God. They are claiming that their approach to "bragging" about their influence in other people's lives is in line with the Bible that encourages people to brag about only what God has done. Because Paul knows that he is a genuine apostle and, therefore, that God will definitely use him in the process of converting Gentiles, Timothy and he can "brag" about seeing others become Christians in the midst of their proclaiming the NT message. However, they are actually only bragging about God, who is the one who performs the inward miracle in people of making them open to the truth.

Therefore, it makes no sense to brag about the influence that others, especially non-apostles, are having on people, because it is impossible to know if the influence is truly biblically genuine. It is impossible to look inside a person's heart and see exactly what is going on there and whether or not God has performed the miraculous circumcision of the heart that is necessary for a person to have genuine belief.

²¹⁰ οὐ γὰρ ὁ ἑαυτὸν συνιστῶν, ἐκεῖνός ἐστι δόκιμος, ἀλλ' ὃν ὁ Κύριος συνίστησιν – The conclusion one has to draw from Paul's argument here is the one which he presents here. Ultimately, it is God's providing the clear evidence of apostleship that counts in terms of who has authority to speak on His behalf and who does not. This is what Paul is arguing by mentioning his suffering and then the miracles which God performed through him too.

But how does one know whom God has chosen to give this authority? We know from John 12-17 that Jesus declares that it is only the apostles (and biblical authors, by extrapolation), who have the divine authority to speak on behalf of Jesus and with the same level of authority and accuracy. And then from the book of Acts we learn about Paul and God's calling him to the role of apostle to the Gentiles. So how can the rest of us tell who is an apostle? Only by their stating their association with Jesus personally through the Scriptures and by examining what they say in these same Scriptures to make sure it is completely coherent with what other apostles say about the biblical message. In other words, it is both an objective and a subjective process.

And then how can we know to whom we should listen as teachers of the apostolic message two thousand years later? Only by individually thinking through very carefully what we are hearing from these teachers in the light of what we individually see the apostles in the Bible saying. In other words, it is helpful to listen to Bible teachers, but not without our doing a lot of work on our own as we listen to compare what we are hearing with what we carefully think through what we see the Bible saying. And this then makes it appropriate to disagree humbly with the teachers when we think it is appropriate. Plus, hopefully they have the humility to realize that they are not apostles and are going to be wrong about their interpretations in certain places throughout the entirety of their lives.

²¹¹ ὄφελον ἀνείχεσθέ μου μικρὸν τῇ ἀφροσύνῃ· ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀνέχεσθέ μου – It seems that Paul is now going to present evidence for how God is recommending him as a true apostle, even though he will call it a bit of foolishness. But he feels compelled to use

this strategy in the light of how the false apostles are acting and what they are saying.

Paul switches back to the first person singular, because he wants to talk about his own individual experience as an apostle and what this means to the Corinthians. He is saying that he may seem a little eccentric in the light of how he would prefer to promote himself as an apostle, i.e., by strictly the miracles that God performs through him and the way his message resonates in sinners, but he hopes that they will bear with him in his craziness on behalf of the NT message, even as he drones on and on about it in order to “brag” carefully about himself while also appropriately criticizing the false apostles. Indeed, they are “putting up” with him as demonstrated for example by Titus’ report in chapter 7 of the Corinthians’ love for Paul and desire to see him. It seems just that there are a few among them who are being influenced by the false apostles.

Cf. 11:4,19,20 for negative meanings of ἀνέχω. It is one thing to put up with the truth by submitting to it and believing it. It is certainly another thing to put up with falsehood by submitting to it and believing it. Thus, this chapter is all about “putting up” with the right people who are supposedly teaching the Bible and rejecting the wrong people who definitely are not teaching it correctly.

ἀφορσύνῃ – used 3x in 2 Corinthians, all in this chapter – 11:1,17,21

²¹² ζήλω γὰρ ὑμᾶς θεοῦ ζήλω ἡρμοσάμην γὰρ ὑμᾶς ἐνὶ ἀνδρὶ παρθένον ἀγνὴν παραστήσαι τῷ Χριστῷ – Paul unequivocally declares that his concern for the Corinthians is no less than or different from God’s.

Here is an interesting parallel in [Numbers 25:11](#) “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was **jealous** with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel ⁱⁿ My jealousy.”

Just as God expressed His jealousy for the Israelites in the OT, Paul feels the same way toward the Corinthians and to whom they are going to grant authority—to the false apostles or him, especially because Paul was the first to present the NT message to them.

Thinking of the Corinthians as a bride, Paul had engaged them to be married to Jesus at the judgment so that they would be his subjects in the eternal Kingdom of God. Indeed, by their single-minded adherence to the truth of the biblical message, they would show up at the judgment as “a pure virgin,” as a group who are unadulterated and uncontaminated intellectually and uncorrupted and unstained spiritually by the falsehood and lies from elements within their culture, whether Jewish or pagan. Here, the lies are coming from Jewish false apostles. In the face of their attempting to be so persuasive in the Corinthians to convince them of the “authenticity” of their Christianity, Paul is encouraging them to work at protecting themselves from Satan’s and the world’s evil and lies by thoughtfully and carefully holding to the apostolic message which Paul and Timothy first taught them.

To succumb to these men’s lies would be to allow themselves to be deceived as Eve was by Satan the serpent. It would be to stop putting the hard work into thinking clearly when it comes to matters of God which Paul has already taught them, and now they are allowing the truth to slip ever so easily from their minds.

Instead of remaining single-minded in their committed to the gospel which they learned, they are becoming double-minded like the false apostles as they combine truth with lies—Jesus is the Messiah, but the Mosaic Covenant is more important than he is and he even said so. We can see how from the following passage in the Sermon on the Mount the Jews could get the impression that Jesus’ priority is to promote the MC and not himself as that which is central to anyone’s relationship with God. But all he was saying was that God would fulfill His promises to Abraham and that Jews who grasped this and were willing to obey Him with changed hearts would experience this fulfillment.

Matthew 5:17 Do not think that I came to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

5:18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away not one of the smallest letters nor one small stroke of the letters shall pass away from the Torah, until everything comes about. **5:19** Therefore, whoever annuls one of the least of these commandments and thus teaches men, he shall be called least in the kingdom of the heavens. But whoever performs even the least of these commandments and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of the heavens. **5:20** For I say to you that if your righteousness is not greater than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of the heavens.

²¹³ φοβούμαι δὲ μή πως, ὡς ὁ ὄφις ἐξηπάτησεν Εὐάν ἐν τῇ πανουργίᾳ αὐτοῦ, φθαρῇ τὰ νοήματα ὑμῶν ἀπὸ τῆς ἀπλότητος καὶ τῆς ἀγνότητος τῆς εἰς τὸν Χριστόν – Paul considers the Corinthians’ attraction to the false apostles to be of equal error to Satan’s deception of Eve and convincing her to draw away from obeying God in the Garden of Eden. Just as she thought that she could make herself wise by disobeying God, the Corinthians think that they are becoming wiser by focusing on the Mosaic Covenant and making themselves acceptable to God through it. Thus, the Corinthians’ buying into the message of the false apostles is making them lose their intellectual and spiritual virginity, because the false apostles are deceiving them into thinking that strict adherence to the Mosaic Covenant is necessary for Gentiles as well as Jews—even in the midst of believing that Jesus is the Messiah. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that these false apostles do not appreciate the significance of Jesus’ death as a propitiatory offering to God in order for him to qualify to be the high priest of sinners before God so that they obtain His eternal mercy and forgiveness.

²¹⁴ εἰ μὲν γὰρ ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἄλλον Ἰησοῦν κηρύσσει ὃν οὐκ ἐκηρύξαμεν, ἢ πνεῦμα ἕτερον λαμβάνετε ὃ οὐκ ἐλάβετε, ἢ εὐαγγέλιον ἕτερον ὃ οὐκ ἐδέξασθε, καλῶς ἀνέχεσθε – I do not think that Paul is commending the Corinthians for their excellent discernment. Instead, he is being ironic and providing them with a gentle rebuke, which is more coherent in this context (cf.

11:19,20 for two more uses of ἀνέχω with the same negative, ironic meaning). The Corinthians are putting up with and allowing themselves to be influenced by false teachers rather than challenging and refuting them. Their “putting up with [the false message] well enough” is really the opposite of “well enough” taken literally and instead to their shame and possible eternal detriment if they were to keep going down this road. They are not holding on to what Paul and Timothy have taught them.

And if they can go astray so easily, those who were personally taught by Paul, the foremost theologian of all time besides Jesus,

what hope do the rest of us have for not at some point in our Christian journeys distorting the biblical message? Our hope as genuine believers is that the Spirit of God within us will keep pushing us towards examining the Bible carefully and thinking through exactly what its message is, not settling for anyone's telling us what it is without critiquing their arguments as diligently as possible. We should also be very careful of "traditional" doctrines, where people claim that Christians have believed them for even hundreds of years. We should be willing to think critically about all so-called "orthodox" doctrines and reject them if we, with the help of others in our own personal study of the Bible, conclude that they are wrong.
Cf. 11:19,20.

