

II Corinthians

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Lesson 1 – Introduction and Outline of the Letter

General Introduction

Paul’s second letter to the Corinthian church is unlike his other works. While most of Paul’s letters are systematically outlined, the second Corinthian letter is written with passionate concern and fervor. He reveals some of his own inner struggles and concerns, which are less obvious in his other works.

This touching letter contains fewer pointed instructions for the church, especially in comparison to the first epistle. However, it holds many great lessons that will aid us today in living a happier, wiser, and more righteous Christian life.

Important Fundamental Points

When we begin to study II Corinthians, we are picking up in the middle of a dramatic sequel. Failure to understand the setting of I and II Corinthians will greatly hamper proper interpretation of II Corinthians.

Paul wrote the II Corinthian letter, when he was extremely concerned for the Corinthians. Based on the letter itself, the church was clearly split. Some were eager to follow the apostle’s instructions, while others were bent on straying from God’s authority, upholding and following false teachers. This created a potentially explosive situation for the Corinthians and Paul. The book of II Corinthians is best interpreted in the light of an inspired apostle writing to defuse the situation by encouraging the faithful while reprimanding the rebellious. Without the understanding of Paul’s divided readers, many of his strong, but subtle, statements will be overlooked or misinterpreted.

It is important to understand that at no point did the apostle Paul lose his composure or write anything rashly. Every word is deliberately chosen to produce a specific response (II Corinthians 12:16). Every passionate plea (6:1, 11-13; 7:1-16; 10:1,2) and powerful rebuke (10:6, 11; 11:1-4; 12:11-13:10) was necessary, as this letter was the final encouragement and warning before Paul’s ominous return (12:11 – 13:10). Also, we should never forget that this is not the thoughts of a mere man, but these words were inspired by the Holy Spirit using Paul’s personality, knowledge, love, vocabulary, and style while establishing every word.

Background

I. Author – “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God”

A. Internal Evidence

1. Paul references himself at the opening of the letter (1:1). Also, the entire letter lends itself to the authorship of Paul. Only Paul could have written with the tone, style of writing, and deep concern exhibited in II Corinthians.
2. Timothy is also mentioned at the introduction of the letter; however, he is mentioned as a “brother” in contrast to Paul’s title. Although Timothy would have sent greetings, he would not have been an inspired joint-author.

B. External Evidence

1. Clement of Rome (95 A.D.) quotes from both I and II Corinthians in his letters to the Corinthians and attributes both letters to Paul. Other numerous apostolic fathers have quoted and attributed I and II Corinthians to Paul.
2. Few critics have disputed the authorship of these letters. However, of the few critics who have endeavored to deny the Pauline authorship, most have managed only to discredit themselves (Coffman 5).

II. Date of Writing: 53–57 A. D.

- A. Two basic dates are given for the writing of II Corinthians. One time span is late 53, early 54 A.D.; the other date is late 56, early 57 A. D. Lenski, Lipscomb and Barnes support the later dating. Jenkins, Curry, and Coffman support the earlier dating.
- B. By using clues and subtle references, an approximate timeline can be calculated to relate events surrounding the establishment of the Corinthian church and the writing of I and II Corinthians. These events are matched to the timeline of secular history by the reference of Gallio, who was the proconsul of Achaia. He was mentioned in Acts 18:12 shortly after the establishment of the church. It is upon the date of his ruling that Paul's second letter to the Corinthians and all related events are based. The discrepancy in dating II Corinthians arises from the two different dates used for Gallio's short rule.
- C. The discrepancy between dates for the writing of II Corinthians is of little importance to us as students of God's Word, but understanding the general time of writing can be useful in better placing the Corinthian church in its proper historical context. This helps us to better understand problems that the Corinthians faced and to identify the themes that Paul weaves throughout I and II Corinthians.

III. Establishment of the church at Corinth

- A. The Corinthian church was established by the apostle Paul (Acts 18:1-21), during his second missionary journey (Map 1), about 51 A.D.
- B. Capital of the Roman province of Achaia, Corinth was a large commercial port city that was a converging point for large amounts of wealth, immorality, and idolatry.
- C. In spite of the corrupt culture in which it was entrenched, the work at Corinth was to have many members (Acts 18:9-10).

IV. Background to the writing of I Corinthians

- A. After Paul's departure, the Corinthian church erred on multiple points, prompting a severe letter of rebuke from the apostle. Instructions were also included in the letter to withdraw from a man who was publicly known to be committing gross adultery (I Corinthians 5).
- B. I Corinthians was written while Paul was on an extended stay at Ephesus (I Corinthians 16:8), during his third missionary journey (Map 2), about 53 or 54 A. D.
- C. The first Corinthian letter did contain encouraging thoughts, but it was on the whole a corrective letter.
- D. The strong content of this letter sets the stage for the writing of II Corinthians. Understanding this part of the background is essential for fully appreciating the letter, especially the opening chapters.

V. Background to the writing of II Corinthians

- A. Paul had promised in the first letter he would soon come to Corinth (I Corinthians 16:5-9).

- B. He also mentioned that Timothy might visit them, but he requested that the Corinthians allow Timothy to return quickly because of his usefulness to Paul (I Corinthians 16:10-11). Timothy's helpful assistance in Paul's labors is supported by the fact that Timothy was with Paul when he wrote II Corinthians (1:1).
- C. However, as events unfolded Paul did not return to Corinth as quickly as he originally promised.
- D. This delay may have been caused by Paul being forced to flee from Ephesus to Troas, because of an uprising caused by Demetrius (Acts 19:21 – 20:1). Or, it may have been because of open doors at both Ephesus and Troas (Acts 19:8 – 20, II Corinthians 2:12). Or, Paul may have simply wanted to give them more time to consider and repent (II Corinthians 2:1).
- E. At some point Titus was sent to Corinth to begin collecting money for needy Christians in Judea and to check on the Corinthians reaction to Paul's letter (II Corinthians 7:6-7, 13-16; 8:1-8). He may also have been sent partly because of Paul's delay in coming.
- F. While Paul waited in Troas, he continued to work for the Lord (II Corinthians 2:12); however, he was restless while he waited on Titus's return. So, Paul continued from Troas to Macedonia, where he met up with Titus (2:13, 7:6)
- G. After finally hearing Titus's report, Paul writes second Corinthians and sends it with Titus (8:6, 16-24). In this letter Paul's passionate concern shines through more than any of Paul's other letters.
- H. The Corinthians' treacherous condition called for Paul to make an emotional plea to strengthen the faithful and to provide one last warning for the rebellious before punishment.

