

2 CORINTHIANS

Hope in the midst of suffering (1:1-11)

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

To God's church in Corinth and all the saints, the born-again believers throughout Greece.

²May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ impart grace and peace to you.

³⁻⁴We praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for He is the Father of compassion and is full of mercy. He is the God of all comfort, who daily gives us strength. Yes, He sees us through all our difficulties, so that we are able to strengthen others in their troubles with the same strength we have received from Him ourselves.

⁵The sufferings that Christ endured spill over into our lives; but, in the same way, His strength overflows through us into the lives of others. ⁶So if we have to suffer any distress it will have a positive affect on you, for you will receive strength and God's saving grace. If we are strengthened by God it is so that you in turn will be enabled to endure patiently whatever suffering you have to face.

⁷This encourages us to believe that your future hope is secure, for it is sure that if you have to suffer for the gospel as we do, then you will also be strengthened as we are!

⁸⁻⁹Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about the troubles we faced in the province of Asia. We felt so completely overwhelmed by the pressure we were under that it seemed impossible for us to be able to survive; it was as if we were living under a death sentence. Now we understand that this was allowed to happen to us so that we would not rely on ourselves at all, but only on God who has the power to raise the dead. ¹⁰And that is what it was like, as if we had been delivered from death itself. Now we can be confident that He will always deliver us, no matter what we have to face in the future.

¹¹So we have set our hope on God; we are sure our future is in His hands and that He will continue to free us, helped as we are by your prayers for us. This being the case, many will join with us in giving

thanks for the way we experienced God's grace and His favour, a definite answer to all your prayers for our safety and well being.

God's enabling grace (1:12-24)

¹²Now we have great confidence and our consciences bear witness that we have behaved righteously in this world, and especially in the ways we have related to you in the holiness and sincere love that we received from God. This is not the outworking of any worldly wisdom but the result of God's grace, of all He has given us. ¹³⁻¹⁴This grace enables me to write to you in a way you can readily understand. I really trust that you will not be satisfied with partial understanding, but will come to a full appreciation of what we say, so that you can have confidence in us, just as we will have confidence about you when the Lord Jesus Christ returns.

¹⁵Because of this confidence I have about you, I planned to visit you to impart a double blessing. ¹⁶I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia and then again on my return journey. Then you could have sent me on my way to Judea.

¹⁷This was not some frivolous wish, because I do not make decisions in a worldly way. I do not say 'Yes' and 'No' in the same breath!

¹⁸God is faithful in what He says. So our message to you is not, 'Yes' and 'No.' ¹⁹Jesus Christ, God's Son, about whom Silas, Timothy and I preached to you, was not 'Yes' and 'No.' In Him the truth is revealed as always being 'Yes.' ²⁰No matter how many promises God gives us, they are all affirmed in Christ with a mighty 'Yes.' We can say 'Amen,' 'It shall be so', to all that is said through Him, and such faithful affirmation gives glory to God.

²¹⁻²²So it is God Himself who enables both you and us to stand firm in Christ. For He Himself anointed each of us personally, thus setting His seal of ownership upon us by placing His own Spirit in our hearts. This wonderful deposit that we have received from Him is a guarantee of what is to come, our full inheritance.

²³God is my witness when I tell you that the true reason why I did not return to Corinth was because I had your own interests at heart. I did not want to have to rebuke you further. ²⁴I did not want you to think that I was always putting you down, telling you what to do; we need to work together for the gospel with joy, as you stand firm in your faith!

Paul's love for the Corinthians (2:1-4)

2 This is why I decided not to make another painful visit to you. ²What purpose would it serve to grieve you? If I only did that,

how could you ever cause me to rejoice in you. ³This is why I wrote as I did, so that by the time I visited you these distressing matters would have been resolved. Then instead of causing you further grief, those same brethren would give me joy! Yes, I had such confidence that all of you would share my joy, not my grief. ⁴For when I wrote before I was so deeply upset, so heart-broken, that I was in tears, not tears of grief but tears that flowed from the depth of love I want you to know that I have for you.

Forgive the troublemaker (2:5-11)

⁵The troublemaker who has grieved me has actually done more to grieve all of you than to hurt me. And that is putting it mildly. ⁶The judgment passed on him by the majority of the church is sufficient punishment for him. ⁷Now it is time for him to know that you have forgiven him and want to restore him, so that he does not believe he is past redemption, that there is no hope for him.