²¹⁵ λογίζομαι γὰρ μηδὲν ὑστερηκέναι τῶν ὑπερλίαν ἀποστόλων – Again, Paul is being ironic. To call the false apostles "super-apostles" is most likely what they think of themselves because of their supposed excellent performance of the Mosaic Covenant, but it is the opposite of who they really are. They are portraying themselves as really, really spiritual, good, and important. But Paul knows that he is no less good and important. He is in no way inferior to them.

It makes sense that Paul again switches to the first person singular "I" to indicate that really it is only he who is an apostle and not Timothy. Yet, he considers Timothy to be a co-equal of sorts as a apostolic co-worker. He has referred to him when he used the first-person plural "we," but this was only to show that Timothy is on the same apostolic page as he is with respect to their theology, even if Timothy is not actually an apostle.

²¹⁶ εἰ δὲ καὶ ιδιώτης τῷ λόγῳ, ἀλλ' οὐ τῇ γνώσει, ἀλλ' ἐν παντί φανερώσαντες ἐν πασιν εἰς ὑμᾶς – Paul admits that he is not a great orator, which the false apostles must be pointing out also, thus making them think that this even makes them superior to him. And, unfortunately, some of the Corinthians are buying this argument!! Yet, Paul also declares that Timothy and he truly understand the biblical message to a depth that is unmatched and unparalleled in the world (except among the other apostles) and have demonstrated the resultant wisdom and humility. He goes on to explain in the next verse how they have shown this wisdom and humility of the gospel.

²¹⁷ ἢ ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησα ἑμαυτὸν ταπεινῶν ἵνα ὑμεῖς ὑψωθῆτε, ὅτι δωρεὰν τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ εὐαγγέλιον εὐηγγελισάμην ὑμῖν – Again, Paul is being ironic. Did he sin by not demanding that the Corinthians support him financially as he presented the gospel to them? The answer to this rhetorical question is of course a resounding no. Indeed, he humbled himself as a true apostle so that they with their new-found faith could experience of sense of being exalted into the position of being those who are being saved by God from His eternal condemnation. Paul would rather that those to whom he proclaims the gospel and who embrace it be considered as having a higher status and position, even though he is the apostle and authoritative spokesman for the Messiah. This implies that the false apostles have given the impression that their legitimacy is partly based upon the fact that they need and require that people support them financially. However, this may be a cultural idea, too. For example, there were the Sophists in Greek culture who did charge for their instruction and considered it a legitimate and worthwhile endeavor. Similarly, the false apostles have institutionalized their activity and made it the object of financial support in order to indicate publicly that they are authorized apostles of Jesus the Messiah. And Paul in 1 Corinthians 9 does argue that he has the right to earn his living from his work as an apostle. Nevertheless, he has never made anyone feel that the only way that he can be an authorized apostle is if people make sure that he survives financially.

Thus, Paul has not demanded that the Corinthians love him to the same degree that he loves them, because he knows they cannot match the giftedness which God has granted him. This is in contrast to the implicit and explicit pressure of modern churches to maintain their presence and their institutions, as if they are saying, "You must love the leadership and our institution to the same degree that we have loved you—so that we can continue to exist and look successful!"

To paraphrase Soren Kierkegaard in CUP, "Today, Sunday, I am walking into a church building, i.e., a pagan temple." Page 201 – "Now, if the problem is to calculate where there is more truth..., whether on the side of the person who only objectively seeks the truth God and the approximating truth of the God-idea or on the side of the person who is infinitely concerned that he in truth relate himself to God with the infinite passion of need—then there can be no doubt about the answer for anyone who is not totally botched by scholarship and science. If someone who lives in the midst of Christianity enters, with knowledge of the true idea of God, the house of God, the house of the true God, and prays, but prays in untruth, and if someone lives in an idolatrous land but prays with all the passion of infinity, although his eyes are resting on the image of an idol—where, then, is there more truth? The one prays in truth to God although he is worshiping an idol; the other prays in untruth to the true God and is therefore in truth worshiping an idol."

²¹⁸ ἄλλας ἐκκλησίας ἐσύλησα λαβὼν ὀφώνιον πρὸς τὴν ὑμῶν διακονίαν – More sarcasm from Paul. He was fine financially based merely upon the gifts that he was receiving from other Christian communities. And these gifts enabled him to present the NT message to the Corinthians free of charge. Sarcastically, he calls these gifts from other groups things that he stole from them, because this is basically what the false apostles are doing to the Corinthians by presenting them with lies and charging them for them.

²¹⁹ καὶ παρὼν πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ ὑστερηθεὶς οὐ κατενάγκησα οὐθενός· τὸ γὰρ ὑστέρημά μου προσανεπλήρωσαν οἱ ἀδελφοὶ ἐλθόντες ἀπὸ Μακεδονίας, καὶ ἐν παντί ἀβαρῇ ἑμαυτὸν ὑμῖν ἐτήρησα καὶ τηρήσω – Even when Paul was in need in Corinth, he did not turn to the Corinthians and require them to help him. He did not even suggest it. He was not going to hint that they should support him financially—regardless of how worthwhile his endeavor was as the apostle to the Gentiles (cf. 1 Corinthians 9 & 10 where Paul argues that he nevertheless deserves to earn his living from preaching the gospel). And he is going to continue in this same fashion with respect to them. For him, the important thing is to get the truth out, not to be supported financially even from those who embrace the truth and benefit from it for the sake of their eternal salvations.

Instead, Christians came from Macedonia, i.e., probably Thessalonica and Philippi, and provided him with a financial gift that allowed him to sustain himself completely without the Corinthians' giving him any money for his service to them of preaching

the gospel.

By speaking of not wanting to be a burden to the Corinthians, Paul is implying that they are a poor Christian community, which is interesting in the light of Corinth's role in the Roman world of being a financial and trading center in Greece. But he promises these Christians that he is not ever going to expect them to support him financially so that he is not a burden to them. His concern is in their growing in their understanding of the gospel for the sake of their eternal salvations, not in his being paid for his work.

²²⁰ ἔστιν ἀλήθεια Χριστοῦ ἐν ἐμοὶ ὅτι ἡ καύχησις αὕτη οὐ φραγίσεται εἰς ἐμὲ ἐν τοῖς κλίμασιν τῆς Ἀχαΐας – Paul states unequivocally that he is a genuine apostle of the Messiah to the Gentiles, that he has the true message within him that he proclaims.

Proof of his having a firm grasp of the gospel is what he is doing “in the regions of Achaia.” Two options for what he means—1) He has a heart to spread the gospel as far as he can, even if it means that he cannot stay very long with the Corinthians, making it appear as though he does not love them, while the false apostles are willing to stick around; 2) He will never expect the Christians in Achaia where Corinth is located to support him financially, even if it appears that he does not love them by not charging them for the gospel as the false apostles are doing.

Even though 10:12-16 would lead in the direction of #1, 11:7-9 in the more immediate context point towards #2. Paul is not going to change his manner of presenting the gospel whereby he would demand to be paid for his work just to compete with the false apostles and make himself appear more legitimate.

²²¹ διὰ τί; ὅτι οὐκ ἀγαπῶ ὑμᾶς; ὁ θεὸς οἶδεν – Does Paul's refusal to charge for his services mean that he does not love the Corinthians, which is probably what the false apostles are accusing him of? Absolutely not. Indeed, God even knows how much he loves them.

²²² ὁ δὲ ποιῶ, καὶ ποιήσω, ἵνα ἐκκόψω τὴν ἀφορμὴν τῶν θελόντων ἀφορμὴν, ἵνα ἐν ᾧ καυχῶνται εὐρεθῶσιν καθὼς καὶ ἡμεῖς – As long as the pseudo-apostles are trying to claim equal authority with the true apostles (“to be found just like us in that which they are boasting”) by demanding to be paid by the Corinthians (and probably others), Paul will continue his efforts as he thinks it wise and loving to do so, and he will refuse to demand anyone's support in order not to give any hint that he is like the false apostles and to communicate that the gospel message is one of *free* grace. Thus, he “may destroy the opportunity” of the false apostles to claim that they are genuine. His authentic graciousness destroys their ungracious claim to authenticity.

Thus, in the final analysis, Paul is demonstrating the concept of God's grace. Even though he deserves to be paid for his work (cf. 1 Corinthians 9 & 10), and so would the false apostles if they were genuinely pursuing the apostolic message, Paul wants to show that the latter are actually pursuing a very worldly strategy by their intimidation and demanding to be paid by the Corinthians. He would never think of doing such a thing.