VI. The Lost Letters

- A. In Paul's first letter (I Corinthians 5:9), he mentions "*I wrote to you in my epistle...*" Since Paul used the past tense, this quotation leads many scholars to conjecture that there must have been a lost letter written before I Corinthians.
- B. Some scholars believe that this may be referring to I Corinthians itself. This argument is based upon the fact that the tense of the verb "*I wrote*" (Greek epistolary aorist tense) could technically have been used so that it would have been referring to the letter that he was writing at that moment, I Corinthians.
- C. However, many scholars correctly point out that although this could technically be true, it would make Paul's message into nonsense. It would be impossible for the Corinthians to have already misunderstood a statement that Paul was just then writing (I Corinthians 5:9-10).
- D. The likely truth is that Paul wrote some kind of letter that he sent to the Corinthians before he wrote I Corinthians. It should be remembered that if this letter was necessary to us, then the Holy Spirit would have preserved it for us.
- E. Some scholars believe that a second lost letter may have been written between I and II Corinthians. Paul references a "*severe*" letter that he wrote in II Corinthians 2:4; 7:8.
- F. However, in all likelihood this refers to I Corinthians, which could surely be regarded as a "*severe*" letter that Paul would have written out of "*much affliction and anguish of heart*".

VII. Higher Criticism

- A. Other liberal scholars, known as higher critics, believe that the “*I wrote*” quotation actually refers to a fragment of II Corinthians (6:14 – 7:1). However, these critics, who scoff at the idea of an inspired Bible, typically slice almost all Bible books into a ridiculous number of fragments by different authors at different times based on highly questionable and subjective methods.
- B. These liberal scholars also slice up II Corinthians into at least three separate fragments depending on which critic is to be believed. Each higher critic promotes a different story, but in general they create a picture where I and II Corinthians are letters that have been edited and spliced by multiple authors. They typically paint Paul as a weakling and coward who was completely rejected by the Corinthian church.
- C. Such stories are based upon speculations about assumptions from opinions on subtle references. They are the products of critics who seek to elevate themselves by discrediting the Bible and its writers. Their stories are as creative as they are false, and few Bible students would consider their theories. However, as silly as these critics may be, their theories do influence more liberal students and eventually filter into the Lord’s churches

General Outline

The second Corinthian letter can be outlined into three major sections. Each section focuses on one main point with many secondary points. The progression of thought is both incredibly logical and deeply emotional, although each can be easily overlooked if not carefully scrutinized. Many of the points overlap previous points, serving as bridge, transitioning between other points, which makes outlining more difficult.

Section One – Exhorting Defenders of Paul’s Apostleship

In the first section of II Corinthians, Paul addresses the part of the church that had mostly remained faithful to Christ through Paul’s gospel. The tone of this section is more patient, although still very bold and impassioned in parts. The first section deals with factors that interfered with his plans, despite his best intentions and sincere motives. He begins a lengthy defense of his ministry, which is frequently – but not always – explicitly contrasted with the false apostles, who are more fully addressed in the third section. He concludes this section with a passionate plea to separate themselves from corrupting influences, while telling them of his deep love and concern for them.

I. Greeting (1:1 – 2)

II. Defense of Paul’s character (1:3 – 2:13):

- A. Suffering in Asia (1:3 – 11)
- B. Defense for failing to visit as previously promised – to spare them sorrow (1:12 – 2:2)
- C. Instructions to forgive and encourage the punished man (2:3 – 11)
- D. Unrest despite door of opportunity in Troas and Macedonia (2:12 – 13)

III. Defense of Paul’s apostolic ministry and associated laborers (2:14 – 5:21):

- A. Lead by God to triumph in preaching the gospel – introduces “*sufficiency*” (2:14–16)

- B. Evidenced by superior “*letters of commendation*” over those offered and required by the “*peddlers*” (2:17–3:5)
- C. Evidenced by a superior covenant, which God enabled Paul and his fellow workers to serve as its ministers (3:7–18)
- D. Evidenced by optimistic, steadfast perseverance in the face of terrible persecution (4:1 – 5:21)
 - 1. Because of superior covenant and God’s power, despite persecution (4:1–15)
 - 2. Because of faith in the unseen eternal glory of being with Christ (4:16 – 5:8)
 - 3. Because of the terror of the judgment of Christ (5:9 – 11)
 - 4. Because they are ambassadors for Christ, ministering reconciliation (5:12 –21)

IV. Paul’s emotional plea (6:1 – 7:16)

- A. Not abandon Paul’s salvation providing ministry, which had been “*commended*” by a multitude of demonstrations of sincerity, miracles, character, and true love (6:1 – 10).
- B. Separate themselves from corrupting influences, tugging at their affections (6:11 – 7:1)
- C. Expressed love, concern, and confidence in the Corinthians to ultimately overcome (7:2 – 16)

Section Two – Collection for Needy Saints

Section two, the shortest section of the letter, primarily addressed the Corinthians part in collecting money for needy saints in Judea. Here Paul encouraged the Corinthians to finish the collection that they had started under Titus’s guidance. He also informed them of the method of collection to reaffirm his sincerity and integrity. This second section also served as a buffer for transitioning the tone and changing the subjects addressed between sections one and three.

V. Exhortation to complete their collection by considering other examples (8:1-15):

- A. Macedonians gave above and beyond their ability (8:1-8)
- B. Jesus left riches of heaven, so that we could be rich in Him (8:9)

VI. Anticipates and answers concerns of abuse (8:10-24):

- A. Collection is gathered in a fair and equitable manner (8:10-15).
- B. Collection is carried and delivered in a manner beyond reproach (8:16-24).

VII. Exhortation to complete the contribution voluntarily and cheerfully (9:1-15):

- A. Finish collection in advance to avoid giving begrudgingly out of shame (9:1-5)
- B. God appreciates, rewards, and enables cheerful givers (9:6-11)
- C. Their contribution causes praises to be given toward God, and it fosters care and thanksgiving from others toward the Corinthians (9:12-15)

Section Three – Rebuke of Supporters of False Apostles

The third section of II Corinthians provides Paul’s last exhortation to the rebellious faction of the church in Corinth, who supported the false apostles. The tone is first begging followed by the threat

of a powerful confrontation, if they did not submit to Christ and His gospel, ministered to them by Paul. This section would have encouraged those to repent who had been most influenced by the factious, false teachers. It would also have been an indirect, but final warning for the Corinthians to stand up to and reject the false apostles before Paul's next visit to Corinth. The nature of this visit would have been determined by their response to this final warning.