⁸So I encourage you now to let him know that you really love him and are concerned for him. ⁹What I wrote before was a real test for you, to see if you would obey what I told you to do and take the necessary action. ¹⁰⁻¹¹If you forgive him, be sure I also forgive him. And whatever I forgive, and whenever I forgive, it is always before Christ and for your benefit, so that Satan may not have any advantage over us. For we know well his evil intentions.

Paul continues to spread the truth (2:12-17)

¹²⁻¹³When I went to preach the gospel of Christ in Troas and found that the Lord had opened a door of great opportunity for me, I still was not at peace because my brother Titus was not there as I had expected. So I left there and made for Macedonia.

¹⁴But thanks be to God, for He always leads us in His triumphant procession because we are in Christ. And He uses us everywhere we go to spread the truth about Him. ¹⁵⁻¹⁶For we are to God like the perfume of Christ among those who are being saved; the sweet fragrance of His life. But it is different among those who are perishing because of their rejection of the gospel. To them we have the smell of death about us.

¹⁷However, we are not like those who preach God's Word simply for their own financial gain; quite the opposite. We speak before God as those who live in Christ. So we preach with sincerity, as men sent by God with His commission.

Ministers of a new covenant (3:1-18)

3 Does it sound as if we are commending ourselves again? Do we need letters of recommendation, as some do? Are we asking you to recommend us to others? ²No, you are the only letter we need, for you are written on our hearts and everybody can see clearly what is written there. ³You demonstrate that as a result of our ministry, you are a letter from Christ, not written on paper with ink, not chiselled out on tablets of stone, but written with the Spirit of the living God on human hearts.

⁴This is the confidence we have before God through our faith in Christ. ⁵We are not able because of our natural abilities to claim any credit for ourselves. Our ability comes from God. ⁶He has made us able to be ministers of the new covenant, which is based not on the letter of the law, but on the Spirit of God. For religious legalism kills, but God's Spirit gives life!

⁷The ministry based on letters engraved on stone resulted in failure and death. Even so, that ministry expressed something of God's glory, for the Israelites were not able to stare at Moses' face because it shone with that glory, even though it was a glory that faded. ⁸But how much more of God's glory will be revealed through the ministry of His Spirit? ⁹If the ministry that condemns men for failing to keep the law is glorious, how much more of God's glory is revealed through the ministry that makes men righteous and acceptable to God! ¹⁰For the glory of the old covenant is as nothing compared with the glory of the new. ¹¹The glory of the old faded; so how much greater is the glory of the new, the glory that lasts forever!

¹²Having this as our hope makes us very bold. ¹³For we are not like Moses who had to cover His face so the Israelites would not see the radiance fading as they stared at him. ¹⁴Even to this day a veil covers the minds of those who hear the old covenant being read, causing them to be incapable of spiritual understanding. Only through faith in Christ can that veil be removed. ¹⁵Yes, that veil still covers their hearts when the books of Moses are read. ¹⁶Yet as soon as someone turns to the Lord, that veil is removed and he can understand the truth!

¹⁷Now the Spirit is the Spirit of the Lord God and where His Spirit is present, people have been set free. ¹⁸So our faces are not covered or veiled, but we are all able to reflect the Lord's glory. The more that glory is revealed in us, the more like Him we become! So this glory that comes from the Lord is continually increasing in our lives because the Spirit of glory lives in us.

Suffering for the gospel (4:1-18)

4 Therefore we have no cause to be downhearted because, by God's mercy, we have been given this ministry of glory. ²For this reason we have put all shameful ways behind us and have nothing to hide. We do not deceive people, nor do we try to make God's Word say what we want it to say. Quite the opposite; we proclaim the truth simply and clearly so that everyone can see our integrity before God.

³If the gospel we preach is not understood, this is only because those who are perishing are blind to the truth. ⁴The god of this age has blinded their minds and understanding so they are incapable of receiving the glorious light of Christ, who is exactly like God the Father and is revealed through the gospel. ⁵So we do not preach for our own glory or adulation but as your servants, to reveal Jesus to you.

⁶For God has declared, "Light is to shine where before there was darkness," and so He has caused His light to shine in our hearts. He has given us the light that comes from knowing God's glory in our experience, as revealed through the person of Christ.

⁷We already have this treasure of Christ's glory in our bodies, which are but clay jars by comparison. It is evident that this power is greater than any other power and is already within us, a gift from God, not something we could produce ourselves.