²²³ οἱ γὰρ τοιοῦτοι ψευδαπόστολοι, ἐργάται δόλιοι, μετασχηματιζόμενοι εἰς ἀποστόλους Χριστοῦ – To put it bluntly, Paul states that these other men, who are claiming to be Jesus' apostles are not, even though they probably spent time with him during the three years that Jesus was on earth and proclaimed his messiahship, which also allows them to claim that they heard personally what Jesus said so that they understand his message. They probably are also stating that their claims of having spent time with Jesus can be verified by folks back in Jerusalem and in Israel, i.e., through their letters of recommendation.

All Paul can do is claim that he had hated Jesus, was a major persecutor of Christians, and then after a personal confrontation with Jesus on the road to Damascus was changed only because of a miracle of God (which no one can really verify), and then spent at least 14 years restudying the OT to find out what they really say about the Messiah. Therefore, the false apostles do look more legitimate than Paul. Whom does it seem more natural to trust, a group of men who were with Jesus during his three years on earth or one individual who was a major persecutor of Jesus' followers but now claims that he was changed through a miracle of God and studied on his own for a long period of time to learn the gospel?

However, Paul is claiming that these men, because of their focus on the MC and not on Jesus, and because of their lack of understanding of both sin and grace, are simply pretending to be Jesus' apostles. This is an example of people who have heard the truth from the best teacher, Jesus, and honestly believe that they have understood him correctly, when in fact they have not. Instead, they have catastrophically misunderstood him to their eternal detriment.

This is similar to asking whom people should trust in a Christian community—a group of people who are unwaveringly committed to a set of traditional doctrines which came into existence after the writing of the NT and the apostles or one individual is committed to understanding the Bible independently of past creeds and so-called orthodox doctrines, while being willing to converse with all others who have the same goal and change his mind if it makes sense to do so?

The truth is that all Christians from the 2nd century on should desire to understand the Bible independently of those who would demand that they hold to and defend a set of doctrines which were established by people who were neither biblical authors nor apostles.

²²⁴ καὶ οὐ θαῦμα· αὐτοὺς γὰρ ὁ σατανᾶς μετασχηματίζεται εἰς ἄγγελον φωτός – Now, Paul implies that these false apostles are following Satan and not God, because the former pretends to be someone who brings truth to people, when he is all about presenting lies to them and convincing them of these lies.

Thus, even the adversary whom God gives a major level of influence in the world, Satan, the real, spiritual and intellectual leader of these men, tries to appear good, even though he is wholly evil, in order to deceive people into thinking that he is good and should be followed instead of their following God. Satan pretends to be a messenger of truth and goodness, when he is full of lies and evil and his *modus operandi* is to rebel against God and to get as many human beings to do the same thing.

²²⁵ οὐ μέγα οὖν εἰ καὶ οἱ διάκονοι αὐτοῦ μετασχηματίζονται ὡς διάκονοι δικαιοσύνης ὧν τὸ τέλος ἔσται κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν – Here Paul boldly and explicitly declares that the false apostles are servants of Satan and not of God. They are merely pretending to be men of truth, goodness, and morality in line with God and His commandments, specifically in the MC. In

addition, their eternal destiny, their telos, is currently one of condemnation and destruction, not of salvation and life.

So it certainly must be no huge surprise to Paul to discover that Satan's servants are trying to deceive people the same way that he does, by appearing to be good and noble and moral with a message that pleases God. Therefore, it makes sense to Paul that these false apostles look as good as they do, even by promoting a complete "morality" according to the Mosaic Covenant. Nevertheless, the outcome of their lives will correspond to their evil and deception—to their lack of embracing their sin, genuine repentance, God's grace, and Jesus as God's instrument of mercy and eternal life. It will be eternal condemnation and destruction from God.

²²⁶ *πάλιν λέγω, μή τις με δόξη ἄφρονα εἶναι· εἰ δὲ μή γε, κἂν ὡς ἄφρονα δέξασθέ με, ἵνα καὶ ὡς μικρόν τι καυχῆσωμαι* – Paul would encourage anyone who thinks he is a bit crazy for not asking for financial support from the Corinthians not to think this way. But if they do and still have not figured out that he is the genuine apostle, then he asks them to let him "boast a little" more and demonstrate just how crazy he is—and yet just how authentic he is as an apostle and a Christian. Again, he is being very ironic—stating one thing (that he is a fool) when the exact opposite is truth (that he is the wisest man alive, along with the other apostles).

²²⁷ *ὁ λαλῶ, οὐ κατὰ κύριον λαλῶ ἀλλ' ὡς ἐν ἀφροσύνῃ, ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ ὑποστάσει τῆς καυχήσεως* – Paul readily admits that what he is about is not what he ever planned to say as an apostle of the NT message, because it is going to sound as though he is emphasizing outwardness rather than inwardness. But, under the circumstances, his speaking "foolishly" like this with respect to the truth makes sense in the light of the false apostles' claiming that their outward actions are the very measure of the authenticity of their apostleship, including their being paid by the Corinthian Christians.

Thus, Paul is not talking "according to the Lord," i.e., in a manner that is always the best strategy for demonstrating his apostleship. Instead, he is speaking "as a fool" in this particular situation where he is combatting the false apostles. He is using their strategy in as loving a way that he can as a true apostle of Jesus the Messiah.

²²⁸ *ἐπεὶ πολλοὶ καυχῶνται κατὰ σάρκα, καὶ ὡς καυχῆσομαι* – Just as the pseudo-apostles brag about their outwardness, their outward accomplishments, Paul is going to also—even though quite reluctantly and with outward actions which are far different from theirs. The false apostles point to their diligent, careful, and persistent efforts to obey outwardly the Mosaic Covenant, and as Jews there seems in their minds to be no greater way to demonstrate a fervent faith in God. And they believe that if it is good enough for Jews, it is certainly good enough for Gentiles. Indeed it should be mandatory for them as it is for the Jews. This would be like saying that just as religion within the institution of Judaism looks really spiritual, so does religion within the institution of the church, so that both should be promoted even though they are examples of misunderstanding the gospel.

²²⁹ *ἤδεως γὰρ ἀνέχεσθε τῶν ἀφρόνων φρόνιμοι ὄντες* – Again, Paul is being ironic and sarcastic, but with the intention of waking up the Corinthians from their spiritual and intellectual slumber so that they grasp the truth of reality as they had when Paul and Timothy first presented the NT message to them. The Corinthians are not wise but, instead, are far too willing to listen to and embrace the message of the false apostles regarding following the Mosaic Covenant to make oneself a bona fide disciple of Jesus and to pay them for their services.

cf. 11:4,20 for other uses of ἀνέχω with a negative meaning.

²³⁰ *ἀνέχεσθε γὰρ εἴ τις ὑμᾶς καταδουλοῖ, εἴ τις κατεσθίει, εἴ τις λαμβάνει, εἴ τις ἐπαίρεται, εἴ τις εἰς πρόσωπον ὑμᾶς δέρει* – Probably not all the things listed here are not happening, that the false apostles are really beating the Corinthians faces. But, spiritually and psychologically, they are enslaving them, putting on false (!) airs as though they are genuine apostles, grabbing their minds (inappropriately), and eating them up relationally, not respecting their individuality before God.

Thus, the Corinthians are willing to follow and believe the false apostles who are mistreating them by strong-arming them into strict submission to their leadership while also disrespecting their individuality. This is not surprising in the light of how many people prefer to be led by people who mistreat them because of their own psychological issues and dysfunction. It is also a good lesson in how to understand the dynamics which exist between those who promote religion and outward religious performance at the expense of God's grace and inward belief and obedience.

²³¹ *κατὰ ἀτιμίαν λέγω, ὡς ὅτι ἡμεῖς ἡσθενήκαμεν* – Paul has not come close to being as intimidating in person as the false apostles, especially by not requiring that the Corinthians support him financially for the work he has been doing among them, resulting in his feeling like an utter weakling in comparison to the false apostles. Sarcastically, he says that this all something that he is quite ashamed of.

The Corinthians sound like a someone in a dysfunctional relationship who feels compelled to stay in the relationship mainly because the other person beats them while someone else is willing to be kind, patient, and loving towards them. The outward strength of the false apostles and their abuse is meeting some important psychological or emotional need which some of the Corinthians have, that, for the wrong reasons, they feel completely reluctant to let go of. Paul, on the other hand, has inward strength, which he will go on to explain.

ἀσθενέω – used 7x in 2 Corinthians

²³² *ἐν ᾧ ὁ ἄν τις τολμᾷ, ἐν ἀφροσύνῃ λέγω, τολμῶ καὶ ἡγώ* – If the pseudo-apostles are so bold as to brag about their outward accomplishments, then Paul will also, even though he feels like a fool doing so since this is not standard operating procedure for him as an apostle.