VIII. Operate according to spiritual principles, not fleshly appearances (10:1 – 18)

- A. Pleads to repent lest he comes to punish using spiritual weapons, not fleshly (10:1 – 6)
- B. Warns that Corinthians had misjudged Paul's meekness, because they judged according to the flesh (10:7 – 11)
- C. Implies Corinthians had accepted faulty boasting according to the flesh (10:12 – 18)
 - 1. Beyond God appointed limits
 - 2. Beyond authority
 - 3. Beyond honest claims
 - 4. Beyond the Lord's glory

IX. Answering the foolish boasts and charges of false apostles (11:1 – 15)

- A. Expresses concern they had been deceived by folly (11:1 – 4)
- B. Answers the folly that had deceived them into accepting false apostles (11:5-15)
 - 1. Not similarly trained in "*speech*", but demonstrated requisite "*knowledge*" (11:5-6)
 - 2. Not accepting payment only to cut off opportunity of false apostles (11:7-15)

X. Overcoming the foolish comparisons on their own terms (11:16 – 12:13)

- A. Explains that the Corinthians foolishness had forced him into brief folly to expose it (11:16 – 21)
- B. Paul's superior boasts in lineage – but primarily in persecution and sufferings (11:22 – 33)
- C. Paul's superior boasts in visions and miraculous knowledge (12:1 – 6)
- D. Paul's handicap, sent by God, to help him avoid self-exaltation over boasts (12:7 – 10)
- E. Boasting should have been unnecessary, because Paul repeatedly worked undeniable signs of an apostle before the Corinthians (12:11 – 12)

XI. Offering Edification or Destruction (12:13 – 13:10)

- A. Desire to help them, despite accusations and their mistreatment of him (12:14 – 18)
- B. Desire to help them grow, not chastise and discipline the unrepentant (12:19 – 21)
- C. Warning to not spare depending upon testimony of witnesses, when he visited (13:1-4)
- D. Desire for self-examination and prayer for righteousness, regardless of their estimation of him (13:5-9)
- E. Desire to edify, not rebuke in sharpness unto destruction (13:10)

XII. Farewell and Benediction (13:11 – 14)

Questions

1. What evidence is available to confirm that Paul was indeed the author?
2. What are the dates for writing I and II Corinthians, and why is there discrepancy between sources?
3. What kind of city was Corinth?
4. In what kind of condition was the Corinthian church when Paul wrote I Corinthians?
5. Who went to visit Corinth after the first letter was delivered, while Paul anxiously waited in Macedonia for his return?
6. In what kind of condition was the Corinthian church when Paul wrote II Corinthians?
7. Into how many main sections may the second Corinthian letter be divided?

Commentaries

- Barnes, Albert. "Barnes' Notes on the Old & New Testaments: II Corinthians – Galatians."
- Coffman, James Burton. "First & Second Corinthians." Volume 7
- Curry, Melvin. "Truth Commentaries: The Book of 2 Corinthians."
- Jenkins, Ferrell. "New Testament Epistles: First Corinthians." Florida College Notes.
- Lenski, R. C. H. "The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians."
- Lipscomb, David and J. W. Shepherd "A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles: II Corinthians – Galatians." Volume 3.
- MacKnight, James. "Commentary and Notes on the Epistles."



Map 1 – Paul’s Second Missionary Journey



Map 2 – Paul’s Third Missionary Journey

Lesson 2 – Greeting, Blessings, and Confidences, II Corinthians 1:1 – 11

Introduction

Although brief, Paul opens the letter of **II Corinthians** with his traditional greeting, followed by a prayerful blessing. Next, he immediately moves into a discussion of the blessings they receive as a result of Paul's suffering and persecution, which would have both attested to his sincerity and reminded them of his great love for them, because he was willing to suffer for their salvation and consolation.

Questions

1. How did God comfort the Corinthians through Paul?
2. What evident attitude helped Paul and the others in this role?
3. What did Paul think was going to happen to him in Asia?
4. How was the Corinthians' care for Paul evidenced in Paul's deliverance?

Lesson 3 – Defense of Paul's Character, II Corinthians 1: 12 – 23

Introduction

In this section, Paul begins a defense of character. He first emphatically declares his integrity and transparency, confident that they knew him to be so, just as he was confident in them. After declaring his sincerity, Paul explains that personal plans are made "*according to the flesh*", and may therefore need to be changed as circumstances and judgments change. He distinguishes between personal plans and the certain truths he declared to them by the gospel. He powerfully affirms that only their best interest – their own joy – motivated any reluctance to visit them again, emphasizing their close relationship and interdependency.

Questions

1. What was the subject of Paul's boasting? Explain this mutual boasting.

2. How could Paul have been confident in them, given the correction already delivered in **I Corinthians** and that which was still to be delivered in **II Corinthians**?
3. Based on Paul's defense found in **1:15-17**, what apparent event did he have to explain?
4. How might this have affected the Corinthians' faith, based upon Paul's continued apology?
5. What *purpose* was served by the "*Spirit ... given us ... in our hearts*" (v. 22)? How does it fit in the context? (For more discussion, see: Appendix A - "*The Guarantee of the Spirit*", II Corinthians 1:22, 5:5.)
6. What was the primary reason that Paul delayed his visit to the Corinthians?
7. What was the *purpose* of Paul calling God into witness to attest to Paul's motive? (For more discussion on Christians swearing oaths, see: Appendix B – Christians and Judicial Oaths, II Corinthians 1:23.)
8. What kind of "*dominion*" did Paul *not* have over the Corinthians? What kind of rule might he have possessed over them, but was cautious to exercise?

Lesson 4 – Discretion, Forgiveness, and Joy, II Corinthians 2:1-13

Introduction

Although less difficult than a personal visit for the same purpose, Paul's previous letter was both written and received with great anguish, and it ultimately resulted in the Corinthians disciplining one of their own (likely, the man from **I Corinthians 5**). Having repented of his sin, the Corinthians now need to "*reaffirm their love*" to him in forgiveness and comfort, along with Paul's own forgiveness.

Lastly, the urgent need in both Troas and Macedonia is mentioned as further complications to his original plans, while also potentially indicating his great concern for them.

Questions

1. Was Paul simply avoiding or putting off a difficult trip? How had the delay served his purpose?
2. Why did Paul express that he wrote “*out of much affliction and anguish of heart*”?
3. How could Paul write, “*If anyone has caused grief, he has **not** grieved me*” (2:5)? How can this be harmonized with the previous statement about writing “*with many tears*” (2:4)?
4. What would have been the punishment “*inflicted by the majority*”? What is the only punishment that the church ever “*inflicts by the majority*”?
5. Why was it critical that they “*reaffirm their love to him*”?
6. Why was it unusual for Paul to push on to Macedonia? What did this imply about his concern for them?