⁸There are times when we seem to be surrounded by insurmountable problems, but we are never crushed or defeated by them. At times we are thoroughly perplexed about why certain things happen to us, but we never despair. ⁹We are persecuted for our faith, but God never abandons us. Even if we are sometimes struck down by some adversity, we are not destroyed. ¹⁰For when we suffer in our bodies, we share in Jesus' own passion and death, so that His risen life may also be revealed through our bodies.

¹¹While we are in the world it seems that we have to die continually to self for Jesus' sake, so the life of His Spirit can be revealed through our natural bodies. ¹²This process of death is at work in us, to enable God's life to be at work in you!

¹³⁻¹⁴It is written in the Psalms, "I have spoken what I have believed." By the same Spirit of Faith we also believe the truth and speak it openly and boldly because we know that the Father who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us up with Him. Yes, Jesus will present all believers to the Father so we can live eternally in His Presence.

4:6 *Genesis 1:3*

4:14 *Psalms 116:10*

¹⁵Whatever we suffer is for your benefit and enables many more people to receive God's grace, causing them to be profoundly thankful that God is glorified in them.

¹⁶Therefore we are not discouraged. Even if outwardly we seem to grow weaker, yet inwardly we are daily becoming stronger. ¹⁷For the difficulties we face now are only temporary and trivial, compared with the eternal glory we inherit. ¹⁸For this reason we keep our focus, not on what we see or experience now, for such things are only temporary. No, we focus on what we do not yet see, but which is ours eternally.

Looking forward to heaven (5:1-10)

5 Now we are assured that when this earthly tent we live in is destroyed, when we die physically and have finished with these present bodies, we have a new home to look forward to in heaven, a house that has not been constructed with human hands, but an eternal body! ²We grow tired of our present bodies, longing for the time when we will be clothed with our new heavenly bodies. ³We will not feel exposed then as we do now. ⁴In this present body we struggle and feel burdened by our sufferings; but our spirits will have new spiritual bodies in heaven. Our mortal lives will give way to the immortal, to eternal life.

⁵God has made us His children for this very reason. This is proved by the fact that He has already given us His eternal Spirit, the guarantee of our future destiny. ⁶Therefore we have good cause to be confident, no matter what the situation; for we know that while we live in these present bodies we are not yet at one with the Lord in our heavenly bodies. ⁷But we live by faith in what He has promised, not in what we see happening at present. ⁸I repeat, we can have absolute confidence that it will be much better when we have finished with these present bodies and have been taken home to be with the Lord eternally.

⁹This being the case, we have made it our aim to please Him in every way possible, both now in this life and in the life that is to come. ¹⁰For we all have to come before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us will receive the right reward for what he or she has done in this present body. And He will determine what has been good and what has been bad in His eyes.

No longer live for ourselves (5:11-17)

¹¹Because we know what it means to live in fear of the Lord, not wanting to displease Him in any way, we do all we can to persuade

others to believe the truth of the gospel. God knows this is our intention and I trust you also realise this. ¹²We are not trying to promote ourselves again, but we do want you to be proud about what we are doing. Then you will have a ready answer for those who are interested in what the world offers, instead of being concerned about the condition of their hearts before God. ¹³We are only being faithful to God in what we do, even if it appears to some that we are out of our minds. We are actually in our right minds, and so you are able to benefit. ¹⁴It is our love for Christ that compels us to action.

We are convinced that He died for all and therefore all have died with Him. ¹⁵But if He died for all it means that those of us who have received His risen life should no longer live for ourselves, but for the One who died and was raised again for us!

¹⁶So from this point onwards we will not assess anyone by worldly standards. We used to have a very worldly view of Christ, but that is no longer the case. ¹⁷Now we are sure that if anyone is in Christ, made one with Him by their faith in Him, then that person is a new creation. The old person he was has died, is buried and finished with – gone forever. Now he has become a new person.

Message of reconciliation (5:18-6:2)

¹⁸All this is entirely the work of God Himself. He alone could reconcile us with Himself, and He has done this through Christ. This is why He has now given us the ministry of reconciliation, to see others made one with Him in His love.

¹⁹In Christ, God was doing all that was necessary to reconcile the whole world to Himself, a reconciliation that can only take place when men's sins are forgiven and God no longer regards them as guilty.

Yes, He has given us this message, this gospel of reconciliation. ²⁰This means we are Christ's ambassadors; He reaches out to others through us. This is why we beg on Christ's behalf that all of you be reconciled to God, so that you live at one with Him.