²³³ *Ἑβραῖοί εἰσιν; καὶ ἡγώ. Ἰσραηλῖται εἰσιν; καὶ ἡγώ. σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ εἰσιν; καὶ ἡγώ* – The false apostles brag about being Hebrew-speaking members of the nation of Israel who are full-blooded descendants of Abraham. Paul says that so is he!

"Hebrews" probably refers to their Jewish culture, traditions, and speaking the Hebrew/Aramaic language, which Paul can certainly claim to have been and even be now when necessary an important part of his life.

"Israelites" probably refers to their being members of the nation of Israel with their long history as recorded in the OT, which

includes all the covenants which God has made with these people, His “chosen people.”

“Descendants of Abraham” refers to the promises which God made with him and those who can trace their lineage back to him through Jacob and then Isaac, promises which include becoming a “great nation” on the land of Israel and then eternal life after death.

²³⁴ διάκονοι Χριστοῦ εἰσιν παραφρονῶν λαλῶ, ὑπὲρ ἐγώ, ἐν κόποις περισσοτέρως, ἐν φυλακαῖς περισσοτέρως, ἐν πληγαῖς ὑπερβαλλόντως, ἐν θανάτοις πολλάκις – The false apostles claim to be serving Jesus the Messiah, probably because they were with him while he was alive and, therefore, can teach what he taught. However, Paul, wanting to compare himself with them and practically thinking he is crazy because of what he now is going to use as evidence for his serving Jesus, points to the natural consequences of being an apostle, i.e., someone who authoritatively proclaims the NT message in the world. Instead of the world’s embracing him and his message, it has rejected and persecuted him with almost the same level of intensity as it did Jesus. Implied is that the false apostles have not even come close to experiencing the same afflictions and suffering as Paul.

Again, this is an example of people who have heard the truth from the best teacher, Jesus, and honestly believe that they have understood him correctly, when in fact they have not. Instead, they have catastrophically misunderstood him to their eternal detriment.

²³⁵ ὑπὸ Ἰουδαίων πεντάκις τεσσαράκοντα παρὰ μίαν ἔλαβον – Here is a key indication of the truth of Paul’s message and his authority as an apostle of the Jewish Messiah—the response of the Jews. Rather than their being receptive, they have violently objected to Paul and his message. Can the false apostles claim this?

²³⁶ τρις ἐρραβδίσθη, ἅπαξ ἐλιθάσθη, τρις ἐνανάγησα, νυχθήμερον ἐν τῷ θυμῷ πεποίηκα – Paul’s apostolic authority has resulted in not only violent and negative reactions from human beings, but also violent and negative reactions from the creation, not because the creation is rebelling against God, but because his travels as an apostle eventually put him in such natural danger.

²³⁷ ὁδοιπορίαις πολλάκις, κινδύνους ποταμῶν, κινδύνους ληστῶν, κινδύνους ἐκ γένους, κινδύνους ἐξ ἔθνων, κινδύνους ἐν πόλει, κινδύνους ἐν ἐρημίᾳ, κινδύνους ἐν θαλάσῃ, κινδύνους ἐν ψευδαδέλοις – Paul’s seeking to fulfill his apostolic responsibilities has led to just plain suffering in the course of doing so, while the false apostles have the right to avoid all these if they so choose, by not only presenting a less offensive message than Paul’s, but also choosing their own times and places to travel when danger may not necessarily be present. Paul willingly goes where and when God leads him, even if it is into the most dangerous situation. This will be the case in Acts 27 when he is being transported as a prisoner of the Romans from Caesarea to Rome. “Dangers from false brethren” would include this situation in Corinth about which Paul is writing, that given the opportunity, the false apostles would love to rid the world of Paul and his supposed lies about God to the effect that the Gentiles are not obligated to obey the Jewish Mosaic Covenant.

²³⁸ κόπῳ καὶ μόθῳ, ἐν ἀγρυπνίαις πολλάκις, ἐν λιμῷ καὶ δίψει, ἐν νηστείαις πολλάκις, ἐν ψύχει καὶ γυμνότητι – ditto. Probably the nakedness is while either in prison or stripped of his clothes to be beaten by the Jews and others.

²³⁹ χωρὶς τῶν παρεκτός ἢ ἐπίστασίς μοι ἢ καθ’ ἡμέραν, ἢ μέριμνα πασῶν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν – Paul’s apostolic responsibility of being an authoritative spokesman for Jesus to the Gentiles constantly leads him to care inwardly, lovingly, and deeply for the spiritual condition of the people to whom he has presented the NT message (and those whom he hears have become authentic Christians, such as the Romans and the Colossians), and to do so in a way that is completely in line with the biblical message of grace and mercy towards individuals—not by asking people for money or demanding that they love him in a commensurate way! Instead, he longs for them to pursue righteousness and morality as they persevere in their belief in Jesus as the Messiah in the midst of persecution and suffering.

²⁴⁰ τίς ἀσθενεῖ καὶ οὐκ ἀσθενῶ; τίς σκανδαλίζεται καὶ οὐκ ἐγὼ πυροῦμαι – When people are weak in their faith and moral pursuits, Paul feels with them and is concerned about them and the authenticity of their faith. When people seem to be abandoning the faith and stumbling into sin, Paul feels bad about the eternal consequences if they continue and moves to encourage them to continue in their belief in and obedience to Jesus as the Messiah. But he of course always tries to do so as an authoritative apostle without being either authoritarian or uncaring.

²⁴¹ εἰ καυχᾶσθαι δεῖ, τὰ τῆς ἀσθενείας μου καυχῆσομαι – Speaking of being weak, Paul would much rather brag about his weaknesses, because he will eventually say that in the midst of them is where God’s grace shines forth and reveals itself most strongly. But exactly what does Paul mean by his “weaknesses” here? Weakness of faith? Moral weaknesses, i.e., sin, such as he talked about in Romans 7? Or possibly some other kind of weakness? I think in the context it is the last option.

Thus, while it may seem appropriate to the pseudo-apostles to brag about things external such as their outward religious efforts according to the Mosaic Covenant that appear successful in other people’s eyes as a way to substantiate their apostleship, Paul, because of his understanding of God’s grace and forgiveness, knows that it is better to brag about the failure that he has experienced through rejection and persecution by other people, an example of which he will go on to cite in vs. 32-33.

ἀσθένεια – used 6x in 2 Corinthians

²⁴² ὁ θεὸς ἡμεῶν καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ οἶδεν, ὁ ὢν εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ὅτι οὐ ψεύδομαι – Before Paul provides an example of his weakness, he feels compelled to appeal to God at this point, even though this does not really contribute to his argument that could convince the Corinthians that he is correct, because the false apostles could theoretically make the same appeal. However, Paul uses this as a launching pad to tell of what God brought about in his life that was clearly an indication of the hostility of the world towards the NT message of Jesus as the Messiah, which, in and of itself, was truly in line with what the Bible says about the sentiment of the world towards God. This also makes Paul look weak and like a failure—not that he is ashamed of it, because he is never ashamed of the gospel as he says in [Romans 1:16](#) For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17](#) For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.”

²⁴³ ἐν Δαμασκῷ ὁ ἐθνάρχης Ἀρέτα τοῦ βασιλέως ἐφρούρει τὴν πόλιν Δαμασκηῶν πιάσαι με – cf. Acts 9, especially v. 25.

²⁴⁴ καὶ διὰ θυρίδος ἐν σαργάνῃ ἐχαλάσθην διὰ τοῦ τείχους καὶ ἐξέφυγον τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ – While the false apostles can claim to be supported financially by whole groups of people, Paul can claim to have been rejected by an entire city! Therefore, who is the genuine apostle of the Messiah? Paul! Really? On what basis? The nature of the message and the nature of Paul's behavior along with the nature of the two kinds of responses to them—positive and negative. The gospel cannot be used to support an institution or religious system.

Therefore, Paul's weaknesses are his inability as an ordinary, mortal human being to control and prevent hostile reactions to God and Christianity from the world which result in suffering, hardship, and affliction for him. And if anyone is inclined to see suffering as failure, such as the false apostles, then certainly Paul looks much less successful than they.

²⁴⁵ καυχᾶσθαι δεῖ, οὐ συμφέρον μὲν, ἐλεύσομαι δὲ εἰς ὀπτασίας καὶ ἀποκαλύψεις κυρίου – Paul does not like to use boastful tactics similar to the false apostles, but he cannot help himself in this situation, because God has revealed things to him that He has not to others. As a result, Paul will go on to brag about himself in an indirect way as one more piece of evidence for the genuineness of his being an apostle of the Jesus the Messiah.

On the one hand, Paul knows that apostles are not supposed to brag about how God has made them special among all other human beings. Thus, bragging in regard to this fact is not "profitable." It really does not become a true apostle—in most circumstances.