Lesson 5 – Superior Commendation, II Corinthians 2:14 – 3:4

Introduction

After answering possible charges or concerns about his delayed visit, Paul transitions into the defense of his ministry. He first observes that it is a triumphant ministry, requiring qualifications and “*sufficiency*”. He briefly mentions that God has made them sufficient, while moving quickly into the absurdity of his having to defend his sufficiency to them. Paul should not have needed to defend himself to the Corinthians. They were originally converted by Paul, and they would have directly benefitted from his teaching, convicting, and even bestowing of miraculous gifts, as is discussed later. Therefore, their Christianity was proof enough to his authenticity as an apostle of Christ. Beyond the Corinthians themselves, Paul was enabled by his divine authority from God – not man. Therefore, letters of commendation from any men would have been inappropriate, because it was God who had authorized Paul, not men.

Questions

1. How could the same fragrance produce two different results?

2. Why would “diffusing” such a “fragrance” require special “sufficiency”?

3. Who else is introduced here, who likewise proclaimed to preach God’s Word? How was Paul different? How might this contrast have been evident?

4. What were Paul’s “letters of commendation”? How were they superior to those required and offered by others?

Contrast in Commendation

In this section, Paul begins a series of comparisons and contrasts between the preachers of the gospel, and the interloping false apostles. While so doing Paul highlights various differences in authority, doctrine, character, and reward. Often he provides one half of the comparison, leaving the obvious contrast unsaid, inferred. The following charts may help us see the details of Paul’s comparisons, while maintaining a clear vision of Paul’s main point.

Point of Contrast	False Teachers	Paul	Related Scriptures
Epistle	Letter of Commendation	Corinthian Church	
Author	[Men – Jewish Authorities]	Christ	
Ministered by ...	[More Mere Men]	Paul, an Apostle	II COR 1:1
Written ...	With Ink	By the Spirit of the Living God	
Written on ...	Tablets of Stone	Tablets of Flesh, Hearts	EXO 34:1-34; JER 31:31-34; II COR 13:5; ROM 2:23-29
Viewed by...	[Limited Audience]	Known and Read by All Men	II COR 9:2; I THE 1:7-9
Source of Sufficiency and Trust	[Themselves]	God, through Christ toward God	II COR 10:12
Ministers of ...	[Judaism, Perverted Gospel]	New Covenant	II COR 2:17

Lesson 6 – Ministers of a Superior Covenant, II Corinthians 3:5 – 18

Introduction

Paul clearly shows the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old. Since Paul hammers this point, it would be reasonable to conclude that the false apostles were Judaizing teachers, advocating the Corinthians to keep the Old Law in addition to the New. This marks the second major distinction between the false apostles and Paul - doctrine. He was preaching a superior new covenant, whereas they were still ministering bondage to the Old!

Questions

1. What are represented by the “*letter*” and the “*spirit*” in verse 6? How do you know?
2. What event in Israel’s history is referenced by the Israelites being unable to look upon Moses’ face?
3. What contrasts does Paul develop between the two “*ministries*” discussed in 3:6-11?
4. How was Paul’s proclamation of the New Covenant different than Moses’ giving of the Old?
5. Why is that “*same veil*” not lifted, even today? When is that veil taken away?
6. How is one “*transformed from glory to glory*” (3:18)?

Contrast in Doctrine (3:6 – 18)

Verses 4-6 serve as a transition between the first point of comparison and the second, their doctrine. Paul and his companions were ministers of the new and superior covenant while the false teachers enforced parts, if not all, of the inferior old covenant. It is from reading this section that the student realizes that those who were steering the Corinthian church astray were Judaizing teachers. It is their doctrine that he refutes and their behavior that he condemns, which is so typical of these false teachers who had doggedly pursued Paul. This point served as one of the most significant differences

to persuade the Corinthians, but it is also a powerful proof-text for the “passing away” of the old law for us today.

The contrast consists of 2 major points. The first distinction is the difference in glory, which is here tied to the covenant’s ability to ultimately justify and save.

Contrast Point	False Apostles	True Apostles	Related Scriptures
Doctrine	[Old Covenant, Judaism, Perverted Gospel]	New Covenant	II COR 2:17
Commendation	Letter	Spirit	ROM 2:23-29; 7:6
Results of Ministry	Kills, Death	Gives Life	GAL 3:10-23; JHN 6:63; ROM 7:6-12
Codified Medium	Stones	[Hearts ?]	EXO 34:1; HEB 8:10; DEU 10:16; JER 4:4
Lawgiver	Moses	Jesus and Holy Spirit	JHN 1:17; 14:26; 16:7-13
Justification	Condemnation	Righteousness	ROM 5:19; 9:30-10:13; GAL 5:5,6; PHI 3:9
Comparable Glory	Glory	Glory that Excels	
Duration of Glory	Passing Away	Remains	HEB 8:13; 12:18-29

The second contrast focuses on the difference in proclaiming the covenant. Unlike Moses, Paul and the other apostles speak with bold forthrightness, because they are unashamed of the eternal glory manifested by the New Covenant and its transforming power.

Contrast Point	False Apostles	True Apostles	Related Scriptures
Doctrine	[Old Covenant, Judaism, Perverted Gospel]	New Covenant	II COR 2:17
Forthrightness and Clarity	Moses veiled face, veiling the fact that glory was passing	Unveiled, used boldness of speech proclaiming hope	II COR 1:12-13; 2:17; 4:2
Resulting People	Veiled Heart, Blindness	Unveiled Heart	JHN 8:43-47; II THE 2:9-11; MAT 13:13-15; II TIM 3:7

Contrast Point	False Apostles	True Apostles	Related Scriptures
Termination of Blindness	[never], “ <i>to this day</i> ”	One turns to the Lord, in Christ	
Produces	[Bondage]	Liberty	JOH 8:32; GAL 4:24-31; 5:1
Access	[Veiled Face]	Unveiled Face	
Clarity of Image	[Darkly, Dim Mirror, Shadows]	[perfect] mirror	I COR 13:12; JAS 1:25; HEB 10:1
Identity of Image	[Blurred Image]	The Glory of the Lord	I COR 13:12; JOH 14:7-10
Produces	[Continued Blindness]	Transformed into the Same Image	ROM 8:29; 12:2; II PET 1:3-4; COL 1:27
Benefactor	The Spirit of the Lord	

According to Lipscomb, the following conclusion is clearly stated by Paul in verse 17, which summarizes the above contrasts:

- Now, the Law of “*Moses*” is represented by “*the letter*” and where the “*letter*” of Moses is, there is bondage.
- But the Law of “*the Lord*” is represented by “*the Spirit*” and where the “*Spirit*” of the Lord is there is liberty.