²¹Look at what it cost God to make this possible! He caused His perfect Son, who was sinless, to take all our sin upon Himself. He suffered the punishment for sin that we deserve, so that now we might become those who live in right standing with God!

6 Because we work with God in the cause of the gospel, we implore you not to reject the grace He has offered you. ²He says, "Because this is the time of My favour I have heard you. Because

this is the day of salvation I have helped you." Listen to me! This is now the time of His favour. This is the day of His salvation when you can be reconciled and made one with Him.

The cost of living for the gospel (6:3-13)

³So we have no desire to hinder anyone from receiving what God wants to give. If we were to do that, our ministry would be discredited. ⁴No, we are able to commend ourselves in every way because of the cost we have been prepared to embrace for the cause of the gospel. We have needed great endurance in the face of many difficulties and hardships and in circumstances that have caused much distress. ⁵We have suffered floggings, imprisonment and even riots. We certainly have worked hard and have known what it is to be without sleep and food. ⁶We have had to live in purity. We have needed understanding, patience and kindness. We have followed the leading of the Holy Spirit and have acted with love. ⁷We have spoken the truth and have been instruments of God's power. We have needed to use the spiritual weapons of righteousness to be on the offensive, and also in self-defence.

⁸We have known times of glory and yet have been treated with dishonour. Sometimes we have been praised, at other times we have been slandered. Although we are genuine we have been regarded by some as impostors. ⁹Sometimes we are well known, in other places nobody knows who we are. We have been close to death, but we are still here! We have been beaten, but not killed. ¹⁰Even in times of sorrow we have continued to rejoice. Even when poor ourselves, we have been able to make many rich through what they have received from God. We have nothing ourselves, yet truly we have everything in Christ!

¹¹My beloved friends at Corinth, we have spoken freely to you from hearts that are wide open to you. ¹²We do not hold back from showing our love for you. So do not withhold your love and affection from us. ¹³Treat us as we treat you and open your hearts to us as my dear children.

A people set apart (6:14-7:1)

¹⁴Do not be joined together with unbelievers. How can you, who are made righteous and acceptable to God, be one with those who are still numbered among the ungodly? What could you have in common with them? ¹⁵What unity could ever exist between Christ and the

devil? What unity can ever exist between a believer and a non-believer? ¹⁶You are a living temple of God, so how can you be one with those who make idols of other people or the things that they do?

Remember what God has said, "I will live in them and will walk with them; and I will be their God and they will be My own special people." ¹⁷And so He has also commanded, "Therefore, be a people set apart from the ungodly. Have nothing to do with anything that is unclean in My sight, and you will draw close to Me. ¹⁸I will be your Father and you My sons and daughters, says the Lord God Almighty."

7 What wonderful promises God gives us, dear friends! So let us cleanse ourselves from everything that causes our spirits or bodies to be defiled and unclean in His sight. Instead let us seek to be completely holy in all we do, because we take God's purposes seriously.

Godly sorrow leads to repentance (7:2-16)

²So I repeat: open your hearts to us. Look at our record. We have never wronged anyone, nor corrupted or exploited them. ³I am not condemning you, for I assure you that we love you from the heart and are ready to live or die for you. ⁴Actually, I have great confidence that you will do what is right, and I take great pride in you, for you have encouraged me in all my troubles, giving me great joy.

⁵When we entered Macedonia we had no rest but were opposed in whatever we did. We had to contend with the external conflicts and the internal fears caused by being so hounded. ⁶⁻⁷However, God strengthens the downhearted, and we were encouraged when Titus arrived with the news that you had given him encouragement. He told us that you were longing to see me, that you were deeply sorry about the issues that had to be resolved and now had a heartfelt concern for my welfare. And this news gave me even greater joy!

⁸Although I did regret it at the time, I no longer regret causing you the sorrow and pain that resulted from the letter I sent you. ⁹Now I am content, not at having to cause you any distress, but because your sorrow has led to real repentance, a change of heart and mind on your part. God knew this sorrow was necessary, and so you were not harmed by it in any way. ¹⁰When God causes sorrow

6:16 *Leviticus 26:12*

6:18 *2 Samuel 7:14, 7:8*

it leads to repentance, which in turn leads to salvation. We do not regret that kind of sorrow; but the sorrow the world causes is totally different and leads to death, not life!