On the other hand, Paul will use the category of "visions and revelations of [from] the Lord [God]" within the created reality as a means to provide evidence for his apostleship. A vision would be something he saw and heard outside the physical reality in which we live and that only he saw and heard, so that it requires a miracle of God to have this kind of experience. A revelation, I wonder in the light of vs. 7-10, is simply what Paul has come to understand from his renewed study of the OT after his conversion which has provided him with an exceptional grasp on the biblical message and the gospel.

²⁴⁶ οἶδα ἄνθρωπον ἐν Χριστῷ πρὸ ἐτῶν δεκατεσσάρων, εἴτε ἐν σώματι οὐκ οἶδα, εἴτε ἐκτὸς τοῦ σώματος οὐκ οἶδα, ὁ θεὸς οἶδεν, ἀρπαγέντα τὸν τοιοῦτον ἕως τρίτου οὐρανοῦ – "I know a man..." seems to be a way for Paul to point to himself more indirectly than directly, probably as part of his strategy to be as humble as possible as he relate this experience, distancing himself as much as possible from the false apostles and their bragging about their own accomplishments which they believe are earning God's blessing of eternal life. Paul is saying that he was not even looking for something like this to happen to him. "Fourteen years ago" would place this experience about A.D. 40-44 if he is writing this letter on his second official missionary journey around A.D. 54-58.

"Whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know; God knows" probably refers to whether his physical body was transported to another location in the creation or this involved only his mind so that he was truly seeing a vision like a dream. The important aspect is that God knows exactly what He was doing for His purposes.

"Such a man was snatched away to the third heaven" indicates that Paul was grabbed by God (either physically or just mentally) and relocated to "the third heaven," which it is not clear exactly what this is. What are the first and second heavens?

1 Thessalonians 4:17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up (ἀρπαγησόμεθα) together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

²⁴⁷ καὶ οἶδα τὸν τοιοῦτον ἄνθρωπον, εἴτε ἐν σώματι εἴτε ἄσῳ τοῦ σώματος οὐκ οἶδα, ὁ θεὸς οἶδεν – Paul repeats the important ideas for assuring the Corinthians that he is being as humble as possible and not really bragging about himself the way the false apostles are.

²⁴⁸ ὅτι ἡρπάγη εἰς τὸν παράδεισον καὶ ἤκουσεν ἄρρητα ῥήματα ἃ οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀνθρώπῳ λαλῆσαι – Here we learn that the "third heaven" of v. 2 is the same as "paradise," which is the same word that Jesus used to identify where the thief on the other cross would be with him – **Luke 23:43** And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

Thus, Paul was snatched away (ἡρπάγη) by God from the present earthly realm to another reality. Is this "paradise" perhaps a parallel universe of an eternal nature where eternal beings such as angels reside, so that God took Paul out of the story of this mortal and sinful realm and transferred him into the story of an immortal and morally perfect parallel realm? This makes sense to me and is the realm in which Jesus resides now and from which he will return to this earth when he sets up the millennial kingdom and thereby restores the Kingdom of Israel.

In this eternal, parallel realm, Paul heard things spoken that he did not understand and could not repeat because of the different, i.e., eternal, language being used – "words too holy to speak that are not possible for a man to speak."

²⁴⁹ ὑπὲρ τοῦ τοιοῦτου καυχῆσομαι, ὑπὲρ δὲ ἐμαυτοῦ οὐ καυχῆσομαι εἰ μὴ ἐν ταῖς ἀσθενείαις – Is Paul really not talking about himself? I think that he is, but this is a way of humbly saying that he is uncomfortable going to such lengths to claim that he is a true apostle of Jesus in contrast to the false apostles. Thus, he is willing to brag on behalf of such a man, which is on behalf of himself as someone whom God has done at least this one very unusual thing.

In contrast, he refuses to really brag about himself as the false apostles do except to mention and comment on his weaknesses, which is what he has been doing since chapter 11.

This he will go on to do in vs. 7ff.

And we learn here that authentic belief leads a person to value weaknesses, including moral weaknesses and sin to a degree, in the present realm, as opposed to strengths, because, in the final analysis, it is on the basis of all our weaknesses and not any of our strengths that God independently provides us with His grace and mercy. As a result, Paul wants to brag about nothing which he has done in and of himself (like the false apostles). Instead, he brags about only what God has done in the midst of all his moral and personal weaknesses that have made life oftentimes quite miserable for him as an apostle.

²⁵⁰ ἐὰν γὰρ θελήσω καυχῆσασθαι, οὐκ ἔσομαι ἄφρων, ἀλήθειαν γὰρ ἐρῶ· φείδομαι δέ, μή τις εἰς ἐμὲ λογίσηται ὑπὲρ ὃ βλέπει με ἢ ἀκούει τι ἐξ ἐμοῦ – Paul could say so much more about his experience as a genuine apostle of Jesus. If he really wanted to brag, he could not really be labelled a “fool” for doing so, even though he has said that it is foolish for an apostle to use his external accomplishments as a means to prove that he is an apostle. But he could not be labelled a “fool” because everything which he would say just happens to be true and good evidence for the authenticity of his role—“for I will speak the truth.” Nevertheless, Paul is refraining from talking about everything he could, because he is concerned that those who hear about all his “accomplishments” might even exaggerate them for their own personal and selfish use, which then would be to lie about him. Paul is all about the truth—whether it’s rather dramatic, even sounding melodramatic, or rather discouraging, even really hard to hear, such as all the afflictions and suffering which he has endured.

²⁵¹ καὶ τῇ ὑπερβολῇ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων, διὸ ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι, ἐδόθη μοι σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί, ἄγγελος σατανᾶ, ἵνα με κολαφίσῃ, ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι – If “revelations” are ideas which Paul has derived from his new study of the OT after his conversion on the road to Damascus in Acts 9, then, it can be said that he understands biblical theology better than anyone in history except Jesus. And in the midst of his natural born sinful humanity which includes a healthy amount of pride as it does for any sinful human being, God has given Paul a constant reminder of his being an ordinary, mortal, sinful human being and of His grace in the form of some kind of affliction and pain within the present realm (because after this age and Jesus returns, he will be morally perfect and painless like all former believers). Thorns hurt, so there must be a degree of pain involved. Plus, “torment” is no fun either. Something which torments causes severe mental and/or physical suffering. And it is very annoying and irritating. Paul even characterizes this affliction as “a messenger of the adversary,” by which he may mean something which has its source in Satan himself as a way to “torment” him and humble him.

This would keep Paul from having an “undue sense” of his own “self-importance” as a genuine apostle of Jesus, indeed as the sole apostle to the Gentiles. Thus, his importance comes only from the fact that God has loved him and revealed Himself to him. Paul is implying that if it were not for God’s predestined choice of him and His gracious work of changing his heart within him, he would still be one of the most, if not the most, enthusiastic and hostile opponent of God and Christianity.

Notice that Paul says twice, “in order that I might not have an undue sense of my self-importance.” He knows that he is not only important as the one and only apostle to the Gentiles, but also a sinful human being, who will tend to feel that he deserves God’s and others’ accolades. Thus, his importance comes only from the fact that God has loved him and revealed Himself to him. If it were not for God’s predestined choice of Paul and His gracious work of changing his heart within him, Paul would still be one of the most, if not the most, enthusiastic and violent opponents of God and Christianity.

²⁵² ὑπὲρ τούτου τρίς τὸν κύριον παρεκάλεσα ἵνα ἀποστῇ ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ – Paul admits that the suffering caused by this “thorn in the flesh” is highly undesirable and naturally has led him to appeal to God to remove it. Just as God encourages him, Paul sought to “encourage” God to remove the affliction. This sounds quite similar to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when he asked God to “remove the cup” of the cross from his role as the Messiah, but he knew this was theologically impossible.

Thus, even Paul sought God’s rescue from this existential reality in spite of his knowing God’s sovereignty in the midst of his having such wonderful, theological knowledge which God had given him and how prone to arrogance and self-righteousness he was. In other words, seeking relief even from God from pain is a very human thing regardless of one’s level and accuracy of knowledge about God as the transcendent and sovereign storyteller of the creation.

²⁵³ καὶ εἰρήκέν μοι ἄρκει σοι ἡ χάρις μου, ἡ γὰρ δύναμις ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελεῖται ἡδιστα οὖν μᾶλλον καυχῆσομαι ἐν ταῖς ἀσθενείαις μου, ἵνα ἐπισκηνώσῃ ἐπ’ ἐμὲ ἡ δύναμις τοῦ Χριστοῦ – God taught Paul that even he ultimately needed only His grace and mercy in the present realm and not any liberation from pain and suffering in order to perform properly his purpose and role as a sinful human—an apostle who authoritatively proclaims the gospel of Jesus as the Messiah. One would think that this role would gain Paul the right to skate through life living the victorious Christian life with victory over all sin, suffering and pain. But, indeed, it is the exact opposite for him. He is more often than not experiencing being “contemporaneous” with Jesus as Kierkegaard says. In addition, Kierkegaard says on pg. 52 of CUP, “But the expression for the utmost exertion of subjectivity is the infinitely passionate interest in its eternal happiness.” This certainly the apostle Paul had.