The end of the new law is to become like Christ, like God. The old law could only bring one to Christ, but it failed in providing forgiveness of sins. It also failed to clearly reveal the image of our Creator, who we are to become like.

Lesson 7 – “We do not lose heart”, II Corinthians 4:1-15

Introduction

Following this stark contrast between the teachings proclaimed by the false apostles and his own, Paul develops another contrast between himself and these false apostles, character. Paul has openly proclaimed the gospel in honesty, transparency, and integrity, which everyone can see except those are willingly blinded by the Devil. Because of God’s inspiration, Paul and his fellow laborers have served the Lord and others at their own expense, even to the point of suffering severe persecution and loss. This attests to their sincerity, but their powerful success attests to their divine authority. Let us look to this profound example of devotion, conviction, and commitment, and learn from it, “*not losing heart*”!

Questions

1. Why did Paul and his companions “*not lose heart*”?
2. How did Paul “*receive mercy*” to receive his “*ministry*”?
3. Why was the gospel veiled from some? Why was this unexpected, given Paul’s preaching style?
4. From verse 4, it may appear that the Devil “*veils*” the gospel, “*blinding*” those “*who are perishing*”. From the context, show that they are willing participants and can reverse it, if they so desire.
5. How did Paul’s behavior among the Corinthians manifest his sincerity?
6. Can we have the same “*light shining in our hearts*” or carry the same “*treasure in earthen vessels*” as did Paul and others? Please explain.
7. What did Paul and his companions “*carry about in the body*”? How was this demonstrated? And, what did this fact demonstrate?
8. In a word, what caused Paul to speak? If we fail to teach the gospel to others by our own choice (or negligence), what does this indicate about us?
9. Specifically, why did Paul **not** fear persecution, even martyrdom?
10. Why did Paul suffer so?

Contrast in Character

In this section of Paul's comparison, he shifts from directly comparing aspects of both parties to descriptions of his motivation and sincerity. Consequently, there is a complete absence of references to the false teachers in this section. However, his evident character stands in stark contrast to the character of the false teachers, which topic he briefly mentioned previously in 1:12 and 2:17.

Comparison Point	False Apostles	True Apostles
Hidden things of shame	Continued therein	Renounced
Handling of God's Word	Craftily and deceitfully	Manifestation of Truth
Integrity	[hide motives & actions]	Commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God
Ultimate truth veiled from...	[all who believed, were deceived]	Only those who were perishing
Preach foremost...	[themselves]	Christ Lord Jesus
Relationship to Christ	[Jesus owed them salvation]	Bondservants (in debt) to Christ
Inspiration	[blinded by Satan]	Enlightened by God

Lesson 8 – *“Walk by faith, not by sight”*, II Corinthians 4:16 – 5:8

Introduction

The restating of Paul's conclusion (*“Therefore, we do not lose heart”*) in 4:16 indicates that this is a continuation of the discussion begun in 4:1. It is a wonderful thought that even though the body we see is wearing down every day, the unseen spirit that dwells within us is actually being renewed and growing stronger. Of course this depends upon us leading a spiritual life, as did Paul.

It is critical that we always remember that this life is temporary. The things of this life are of no significance compared to how we live this life. This is much easier to understand intellectually than to accomplish practically. But, we must keep trying. We must allow our spiritual conviction to permeate every aspect of our lives, including family bonds, work relationships, casual friendships, and spiritual ties.

This passage reminds us that the Christian should never quite feel comfortable here. They should always have a sense of uneasiness. Just as we often sing, *“This world is not my home; I'm just a passing through...”*

Questions

1. Paul maintained “*heart*”, in spite of what daily discouragement? How?
2. Would you consider Paul’s “*affliction*” to be *light*? How does this make you feel?
3. Does Paul mean that he *cannot* see things here (v. 18)? What does he mean?
4. Was it *death* that Paul desired? Why or why not?
5. Who is the “*we*”, who received “*the Spirit as a guarantee*” in 5:5? What did it produce (5:6)? How is He a “*guarantee*”? (See, **Appendix A.**)
6. What does it mean to “*walk by faith*”? How can we use this for self-examination?

Lesson 9 – Motivation & Basis of Apostolic Ministry, II Corinthians 5:9–21

Introduction

Here, Paul concludes his reasons that should have given the Corinthians an “*opportunity to boast.*” By faith, he has been moved to preach the gospel to help prepare all men for the Day of Judgment. He was motivated not by his own insecurity, but fear for the fate of those still unprepared.

He concludes by highlighting the transforming nature of the gospel, which includes his perspective towards all men. He has become a new creation, and there is a subtle implication that the Corinthians should also change how they estimate others – not by appearance. He emphasizes the earnestness of God’s gospel plea, a ministry of reconciliation given to them (again emphasizing a contrast in doctrine and its result). This should have drawn a stark contrast, as it concludes this section of defense, and prepares tender hearts for the imminent, impassioned plea of chapters 6 and 7

Questions

1. Why was it critical to be “*well pleasing to Him*”?

2. Why did Paul preach the gospel with such urgency and fervor?
3. Was Paul defending himself to the Corinthians? Explain.
4. What can we conclude from the fact that “*One died for all*”?
5. How did this change Paul’s estimation of others? How should it have affected the Corinthians?
How should it affect us?
6. How does one become a “*new creation*”?
7. What is the chain of “*reconciliation*” mentioned in verses 18-20?
8. Can we be “*ambassadors for Christ*”, as was Paul and others of the 1st century? Explain.
9. What extreme event manifested the earnestness of God’s plea?

Lesson 10 – A Truly Credentialed Ministry, II Corinthians 6:1-10

Introduction

As this first section begins to end, Paul shifts the tone and thrust of his writing. He has answered his first rhetorical question (2:16) by showing his worthiness to serve as an ambassador for Christ, chosen by Christ. He has answered his second rhetorical question (3:1) by giving them a defense with which they can answer others. The preceding chapters should have provided encouragement to strengthen and renew their confidence in Paul as an apostle.