¹¹ Consider, then, what changes have taken place in you as a result of this godly sorrow. You are now more earnest about the things of God. You are keen to clear yourselves of any guilt. You now feel indignant about the sin you once allowed. You were even alarmed about the situation and longed to see good order restored. Now you are concerned that those involved are dealt with justly. So you have proved ready to do everything in a righteous manner.

¹² When I wrote, I was not taking sides either with the guilty party or with those who were wronged. Before God you needed to demonstrate that you are devoted to us by taking note of what we wrote. ¹³ And we are truly encouraged by your response.

Not only are we encouraged, but we are especially pleased to see how happy you made Titus by the way you received him. He was refreshed spiritually as a result. ¹⁴ I had told him great things about you, and you did not let me down. We spoke the truth to you, but we also spoke the truth about you to Titus. ¹⁵ Now he remembers your obedience with great affection because you listened to him with both respect and concern to do what was right. So it pleases me to be able to have such confidence in you.

Generosity encouraged (8:1-15)

8 Brothers, we want to tell you about the grace the Macedonian churches have received from God. ² Despite the fact that they had to face extreme difficulties themselves, they still overflowed with great joy and gave with such wonderful generosity, regardless of their own dire poverty. ³⁻⁴ I can assure you that they gave as much as they were able to give, and more besides. On their own initiative, they begged us to allow them to share in the privilege of giving to their fellow saints. ⁵ So they went far beyond our expectations, devoting themselves first to the Lord and then to us, being prepared to accept the direction God would give them through us.

⁶ So we have encouraged Titus, who had originally inspired you to give, to return and help you complete this generous action. ⁷ You have shown that you excel in everything, in your faith, in the things you say, in your knowledge of God's will and in truly longing to see His will for you fulfilled. Yes, you also excel in your love for us. So now also prove that you excel in this grace of giving. ⁸ I am not ordering you to give, but I am testing the genuine nature of your

love by comparing it with the way others have been so enthusiastic in the way they have given.

⁹You are well aware of the nature of the grace our Lord Jesus Christ has demonstrated. In heaven He was rich beyond measure, yet for your sakes He came to share the poverty of our humanity, so that now through that poverty you are able to share in His heavenly riches.

¹⁰I believe this to be the best course of action for you. Last year you were the first to express the desire to give to the saints in need, and you gave accordingly. ¹¹Now complete what you began, to show that you are just as eager to complete the task as you were to begin it, using whatever means you have. ¹²The amount is acceptable if given willingly. You can only give what you have, not what you do not have.

¹³Our intention is not that you put yourselves in a difficult financial position in order to relieve the needs of others, but that there shall be sharing among the brethren. ¹⁴⁻¹⁵At this time you can supply for their needs out of your surplus, so that at another time they can supply for your needs out of their surplus. So in time there is equality among you all, for it is written, "The one who gathered much did not have more than he needed, and the one who gathered little did not have too little."

Titus returns to Corinth (8:16-24)

¹⁶I thank God that He gave Titus the same heart for you as I have. ¹⁷He not only welcomed my request to make a return visit, but was genuinely eager to see you all again. ¹⁸We are sending with him a brother who has been praised by all the churches for the way he has served the cause of the gospel. ¹⁹In addition, this brother was selected by the churches to accompany us when we take the gift to Jerusalem. Administering this gift honours the Lord and shows how eager we are to help the brethren there. ²⁰But we are going to be careful to avoid any criticism for the way in which we handle this generous gift. ²¹We will go out of our way to show that everything is seen to be done righteously before the Lord and in the eyes of men.

²²We are also sending with Titus another brother, who has proved himself in many ways to be truly zealous in serving others. This is even more the case now, because he has such confidence in you.

²³I regard Titus as my partner who works with me for your good. And all these brothers represent the churches and honour Christ by

the way they conduct themselves. ²⁴Therefore, show these men how genuine is your love for them and that our pride in you is fully justified, for this will be a good witness to all the churches.

Sowing and reaping (9:1-15)

9 I do not need to write further to you about serving your fellow saints in Jerusalem through this gift. ²I know you are so keen to help them that I have been boasting about you to the brethren in Macedonia, telling them that for a whole year you brethren in Greece have been ready to give. In fact, your enthusiasm has been catching and has inspired others to action. ³And I am sending these brothers to you now so that what we have said about you might prove true and not be empty words, that you will give generously as I told others would be the case.