Paul would rather be humbled and reminded every day through his pain and suffering that God is working in him supernaturally because of his apostolic association with the Messiah, the king and high-priest of authentic believers, than be rid of the pain and risk succumbing to pride and sin that could potentially lead him to abandon his belief in Jesus. This attitude and its perseverance in a sinful human being obviously requires God’s grace to cause it.

While the false apostles are bragging about their apparent strengths and successful, outward accomplishments in the eyes of the world, Paul chooses to brag about his actual weaknesses, which most likely even includes his moral weaknesses and sin as he describes in Romans 7, and about God’s powerful work of grace and mercy of producing belief, pursuit of morality, and pursuit of fulfilling his role as the apostle to the Gentiles that are miracles in the midst of his moral weaknesses and sinfulness.

²⁵⁴ διὸ εὐδοκῶ ἐν ἀσθενείαις, ἐν ὕβρεσιν, ἐν ἀνάγκαις, ἐν διωγμοῖς καὶ στενοχωρίαις, ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ· ὅταν γὰρ ἀσθενῶ, τότε δυνατός εἰμι – Paul’s life has been and continues to be nothing even close to easy and free of stress. Indeed, his description of his existence here sounds almost perverse. Is not a person who relishes pain a masochist, and is not this person a bit sick in the head for not seeking to eliminate the pain in his life?

Nevertheless, Paul is describing healthy, biblical masochism that takes into account God’s sovereignty and man’s sinfulness, both of which figure prominently in a person’s acquiring eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Paul knows that when he is struggling to endure the hardships of life by persevering in his belief in the Jewish Messiah, then he is also doing the most important hard work for the most important human goal, which also means that the only way that he is doing this hard work is by means of God’s sovereign initiative and grace taking place within him and causing him to do so. This is the very definition of biblical strength

and biblical mental health!

In this context, I think it makes the most sense to take the words after “weaknesses” as being in apposition to it, that Paul’s weaknesses are hostile actions towards him by those who are completely against the true gospel and who are completely out of his control. He is too weak to stop opponents of Jesus from harming him. Therefore, he experiences from other people 1) arrogant insults coming from a position of pride and probably self-righteousness, 2) stressful hardships forced upon him, 3) persecutions from hatred of Jesus and the information about him, and 4) stressful circumstances which are probably not different from #2.

And these are all “for the sake of the Messiah,” that whatever he endures on behalf of the message of Jesus is also on behalf of Jesus himself, to demonstrate the world’s continued hostility towards him and Paul’s willingness to join him that certain others may live eternally by embracing the message with genuine belief.

And Paul’s final analysis of this whole dynamic that God’s strength through His grace appears most when Paul is suffering the most in circumstances which are completely out of his control. Not exactly what we want to hear about how Christianity is affecting Paul as an apostle and us to a degree by extrapolation as ordinary Christians, but it is part of the truth of the biblical message.

²⁵⁵ γέγονα ἄφρων, ὑμεῖς με ἠναγκάσατε. ἐγὼ γὰρ ὄφειλον ὑφ’ ὑμῶν συνίστασθαι· οὐδὲν γὰρ ὑστέρησα τῶν ὑπερλίαν ἀποστόλων εἰ καὶ οὐδὲν εἰμι – Paul uses irony to blame the Corinthians for his having to play the fool, for his having to brag about his apostleship using external criteria as the false apostles do. The Corinthians have become so impressed by the outward performance of the MC by the false apostles that Paul has had to resort to talking about what is outwardly impressive about his ministry as an apostle—his suffering at the hands of hostile unbelievers, which is his “weakness.”

Instead, the Corinthians should have recognized just how important he is as the apostle to the Gentiles and should have been recommending him to everybody, even though he is an undeserving sinful human being just like them, indeed, someone who persecuted Christians, threw them into jail, and tried to destroy Christianity in its earliest days as the book of Acts tells us. This are all things which he is probably still embarrassed about, and which leads him to call himself a “nobody.” Yet, he certainly is not inferior to the false apostles but superior to them though he is a greater sinner than they are in his own mind because of his former hostility towards God and Christianity.

²⁵⁶ τὰ μὲν σημεῖα τοῦ ἀποστόλου κατεργάσθη ἐν ὑμῖν ἐν πάσῃ ὑπομονῇ, σημείοις τε καὶ τέρασιν καὶ δυνάμεσιν – With miracles God demonstrated through Paul the authenticity of his apostleship, that should have been very obvious to the Corinthians and stuck with them through the time when these false apostles were trying to influence them away from Paul and his message—and they were not performing miracles as proof of their apostleship.

We can wonder why Paul did not immediately and solely mention these miracles as proof of his apostleship at the beginning of this letter. Perhaps it is because he truly wanted to teach them a lot of good theology and practical application of this theology to his life as a genuine apostle in the midst of his defending himself. The implication has always been that all Christians are liable to encounter the hostility of the world against God and His message of Jesus as the Messiah.

²⁵⁷ τί γάρ ἐστιν ὃ ἠσώθητε ὑπὲρ τὰς λοιπὰς ἐκκλησίας, εἰ μὴ ὅτι αὐτὸς ἐγὼ οὐ κατενάρκησα ὑμῶν· χαρίσασθέ μοι τὴν ἀδικίαν ταύτην – Again, Paul uses irony to compare himself to others, this time to the false apostles. The false apostles must be saying that Paul did not really care about the Corinthians because he did not charge them for his services, while they claim he did charge other Christian communities because he received financial support from them. In reality, Paul never “charged” these other gatherings of Christians for his services. He merely taught the gospel, and the people rightly concluded that Paul deserved by be supported by them, and therefore they freely wanted to send him financial gifts in appreciation for having brought them the message of eternal salvation and life through Jesus the Messiah.

In contrast, Paul genuinely did not want to burden the Corinthian Christians financially and graciously communicated to them that they need not support him financially. With irony, he asks them to forgive him for thus “mistreating” them, i.e., for mistreating them by not acting like the false apostles, who have demanded the Corinthians support them, which somehow has translated in the Corinthians’ minds to the false apostles’ being genuine in contrast to Paul. Paul asks with tongue in cheek for their forgiveness for treating them unjustly by not demanding that they support him financially.

²⁵⁸ ἰδοὺ τρίτον τοῦτο ἐτοίμως ἔχω ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, καὶ οὐ καταναρκήσω· οὐ γὰρ ζητῶ τὰ ὑμῶν ἀλλὰ ὑμᾶς. οὐ γὰρ ὀφείλει τὰ τέκνα τοῖς γονεῦσιν θησαυρίζειν ἀλλὰ οἱ γονεῖς τοῖς τέκνοις – Paul is looking forward to his third visit to Corinth and the Christian community there. But he still is not going to demand to be financially supported by them. And this is because he does not want what they have. By implication, he wants them to want what he has—the message of the gospel and authentic belief in it.

Paul uses the naturally understood concept of parents’ providing for their children, rather than the other way around. He considers himself the Corinthians’ Christian parent, not child or laborer. Thus, he does not demand the Corinthians support him and pay him. He does not want what they have—their money. He wants them to be want what he has—authentic Christianity. This is in spite of the fact that the laborer is worthy of his wages (cf. 1 Corinthians 9 & 10).

Thus, whenever Paul returns to Corinth, it will be the third time that he has visited them—first during his 2nd missionary journey of A.D. 50-54 and second sometime during this 3rd missionary journey of A.D. 54-58, which he is still in the process of completing.

²⁵⁹ ἐγὼ δὲ ἥδιστα δαπανήσω καὶ ἐκδαπανηθήσομαι ὑπὲρ τῶν ψυχῶν ὑμῶν. εἰ περισσοτέρως ὑμᾶς ἀγαπῶ, ἥσσαν ἀγαπῶμαι – Paul says that he would rather spend the most valuable earthly commodity he has, his life, on the Corinthians, if it would mean that they persevere in genuine belief in the true message of the gospel for the sake of their own “lives,” i.e., their eternal salvation and life in the Kingdom of God. He is thus willing to give up his life for the sake of the authenticity of the Corinthians’ belief and never receive anything financial from them.

He intimates that this demonstrates that he loves the Corinthians more than the false apostles do, even though the false apostles are trying to convince them otherwise. And does it make sense that they love him less than they love the false apostles, which they have improperly done by their paying them for their work and not him? Of course not, but this is what he has been trying to teach them since the beginning of the letter.