With the profound weight of his reasoning laying heavy on their consciences, he now begins his plea. It is this plea that will return many to Christ. By heeding this plea, the lines will become clear, and those who failed to heed it will become the sole recipients of the rebuke in section three.

Questions

1. What evident danger were the Corinthians approaching, even if they did not realize it?
2. What is the context of the quote from Isaiah in verse 2?
3. In verses 4 – 10, Paul provides a list of events, blessings, traits, and paradoxes. What are their purpose?
4. Was Paul bragging on himself in these verses? He says, “*We commend ourselves*”. Explain.
5. How did persecutions commend the ministry of Paul?
6. How did the things mentioned in verses 6-7 commend Paul to them as a true minister of God?
7. What choice did the paradoxes of verses 8-9 present to the Corinthians? To us?

Lesson 11 – Avoiding Corrupting Influences, II Corinthians 6:11-7:1

Introduction

Having reminded the Corinthians of his defense thus far established, Paul now openly bares his heart and pleads along with Christ, “*Come out from among them and be separate.*” Because of their misplaced affections, the Corinthians had joined themselves to corrupting influences. Although this invaluable lesson might apply in many instances, the original application here was to avoid the compromising relationships with idolaters – and possibly the Judaizing false apostles, who were evidently having a leavening influence upon them. We see once again the deep love that Paul had for the Corinthians as he pleads like a parent to his children, trying to spare them from destruction.

Questions

1. What effect did Paul hope that his openness would have upon the Corinthians? Why would he have that hope or expectation?

2. What 2 fundamental reasons does Paul give for *not* being “*unequally yoked*”?
3. What application did these verses imply for the Corinthians? What application do these verses hold for us today?
4. To what promises is Paul referring in 7:1?

Note: These verses arguably most directly relate to the question of Christians marrying non-Christians. We will reserve this specific consideration for a later lesson, after we have finished the book. For this lesson, please focus on understanding the underlying principles, outline, immediate application to them, and general application to us, so we can maintain focus on the book as a whole until we complete its general study.

Lesson 12 – An Impassioned But Confident Plea, II Corinthians 7:2-16

Introduction

Again, Paul pleads plainly with the Corinthians to open their hearts to him. He begins to conclude his plea by recounting both his confidence and concern for them in regards toward their reception of the first Corinthian letter. He was clearly overjoyed by their reaction, but he clearly wrote the first letter with great pains. Despite whatever troubles the Corinthians faced as a result of their own immaturity and outside influences, Paul exudes confidence in their ultimate triumph, which Titus now also shared. Paul’s boast in them should have reinvigorated their possibly flagging optimism.

These verses close discussions begun earlier (about Titus, 2:12, and accepting Paul’s previous written correction, 2:3-11), and prepares them for the next major section of the second Corinthian letter.

Questions

1. Based on Paul’s observations, why might the Corinthians have closed their heart toward Paul?
2. Paul wrote, “*I do not say this to condemn.*” Did he mean they had done nothing wrong? Or, that he was unwilling to correct their wrong? Or, something else? Please explain.
3. Putting these verses together with 2:12-13, the overall thrust of the letter, and the tone of the immediate context, to what fear is Paul most likely alluding in 7:5?

4. What two things had brought comfort to Paul?
5. In verse 8, does Paul mean that he was *mistaken* to write the first epistle to the Corinthians? Please explain.
6. In practical terms, how can we examine ourselves (or others) and determine if we are truly “*sorry in a godly manner*”? How can we use this to make sure we do not repeatedly commit the same sins?
7. In verse 12, is Paul implying that he did not care about the brother who sinned or who he may have sinned? Was Paul only concerned about how they perceived him?
8. Who else had been impacted by their repentance? What should that mean to us?
9. Imagine you were in the place of the Corinthians. How would you feel after reading verses 14-16? What can we learn from this chapter – as well as previous verses – about correcting and reaching those who are either lost or in danger of being lost?

Lesson 13 – Examples in Sacrificial Giving, II Corinthians 8:1-15

Introduction

This second section fits perfectly into the flow of the context when the accomplishments of the first section are reviewed. Paul has successfully explained and dismissed the suspicions of the Corinthians, answered the accusations of the false teachers, encouraged the faithful, and finally rejoiced in the renewed determination of much of the Corinthian church. Based upon Titus’s report of their whole-hearted repentance, Paul now directs their zeal by reminding them of their previous determination to contribute to a collection for needy saints. To encourage them in this good work, he provides them with two examples: the Macedonians and Christ. It should be remembered that the boasting, encouragement, and instruction were addressed to those who would listen. The unfaithful few and the false teachers who could not be included in the preceding statements about repentance were obviously not included in the following statements of confidence and encouragement.

Questions

1. How did the Macedonians' reaction manifest the "*grace of God*"?
2. How can "*deep poverty*" promote one to "*abound in the riches ... of liberality*"?
3. How were the Macedonians able to give so abundantly (vs. 5)?
4. What did Paul mean, "*I speak not by commandment*" (vs. 8)? Was he *not* giving a commandment?
5. How did Jesus go from riches to poverty? How did this enrich us?
6. How was it to the Corinthians *advantage* to finish this good work that they had started (vs. 10)?
7. What are the scales of balance by which God compares and accepts our contributions?
8. Do verses 13-15 teach that Christians should have an equality of wealth, i.e. should the rich give to the poor until all have equal amount of goods? Explain.

Lesson 14 – Honor in the Sight of All, II Corinthians 8:16-24

Introduction

Ever mindful of avoiding false allegations and maintaining all propriety, Paul introduces those who will be journeying to Corinth to collect the contribution the Corinthians had previously promised. He also explains the motivation for including so many people. Please also note that this passage exemplifies and explains much of the New Testament pattern for intra-congregational cooperation in benevolence.

Questions

1. Who else demonstrated selfless care and voluntary sacrifice? Who else was involved in his decision to return? How were they involved?
2. What two additional things did the Corinthians' "gift" manifest and accomplish?
3. What were the reasons for the extra people carrying the collection? Was *one* person *not* sufficient?
4. Upon what basis were these people chosen to help? (In other words, why were they each chosen instead of someone else? What were the qualifications?) What lessons can we learn?
5. What other passages speak of promises without fulfillment or well-wishes without substance?

Lesson 15 - "God's indescribable gift", II Corinthians 9:1-14

Introduction

Paul, having provided inspiring examples in sacrificial giving, continues to build the motivational case for the completion of Corinthians promised contribution. Besides the encouragement to not embarrass themselves, this chapter is rich in reasons that should have motivated the Corinthians to not just give, but to give with the proper heart. This closes Section II of this letter.