⁴If any Macedonians who accompany me when I come to visit you find that your gift is not ready I will feel ashamed of you and humiliated before them, having spoken so well of you. ⁵So I thought it wise to send these brothers ahead of me to ensure that everything is in place and that the generous gift you promised is already collected willingly and not given begrudgingly.

⁶Remember this spiritual principle: he who sows a little will only reap a little, and he who sows to bless generously will reap generous blessings. ⁷But each person has to decide in his own heart what he will give, not reluctantly or because he feels under pressure to give; for God loves those who give willingly and joyfully. ⁸He is able to cause all His grace to overflow in your lives, so that in all things at all times, you will have all you need and much more besides, so that you will overflow in the way you bless others. ⁹As it is written, 'He has given generous gifts to the poor and his righteous actions will never be forgotten.'

¹⁰The Lord supplies seed for the sower so we can have bread to eat; and He will also supply you with many opportunities to give so that you will reap a great harvest through your righteous deeds.

¹¹As a result, you will be made rich in every way so that you will have even more to give when the opportunity arises. And many will be thankful to God for what they have received through your generosity.

¹²So you can see that this present situation will not only serve to meet the needs of God's people, but will also cause them to overflow with praise and thankfulness to God for His provision. ¹³At the same time, you will have demonstrated the reality of your love and

so they will praise God for your loving obedience, the outworking of the faith you claim in the gospel of Christ. They will thank God for you because of your willingness to share what you have with them and with others.

¹⁴So they will hold you before God in prayer because of this wonderful grace that He has given you – the grace to give generously, willingly and joyfully. ¹⁵So thanks be to God for the greatest and most wonderful gift of His grace to us all, His Son Jesus Christ.

Demolishing enemy strongholds (10:1-6)

10 You regard me as a timid person when I am with you, and think that I am bold when I write to you from a distance. ²Well I, Paul, appeal to you now in the humility and gentleness of Christ to take note of all I am saying to you, so that when I visit you I will not have to be bold as I have to be with those who think that we Christians can live by worldly standards. ³True, we live in this world; but we do not fight our battles as people who belong to the world. ⁴We have other weapons to fight with, not those of the world. By contrast, our weapons have God's power that shatters the enemy's strongholds that oppose us. ⁵With the weapon of truth we demolish rational arguments that oppose the walk of faith. We have the answer to every false way of thinking that seeks to undermine the truth about God. We exercise authority in the way we think, denying negative or rebellious thoughts, and accepting only those that glorify Jesus so that we might obey Him. ⁶But we must be prepared to punish those who refuse to obey so that, as a church, we might be united in obedience.

Paul's God-given authority (10:7-18)

⁷You look at things superficially. If you are assured that you belong to Christ, you must remember that we also belong to Him in just the same way. ⁸I do not hide the truth; the Lord gave us His authority to encourage you and build up the church, not to discourage or destroy you. I refuse to be ashamed of the authority He has given me. ⁹At the same time, I have no desire to intimidate you by what I write. ¹⁰For some say, "his letters are full of authority and power, but he does not appear to be an impressive character when you see him; and he is not a great speaker."

¹¹Those with such attitudes should understand that I am the same person when I write from a distance as I am when with you in person, as my actions prove.

¹²I would not dare to think of myself as highly as those who commend themselves, nor would I want to compare myself with them. They are not wise to measure themselves by their own standards, or to compare themselves with others around them. ¹³⁻¹⁴I will not make any claims beyond those it is right to make, but will restrict the use of my authority to the areas God has assigned to me. So I am not going too far in the authority I claim to have over you, for I brought the gospel of Christ to you. I would not expect to have the same authority if I had nothing to do with you.

¹⁵⁻¹⁶Neither do I claim the credit for the work done among you by others. My hope is that I will have even greater influence among you as your faith continues to develop, so that I can then move on to preach the gospel in other places further away that have not yet been reached with the gospel! I never want to be satisfied with working where others are also working. ¹⁷The scripture declares, "Anyone who boasts should boast only in what the Lord does."

¹⁸So the person who commends himself is not necessarily approved, but only he whom the Lord commends!

Paul jealous about the church (11:1-9)

11 I trust that you will continue to bear with me if I go on talking foolishly for a moment. ²I feel jealous about you, but with jealousy that comes from God. I promised you to Christ as your only Husband; a pure virgin given to Him as His bride. ³However, I fear that you might wander away from your heartfelt and pure devotion to Christ, in the same way as Eve was deceived by the devil's cunning. ⁴For you are influenced in the ways you think by those who come and preach a different Jesus than the Jesus who was preached to you. You even allow yourselves to come under the influence of a different spirit from the Spirit given you when you believed the truth. You end up believing a different gospel from the one you accepted at the beginning. And you do all these things so readily!