²⁶⁰ ἔστω δέ, ἐγὼ οὐ κατεβάρησα ὑμᾶς· ἀλλὰ ὑπάρχων πανούργος δόλω ὑμᾶς ἔλαβον – On the other hand, the false apostles are intimating that Paul is a wily and skillful deceiver, because he does not charge for his labor as an apostle. It must be for them that the only good apostle is an apostle who expects and even demands that his wages to be paid—that *quid pro quo* materially is the only proper relationship between an apostle and his students.

It is not that it is completely wrong for an apostle to be thought worthy of his work, as Paul has explained in 1 Corinthians 9 & 10, but the gospel of God's grace is too gracious to demand that people pay for it, or even to hint with some kind of strongarm tactics that a person "should" be paid for his work as a Christian laborer, especially if there is going to be misunderstanding about the reason for the payment and the message of grace being given. If being paid for his apostolic work is in people's minds the basis for thinking that his apostleship is legitimate, then Paul has no desire to be paid.

²⁶¹ μή τινα ὧν ἀπέσταλκα πρὸς ὑμᾶς, δι' αὐτοῦ ἐπλεονέκτησα ὑμᾶς – What about Paul's apostolic co-workers? Have they demanded to be paid for their serving the Corinthians within the gospel or to receive something for Paul? No, and this too would be unlike the false apostles. In Paul's mind, this would be to "take advantage," i.e., undue advantage, of his position and role as an apostle and of his co-workers' position and role as his helpers in this gracious task. God has graced Paul with the role of proclaiming the gospel, and Paul graces this message to people without demanding that he be paid for it—even though he has the right to be paid for it.

²⁶² παρεκάλεσα Τίτον καὶ συναπέστειλα τὸν ἀδελφόν· μήτι ἐπλεονέκτησεν ὑμᾶς Τίτος; οὐ τῷ αὐτῷ πνεύματι περιεπατήσαμεν; οὐ τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἔχνεσιν – Paul now names Titus as his fellow worker in the gospel. He has referred to him in chapters 2, 7, & 8 along with the "brother" in chapter 8. Paul wants to know if Titus and he have acted the same way toward the Corinthians, i.e., in an undemanding way. This is clearly a rhetorical question. Certainly, neither Paul nor his apostolic workers have even hinted at demanding to be paid for their work in order to preserve the integrity of the message of God's grace. They are all on the same page in this respect.

²⁶³ πάλαι δοκεῖτε ὅτι ὑμῖν ἀπολογούμεθα. κατέναντι θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ λαλοῦμεν τὰ δὲ πάντα, ἀγαπητοί, ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑμῶν οἰκοδομῆς – Paul switches back to the first-person plural "we" to include Timothy in this apostolic message to the Corinthians. While Paul has actually been defending his apostleship, he uses irony to say that his ultimate goal is not to defend himself before the Corinthians, but to speak honestly and truthfully in God's presence because of his apostolic association with Jesus the Messiah. Thus, he indicates that this is always his main purpose, to please God in the midst of serving man. Yes, he always wants to speak the truth of the gospel of Jesus as the Messiah, but not to impress human beings and/or obtain their approval and affirmation. Their response to him is nothing in comparison to God's sovereign grace, mercy, and call to him to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

Therefore, as far as earthly goals are concerned, Paul aims his efforts toward the spiritual improvement of the Corinthians, i.e., their being more grounded and clearer in their understanding and belief in the NT message of Jesus as the Messiah, while his heavenly goals are to obey and please God regardless of what are the effects of his earthly efforts. Consequently, while this whole letter actually is Paul's and Timothy's defense of Paul's responsibility of being the only apostle to the Gentiles, he does not want it to be such—ONLY. He wants the Corinthians to view it as his speaking in front of God and stating truths that are intended to further the message of Jesus as the Messiah in their lives for the sake of their eternal destinies which will come from their continuing to be built up in their understanding the gospel and their perseverance in their faith. Thus, Paul knows that he is walking a fine line, one that the gospel demands if it is to be communicated properly and accurately where he has the right to defend himself as graciously as possible and also the responsibility to proclaim the undeserved message of God's grace and mercy.

²⁶⁴ φοβοῦμαι γὰρ μή πως ἐλθὼν οὐχ οἶους θέλω εὐρὼ ὑμᾶς κἀγὼ εὐρεθῶ ὑμῖν οἶον οὐ θέλετε· μή πως ἔρις, ζήλος, θυμοί, ἐριθείαι, καταλαλῖαι, ψιθυρισμοί, φυσιώσεις, ἀκαταστασίαι – One option is that Paul is concerned that the false apostles have so captured the Corinthians' hearts that they will end up in conflict with Paul when he comes, that they will be convinced that he should be different and like the false apostles, while he believes that they should be different and like authentic believers who appreciate the authentic, apostolic message of God's grace that Jesus himself brought. Thus, Paul indicates that the error of their believing the religious, making-oneself-worthy Judaism of the false apostles results in pride, conflicts, and confusion *with respect to him*, while truth accompanied by God's grace and a deep understanding of this grace results in genuine love and care *for him* as a fellow believer in Jesus as the Messiah.

Another possibility is basically the same as above but that Paul is concerned that the erroneous ideas of the false apostles will result in mistreatment by the Corinthians *of one another*, like leaven spreading through the dough. The outward, religious focus of the false apostles' message is right in line with our natural, sinful tendency as human beings *to compete with one another*, resulting in strife, envy, etc. among "Christians." This option seems more coherent with the next verse. In addition, certainly Paul would not engage in slanderous exchanges with the Corinthians. Nor would he personally pursue gossip and prideful feelings. These are the result of a human being's sinfulness acting in conjunction with a focus on an outward, religious system such as the Mosaic Covenant.

²⁶⁵ μή πάλιν ἐλθόντος μου ταπεινώσῃ με ὁ θεός μου πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ πενήθῃω πολλοὺς τῶν προσημαρτηκόντων καὶ μὴ μετανοησάντων ἐπὶ τῇ ἀκαθαρσίᾳ καὶ πορνείᾳ καὶ ἀσελγείᾳ ἣ ἔπραξαν – The false apostles' legalistic message of earning God's favor through obedience to what are probably mainly *the rituals* of the Mosaic Covenant must be providing room for the

Corinthians to continue with various acts of sin rather than repenting of them in the light of the true message of God's grace. If Paul finds that this is the case in Corinth, then it will be a humbling experience which he acknowledges will come from God and His sovereignty. Paul has worked hard to help the Corinthians become genuine in their understanding and belief in Jesus with more than a year and a half of teaching them and now his fourth letter. And what might he get out of all this hard work? The Corinthians steeped in erroneous Judaism and sinning without appropriate repentance. This would humble him to no end, because it is something completely out of his control, just as his suffering the hostility of unbelievers is out of his control too.

In other words, unbelieving Judaism, whether with the Christian twist of believing in Jesus as the Messiah or not, is not a good help against man's sin—certainly not like the authentic, Christian message and a good grasp of it. Plus, a religious system and strict adherence to it can become an excuse to sin if people feel that they are doing enough for God by performing some kind of outward religion instead of focusing on authentic love and moral purity toward God and people. This certainly seemed to be the case in OT Israel, that as long as they were bringing their offerings and sacrifices to God in the temple, they thought that they were pleasing Him enough that they could pursue all sorts of evil in the other parts of their lives.

This is just the natural inclination of human beings with our "flesh" of Romans 6-8, i.e., our natural-born sinful humanity.

²⁶⁶ Τρίτον τοῦτο ἔρχομαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐπὶ στόματος δύο μαρτύρων καὶ τριῶν σταθήσεται πᾶν ῥήμα – cf. Deuteronomy 19:15, דְּבָרִי יִקְרָא יְהוָה שְׁלֹשִׁים וְשְׁנַיִם עֵדִים (LXX – ἐπὶ στόματος δύο μαρτύρων καὶ ἐπὶ στόματος τριῶν μαρτύρων σταθήσεται πᾶν ῥήμα). This is the second time Paul has mentioned that this will be the third visit to Corinth (cf. 12:14). And he sees it as the Mosaic Covenant speaks of the requirement that there be two or three witnesses to corroborate the facts of a situation. His third visit will mean that he has his facts straight about the spiritual condition of the Corinthians. Either they are for the NT message, or they are against it. He will be able to tell which is the case when he visits them for the third time.

Of course, he is implying that he really wants to experience them as having authentic belief in Jesus as the Messiah and therefore to be done with the false apostles and any influence which they have had on them.

²⁶⁷ προεῖρηκα καὶ προλέγω, ὡς παρὼν τὸ δεῦτερον καὶ ἀπὼν νῦν ἵ, τοῖς προσημαρτηκόσιν καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς πᾶσιν, ὅτι ἐὰν ἔλθω εἰς τὸ πάλιν οὐ φείσομαι – Whenever Paul shows up again in Corinth, he will treat his apostolic responsibility with all seriousness and identify sin where he sees it in the midst of the Corinthians' adhering to the incorrect message of the false apostles, just as he did during his first and second visits to Corinth.