The abundance of motivation suggests that there must have been some hesitance, possible desertion, of their original purpose. All of the encouragement that Paul provided to the Corinthians serves as a landmark lesson for us today. Although we may give faithfully today, these lessons give us reason to reexamine our contribution and our hearts, and to encourage us if we become disheartened in the future. Moreover, these lessons would help the one who may not give any – or adequately when compared with their abundance, to urgently repent and "avenge" (7:11) their wrongdoings. Whatever our case, there is much in these two chapters that is important for us, even if it is *only* a reminder (II Corinthians 9:1; II Peter 3:1).

Questions

1. Why was it "*superfluous*" for Paul to write about the collection of the saints?

2. How would it have likely affected the Corinthians to learn that their example had been used to stir up the Macedonians?
3. What was Paul trying to avoid by encouraging the Corinthians to prepare in advance?
4. How does one “*reap bountifully*” if he “*sows bountifully*”? Is this the promise of a “health and wealth” gospel? Please explain.
5. How could the Corinthians avoid being “*grudging givers*”? Likewise, how can *we* ensure that *we* will be “*cheerful givers*”?
6. How would God’s grace help them in this task?
7. What would be the many results of their contribution? (Remember, what ethnicity were many of the Corinthians versus the “*needy saints*”?)
8. Does the latter part of verse 13 authorize the church doing benevolent work for those outside of the church, “*all men*”?

Lesson 16 – The Weakness of Appearance, II Corinthians 10:1 – 10:18

Introduction

As section one subtly transitioned into two, section two abruptly transitions into three. With the profound thought of God’s indescribable gift still ringing in their ears, Paul now swiftly turns to the profound weakness and impotence of these false apostles’ case presented before godly apostles. These false teachers are not directly addressed; however, Paul warns any sympathetic, unstable, or double-minded Corinthian of the fundamental failure of these false teachers: Their strength was rooted in appearance and the shared accolades of their peers. However, Paul’s authority and might was from God, and it would be exercised fully. Much like God warning Moses to remove himself from the Israelites, lest he also be consumed in His wrath, Paul warns the faithful and undecided to separate themselves from these enemies, who would surely suffer the punishment entrusted to the apostles.

Questions

1. Verses 1 and 9-10 indicate what allegations had been levied against Paul?
2. Why might Paul have had such a presence among them? (Consider verses 6, 10, and 11 also.)
3. Can we develop these “*weapons of warfare ...mighty in God*”? If so, how? If we succeed, how do we use them?
4. What basis for judging had the Corinthians been using? What other passages warn against this?
5. How is Paul’s “*boasting*” (10:8) different than the “*commendation*” he condemns (10:12)?
6. What kind of boasting did Paul avoid, which the false apostles enjoined?
7. How can we “*glory in the Lord*”? How can we avoid “*commending ourselves*”? Application?

Lesson 17 – Cutting off Deceivers, II Corinthians 11:1–15

Introduction

In this passage, Paul accomplishes three things. Continuing to build upon his case, distinguishing his divine authority from the carnal mindset of the false teachers, he entreats the Corinthians to endure his boasting, now at their carnal level. The possibility of the Corinthians rejecting this entreaty stood in ironic contrast to their foolishness by which they had gladly endured the boasting and accepted the perverted gospel of the false teachers – even to their own corruption. The second thing Paul accomplishes was to answer the charge concerning his manner of speech. The sarcastic response did not answer the charge but redirected the focus toward the appropriate point. While their speech may have been more appealing to the flesh, his speech contained true, spiritual knowledge. Finally, he addresses a distinction that the false prophets had realized and were seeking to remove. His refusal of financial support from the Corinthians contrasted with the false teachers’ acceptance exposed their carnal mind in their desire for wealth and recognition.

Questions

1. How was Paul's "*godly jealousy*" different than any possible jealousy exhibited by the false apostles?
2. What fear of Paul had already been partially realized in the Corinthians?
3. Who are the "*chief apostles*" or "*most eminent apostles*" of verse 5? Was Paul comparing himself to Peter, James, John, or other apostles of the Lord (compare to, **Galatians 2:2, 9**)?
4. In what 2 ways mentioned here, was Paul evidently charged as being "*inferior*" to these apostles? How does he answer the first charge?
5. Why did Paul not ask support from the Corinthians?
6. What does this pattern show about evangelists drawing outside support? What can we learn from this example?
7. How would a "*false apostle*" transform himself into an "*apostle of Christ*"?
8. From the context, what distinguishing feature did Paul provide to help them (and us) recognize the Devil's "*ministers*"?

Lesson 18 – Dismissing the Competition, II Corinthians 11:16–33

Introduction

In the last two passages, Paul exposed the folly of judging based upon the fleshly appearances and the self-commendation. Both the Corinthians and the false teachers had been focused on carnal things rather than those spiritual. Having deflated the foundation of such an approach, Paul continues his withering attack on the false teachers' charges, which the fallen Corinthians had accepted. He

dismantles their logical fortress brick by brick - already without foundation - by comparing his pedigree to their own on their terms. In this passage, he focuses on his fleshly heritage and his persecutions for Christ. Although Paul felt no personal need to compete with these false apostles, the Corinthians' insistent folly had required him to stoop to their level, so he might restore them.

Questions

1. What was foolish about the “*boasting*” that the Corinthians had accepted?
2. If it was so foolish, why then was Paul engaging in such boasting?
3. In verses 19-21, was Paul commending the Corinthians and admitting his own failings – or something else? If so, what? How would you reconcile this tactic with I Corinthians 13:4-8 and Romans 13:10?
4. Why would lineage have been an issue of importance to the false teachers? How would it benefit them to brag about this trait in a world that was dominated by Gentiles?
5. How would the boasts of 11:23-29 have silenced the false apostles, defended Paul's apostleship, and corrected the Corinthians' affections – all at the same time?
6. Does the Christian have the right to flee persecution? If so, when and why? How do we ever choose between 2 options, if both are authorized?

Lesson 19 – Of Visions and Thorns, II Corinthians 12:1–12

Introduction

Although forced to boast, Paul continues to emphasize his weaknesses and infirmities. Moreover, when briefly mentioning the visions, emphasis is placed on Paul's relation to Christ. His unnamed “*thorn in the flesh*” also emphasizes his trust and dependence upon Christ, which provides a tremendous lesson in humble faith for all of us.