⁵I know I am not at all inferior to those 'super-apostles.' ⁶I may not be a great orator, but I do know the truth, as I have made abundantly clear to you.

⁷Do you think I sinned in humbling myself before you when my purpose was to see you raised up by preaching the good news from God to you, without asking anything from you? ⁸Did I 'rob' the other churches because they gave me financial support so that I could serve you with the gospel?

⁹And when I needed anything while I was with you in Corinth, I never became a burden to you, for the Macedonian brothers who visited met all my needs. I was determined not to be a financial burden to you and this is still the case.

Paul warns of deceivers (11:10-23)

¹⁰Because I have the truth of Christ living in me, nobody anywhere in Greece will prevent me from boasting about these things. ¹¹Does this mean that I do not love you? God knows well that I do love you! ¹²Yet I will persist in acting in the way I do to remove the ground from under those who want to be considered as having equal status with us, believing their works are just as significant as ours. ¹³Such men are not truly apostles, even if they call themselves such. They are false, deceitful workmen who want others to regard them as apostles.

¹⁴We should not be surprised that there are such people, for even Satan appears to be what he isn't, an angel of light. ¹⁵Those who honour him will follow him in deceiving others by appearing as servants of righteousness, when all they are really concerned about is their own prestige and self-importance. They will be judged in the way their actions deserve!

¹⁶I say again, do not think of me as a fool. If that is your attitude, I will indulge you with a little foolish boasting. ¹⁷Such self-confident talk does not come from the Lord, but I speak as a fool. ¹⁸These false people boast about their exploits, so I also will indulge in some boasting. ¹⁹You think that you are wise even though you willingly indulge these false foolish people. ²⁰You even receive those who enslave you by their false teaching and those who exploit you for their own ends. They take advantage of you and promote themselves, while at the same time hitting you in the face. ²¹Do you think I should feel ashamed for not acting as they do? Is this a sign of my weakness?

If you want me to boast as they do, I am certainly capable of doing so. ²²Are they true Hebrews? Well, so am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descended directly from Abraham? I am also descended from him. ²³Are they Christ's servants? It is really crazy to talk in this way, but I am even more a servant than they are!

Paul's suffering for the gospel (11:23-33)

I have worked much harder for the cause of the gospel than these people; I have been in prison more frequently for my faith than any

of them. ²⁴I have been flogged more severely and have been in danger of my life on numerous occasions. I have received the Jewish punishment of thirty-nine lashes no less than five times. ²⁵On three occasions I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned and I have been shipwrecked three times. I spent a whole night and day drifting in the sea.

²⁶I have travelled constantly, often in danger from rivers, bandits and even from my fellow Jews as well as from Gentiles. I have known danger in the city, in the country and at sea. Even those who claimed to be brothers, but who were really false, put my life in danger.

²⁷I have known what it is to feel continually tired and have often had to forgo getting any sleep. I have known what it is to be hungry and thirsty, starving even! I have been freezing cold with insufficient clothing to keep me warm.

²⁸On top of all these things, I carry daily the pressure I feel because of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹Do you not realise that I empathise with the weak and seethe inwardly with anger towards the devil when he leads people into sin?

³⁰If I boast at all, it is only to show how weak I am humanly. ³¹I praise forever the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ who knows that I do not lie. ³²There was even an occasion in Damascus when king Aretas had the whole city on alert in order to arrest me. ³³But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the city wall and slipped through their hands.

Dependence on God's strength (12:1-13)

12 Although there is nothing to be gained from it, I will show you that I have good cause to boast. I will tell of visions and revelations I have received from the Lord.

²Fourteen years ago I was caught up in a vision to the third heaven, into paradise itself. I could not tell whether my spirit was still in my body or had momentarily left it. I really do not know, but God knows. ³⁻⁴But I am sure that I was lifted up into paradise and heard things I cannot express, that should not be told to anyone.

⁵A person who has had such an experience has something to boast about! But I do not claim any credit for this myself. I will only boast about my personal weaknesses. ⁶I could not be accused of speaking foolishly if I did boast about such experiences, for I only speak the truth about what happened. But I will not go into detail for I do not want to promote myself. I want people to judge me by what I say and do, not by the revelations I have received.