The biblical message is all about rescuing human beings from God's eternal condemnation that results from their sinfulness and rebellion against God, which means that it would be inconsistent to condone or even overlook immoral behavior in anyone who claims to want this rescue to occur for him. Thus, the gospel comforts those who genuinely feel their deserving God's wrath and condemnation and encourages those some ones who genuinely "hunger and thirst for righteousness" by pursuing goodness and morality in their lives (cf. Matthew 5).

²⁶⁸ ἐπεὶ δοκιμὴν ζητεῖτε τοῦ ἐν ἐμοὶ λαλοῦντος Χριστοῦ, ὃς εἰς ὑμᾶς οὐκ ἀσθενεῖ ἀλλὰ δυνατεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν – Even the false apostles must be encouraging the Corinthians to seek out proof the Messiah in Paul, which they think should come from his placing the Mosaic Covenant at the center of his relationship with God. But Paul is saying that the proof will be in his identifying their sin just as Jesus would, especially in the midst of God's powerfully working within them to move them toward truth, morality, and salvation—hopefully. Indeed, as a true apostle of Jesus, it is as though Jesus himself is speaking whenever Paul proclaims the whole message of the gospel—both the mercy of God and the call by God to moral behavior. For the false apostles, the "proof" of their apostleship is in their outward performance of the Mosaic Covenant. In contrast, for Paul, his proof is within him, i.e., in his message of mercy through Jesus and pursuit of genuine morality, not ritual actions according to the MC.

²⁶⁹ καὶ γὰρ ἐσταυρώθη ἐξ ἀσθενείας, ἀλλὰ ζῇ ἐκ δυνάμεως θεοῦ. καὶ γὰρ ἡμεῖς ἀσθενούμεν ἐν αὐτῷ, ἀλλὰ ζήσομεν σὺν αὐτῷ ἐκ δυνάμεως θεοῦ εἰς ὑμᾶς – I think that Paul is referring to Jesus' own weakness that is like his—that he as a genuine human being was unable to keep the hostile forces arrayed against him from crucifying him. Only God as the transcendent storyteller could have stopped the Jews and the Romans. Yet, it was not His eternal plan to do so. Therefore, because of Jesus' own weakness in not being able to avoid the mistreatment of unbelievers, he died. Then, because of God's power, he was raised from the dead and now lives to complete his role as the final and permanent king of Israel. This is more coherent with the next sentence than interpreting the weakness as referring to the Corinthians' sin.

Paul then goes on to say that Timothy and he are weak like Jesus in not being able to avoid persecution and criticism from unbelievers. Yet, they "live with him" in the sense that they are authentic believers who are destined for resurrection and eternal life with Jesus just as God powerfully acts towards the Corinthians by sustaining their belief, if this is really what He is going to do for them as authentic believers—if they are not those who will continue to succumb to the influences of the false apostles and thus demonstrate that their faith is not genuine.

²⁷⁰ ἐάντοὺς πειράζετε εἰ ἐστὲ ἐν τῇ πίστει, ἐάντοὺς δοκιμάζετε. ἢ οὐκ ἐπιγινώσκετε ἑαυτοὺς, ὅτι Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν; εἰ μὴτι ἀδόκιμοί ἐστε – Paul wants the Corinthians to take spiritual inventory and look for the signs of Jesus the Messiah's being a part of who they are as human beings—their understanding at a deep level their inherent sinfulness, their belief in Jesus as their advocate before God, their following him and his commandment to love one another authentically, their desire for eternal mercy strictly on the basis of God's grace and Jesus' advocacy, their working hard to make wise and moral choices, etc.—and their rejecting the message of the false apostles.

²⁷¹ ἐλπίζω δὲ ὅτι γνώσεσθε ὅτι ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἐσμὲν ἀδόκιμοι – If the Corinthians understand accurately the signs of an authentic believer, they will recognize that Paul and Timothy are genuine in their belief and genuine as apostles. Paul and Timothy do not lack clear evidence to the effect that they are authentic Christians.

²⁷² εὐχόμεθα δὲ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν μὴ ποιήσαι ὑμᾶς κακὸν μηδέν, οὐχ ἵνα ἡμεῖς δόκιμοι φανώμεν, ἀλλ' ἵνα ὑμεῖς τὸ καλὸν ποιήτε, ἡμεῖς δὲ ὡς ἀδόκιμοι ὦμεν – Again, Paul's concern is for the Corinthians to be authentic in their belief in the true gospel and gain eternal salvation, even it were the case that he lacks the clear evidence of a genuine Christian and were to incur God's eternal condemnation. He wants them to do what is right with respect to the biblical message for the sake of their own individual salvations, even if Timothy and he are flat out liars, unbelievers, and suffer eternal condemnation as a result.

In other words, the main issue for the Corinthians is not that they follow Paul, but that they follow God who has presented His message about Jesus as the Messiah through Paul.

²⁷³ οὐ γὰρ δυνάμεθά τι κατὰ τῆς ἀληθείας ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀληθείας – Nevertheless, Paul and Timothy know that they are compelled to act in obedience to the biblical and truthful message, because God has commissioned solely Paul with the responsibility of being the apostle to the Gentiles. And God will remain faithful to this commissioning of Paul. But this also should be the case for even non-apostolic Christians, that we all would live only for the truth and not against it.

²⁷⁴ χαίρομεν γὰρ ὅταν ἡμεῖς ἀσθενῶμεν, ὑμεῖς δὲ δυνατοὶ ᾗτε· τοῦτο καὶ εὐχόμεθα, τὴν ὑμῶν κατάρτισιν – Thus, Paul and Timothy are willing to be weak by not being able to avoid the affliction and suffering which comes from encountering hostile unbelievers in the world, so that they do not look good in the world's eyes, especially to those who are committed to an erroneous Judaism. And this even while the Corinthians thrive in the genuineness of their faith and perhaps experience no suffering at all from unbelievers—if this is actually possible.

Thus, they are concerned about the strength of the Corinthians' (and other believers') belief for the sake of their maturing and becoming more resolved so that they persevere in their belief to the end of their lives and acquire eternal mercy and life.

Therefore, even if Paul and Timothy look weak to the world in the midst of their fulfilling the responsibility of proclaiming the gospel, as long as the Corinthians are growing stronger in their belief and following Jesus as the Messiah, this is what really matters to them.

²⁷⁵ διὰ τοῦτο ταῦτα ἀπὸν γράφω, ἵνα παρὼν μὴ ἀποτόμως χρήσωμαι κατὰ τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἣν ὁ κύριος ἔδωκέν μοι εἰς οἰκοδομὴν καὶ οὐκ εἰς καθάρεισιν – Paul has already admitted that the Corinthians are basically correct in their assessment of him that his letters are stronger than his personal presence. As long as this is the case, Paul does not mind at all that this letter be strong enough to correct their belief and encourage them to avoid the false teachers and their teaching, so that he does not have to exercise his authority fully as an apostle when he comes to visit them for the third time. The sooner the Corinthians correct their thinking about the gospel, the better, and Paul much prefers this happen while he is away from them than when he comes to Corinth, which also would be in direct contrast to the strategy and methodology of the false apostles.

Paul wants to use his apostolic authority to build up the Corinthians in their faith from a perspective where they are truly believing the truth and not headed down the road of error. He in no way wants to tear them down by humiliating them in their following their false apostles. Instead, he wants to encourage them to keep going in their belief in the truth.

²⁷⁶ λοιπόν, ἀδελφοί, χαίρετε, καταρτίζεσθε, παρακαλεῖσθε, τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖτε, εἰρηνεύετε, καὶ ὁ θεὸς τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ εἰρήνης ἔσται μεθ' ὑμῶν – Paul concludes the letter by encouraging the Corinthians to choose to exhibit the marks of authentic belief—joy in regard to God's mercy, constantly restoring themselves to the truth from any error that may creep into their minds and lives, which in this case would be the influence of the false apostles and their erroneous Judaism mixed with Jesus as the Messiah, being encouraged by God's faithfulness and the message of the gospel which will result in eternal salvation and life, and having a uniform view of reality that corresponds to the apostolic message which Paul taught them and has been defending throughout this entire letter.

Paul also wants them to living within the wholeness of God's involvement within them that will result in complete shalom in the eternal Kingdom of God. The reason that this will all occur and the result from its occurring is the same—God's love and intent of shalom toward them.

²⁷⁷ ἀσπάσασθε ἀλλήλους ἐν ἀγίῳ φιλήματι ἀσπάζονται ὑμᾶς οἱ ἅγιοι πάντες – Paul wants their greetings toward one another to be kind and gracious, while also the believers where he is located greet them too.

²⁷⁸ ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν – Paul's final desire is that both the grace of God that comes as a result of Jesus' role as the Messiah and the common participation in their lives of the work of the Spirit of God within the creation be constant in their lives.