⁷And the Lord ensured I would not be puffed up with pride, for I was given a thorn in my flesh to stop me from being proud because of these great encounters. This thorn was a messenger from Satan, someone he sent to torment me.

⁸I pleaded with the Lord on three occasions for this 'thorn' to be taken away. ⁹"My grace is always sufficient to meet your need," He told me; "My power is revealed more perfectly through your weakness!" This is why I am happy to boast about my weaknesses, for then Christ's power will work through me. ¹⁰Yes, for Christ's sake, I even delight in being so weak, in suffering rejection and hardships, in being persecuted and having to face so many difficulties. For the more I am aware of my own weakness, the more I can depend on His strength.

¹¹See what you have driven me to! If you had commended me in the way you should have done, I would not have had to speak so foolishly! Even though I regard myself as nothing, I am not in the least inferior to those 'super-apostles'. ¹²What is the evidence that a person is an apostle? He continually performs signs, wonders and miracles among you!

¹³Were you inferior to any other churches? Only in that I was never a financial burden to you. If that makes you inferior, please forgive me for being the cause of this!

Working for the welfare of the church (12:14-21)

¹⁴Well, I am ready to make my third visit to Corinth, and I will not be a personal burden to you then, because I do not want your possessions but your hearts. It is clear that the young children do not have to provide for their parents, but the parents for their young children. ¹⁵This being the case, I will give myself and all I have with joy for your sake. But if I show you even greater love, will you love me less in return? ¹⁶No matter what you choose to do in the future, I certainly have not been a burden to you in the past, even though some accuse me of being crafty and trying to manipulate you. ¹⁷Be honest; did I ever try to exploit you through any of the brothers I sent to visit you? ¹⁸For example, when I persuaded Titus to visit you, along with another brother, did he do anything to exploit you? No, for we always act in the same Spirit, with the same intention of working for your welfare.

¹⁹Do you think that all we are doing is trying to justify ourselves in your eyes? Not at all, for we speak as those who live in Christ and before God. So everything we say and do is aimed at strengthening you in your faith.

²⁰However, I fear that when I come to Corinth I may be disappointed in what I find, and then you might be disappointed in what I have to do. Will you be what I want you to be? I am afraid there may be quarrelling, jealousy, anger with one another and factions among you. I might find that you slander one another, gossip about each other, that you are proud and disorderly.

²¹I fear that when I next meet you I shall be humbled before God because of what I find. And I will be truly grieved if I find that there has not been genuine repentance of the earlier sins of which you were guilty; the impurity, the sexual immorality and even the debauchery in which you used to indulge.

Warnings to the church (13:1-14)

13 So this will be my third visit to you. The scripture declares that, "Every case must be settled on the testimony of two or three witnesses." ²Well, I gave you clear warnings on my second visit and I now repeat these warnings from a distance. When I arrive I will not spare the guilty or any who have not repented and changed their ways. ³I will give you ample proof that Christ speaks through me. He certainly does not deal with you in a weak and feeble manner, but He acts in power. ⁴It is true He was crucified in the weakness of His humanity, but He lives now in God's power. In the same way, we are weak in ourselves even though we live in Him; yet by God's power we are able to serve you because of our unity with Him.

⁵So examine yourselves to test whether you are living in genuine faith. Surely it is evident that Christ Jesus is in you, unless of course you fail the test! ⁶I trust it will be apparent to you that we have not failed the test!

⁷I pray to God that you will not do anything wrong, not simply to demonstrate that our ministry among you has not been a failure, but because you are intent on doing what is right. ⁸We must not be seen doing anything that denies the truth we preach, but only that which demonstrates and promotes the truth. ⁹We are not worried about appearing weak so long as you are really strong, and we pray that you will fulfil God's purpose as mature believers should.

¹⁰This is why I write from a distance in the way I do, so that when I arrive I will not have to be harsh in any way. I exercise my apostolic authority which the Lord gave me to encourage and build you up, not to destroy you!

¹¹Beloved ones, my final word to you is this: Aim for perfection, to fulfil completely God's purpose for your lives. Take notice of all I have said and live in unity and peace with one another. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.

¹²Greet one another in God's holy love. ¹³All the saints here send their greetings!

¹⁴May the Lord Jesus impart His grace to you, and may God keep you in love. And may you all share in the life and fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