Paul's case has devastated the false apostles' claim to superiority on 6 fronts: 1) Knowledge – He thoroughly demonstrated his ability to teach in their conversion and establishment; 2) Ulterior

motives – Paul did not preach for financial gain from them; 3) Accomplishments and Accreditations – Ignoring parity in pedigree, Paul was superior in labors, sufferings, and infirmities; 4) Revelations – False apostles had not received such heavenly visions; 5) Humility – Paul boasted in his weaknesses as opposed to his strengths. In so doing, Paul confessed Jesus as the source of his strength, and he confessed the reality that he was, in and of himself alone, nothing. This, the false teachers would have never uttered in their arrogance. Finally, 6) Paul proved his authority through the signs of an apostle, which should have ended all argument before it began, if the Corinthians had not been so easily deceived.

Questions

1. Who is the subject of verses 2-4? Did Paul have these visions or was it somebody else? How could verses 5 and 7 be reconciled with Paul being the recipient of these visions?
2. What and where is the “*third heaven*” (verse 2)? What and where is “*Paradise*” (verse 4)?
3. Would a “*messenger of Satan*” deliberately help Paul to be humble? Please explain.
4. Did Paul receive an answer from the Lord to his prayer after the first request? When he was answered, did he receive the answer he wanted? How does our standing with the Lord compare to Paul’s? Lessons for us?
5. Explain this paradox, “*For when I am weak, then I am strong*” (12:10).
6. Why was it foolish that Paul was forced to stoop to this level of boasting?
7. What were and are the signs of a true apostle? What could apostles do that no other 1st century saint could do?

Lesson 20 – Edification or Destruction? II Corinthians 12:13 – 13:14

Introduction

With the defense, rebukes, and pleas now concluded, Paul closes the letter with a final warning and invitation. A few final points are made. His intentions and love for them is once again stated and asserted. Paul's love for them is manifested, because he holds their salvation dearer than his own appearance. They are reminded that Christ appeared his weakest right before his triumph and the manifestation of his true strength. A final appeal is made to their conscience. He reaffirms both his authority and desire to avoid its exercise, as well as his deep preference to build up. They have one last chance to reform before he comes which will be either for edification or destruction. He bids them farewell, illuminates the path towards spiritual completion, and then closes the letter. Surely then, he took up again his watchful, tearful, and loving prayer as would any true father.

Questions

1. How was Paul's relationship to the Corinthians like that of "*parent*" and "*children*"? What responsibilities did that relationship require? How might it apply to us and other adults?
2. How can we distinguish between those, who "*love less as more abundantly loved*" and those who "*love more as more abundantly loved*"? Given Paul's example how should we respond to such?
3. What is meant by the phrase, "*being crafty, I caught you buy cunning*"? Had Paul been deceitful with the Corinthians? Explain. Lessons for us?
4. How would "*excusing ourselves*" be different than what Paul had been doing? Was he not excusing himself? Explain.
5. Why would Paul be himself humbled by their sin?
6. Who or what are the witnesses of 13:1, and to what truth might they testify?
7. What undeniable sign might the Corinthians at the last received?
8. How would self-examination help them recognize Paul's genuine relation with Christ?

9. According to verse 13:7-9, what else had Paul sacrificed for their “*strength*”? Lessons for us?

Appendix A - “The Guarantee of the Spirit”, II Corinthians 1:22, 5:5

Introduction

With many Biblical topics, Christians form conclusions based upon their best interpretation of the facts and confess a current inability to crystallize a concrete conclusion. Studies regarding the guarantee, indwelling, seal, and the gift of the Holy Spirit are all such studies that leave most students with some unanswered questions. Whenever we must admit such an inadequacy, we are forced to simply organize the known facts, draw inferences where conclusive, and work toward better resolving the issue at a later date. In this humbled condition, let us seek to do the best we can for today with this complex issue.

Facts We Know

As we attempt to better understand this issue, we will begin following the above procedure by arranging the Scriptures and facts that are certain. Many aspects of this study are clearly taught in the Scripture and are of vast significance to our worship, behavior, and diligence. Therefore, we will begin by briefly examining some of the more basic aspects of the Holy Spirit and His work.

I. The Holy Spirit is a unique, divine member of the Godhead.

It is essential to begin study with this fundamental aspect of the Holy Spirit because many false doctrines begin with false notions about the nature of the Holy Spirit. Many groups believe the Holy Spirit to be either a created being, a mere manifestation of the Father, or synonymous with the word. However, the Scripture speaks plainly about the personality and quality of the Holy Spirit.

- A. He is equal with the Father and the Son
 - 1. He is spoken of as an equal by Jesus (Matthew 28:18)
 - 2. Jesus labels Him as a comforter equal to Himself (“another “ – John 14:6)
 - 3. His name is used interchangeably with the name of God (compare Acts 5:3 with Acts 5:4 and Matthew 12:28 with Luke 11:20).
- B. He possesses all of the qualities attributes of deity, or Godhead
 - 1. Eternal – transcends or exists beyond space and time (Hebrews 9:14)
 - 2. Omnipresent – everywhere at the same time (Psalm 139:7-12; I Corinthians 6:19)
 - 3. Omniscient – knows everything (I Corinthians 2:10-11; John 16:13-14)
 - 4. Omnipotent – all powerful; works only what God can do
 - a) Creates – Genesis 1:1; Job 26:13; Psalm 104:30
 - b) Works miracles – Matthew 12:28; I Corinthians 12:8-11
 - c) Through Him Christ offered Himself - Hebrews 9:14
 - d) The Father by the Holy Spirit raised Christ from the dead – Romans 8:11
- C. He is an equal but separate being to and from the Father and Son
 - 1. Spoken by Jesus as equal but yet distinct (Matthew 28:18)

2. Separate presence at the baptism of Jesus (as dove, but not voice or Jesus – Matthew 3:16)
3. Mentioned distinctly apart from other members of the Godhead (Isaiah 48:16; Romans 15:30)

D. He manifests many attributes of a individual being, personality

1. Has divine qualities of character
 - a) Holiness (Hebrews 10:29)
 - b) Grace (Hebrews 10:29)
 - c) Goodness (Nehemiah 9:20)
 - d) Truthful (John 16:13)
2. Has attributes and actions of an individual personality
 - a) Makes choices (Acts 16:7)
 - b) Knows (I Corinthians 2:10-11)
 - c) Wills (I Corinthians 12:11)
 - d) Loves (Romans 15:30)
 - e) Thinks (Acts 15:28)
 - f) Speaks (I Timothy 4:1; Acts 13:2)
 - g) Hears (John 16:13)
 - h) Reproves or convicts (John 16:7-11)
 - i) Leads (Matthew 4:1; Romans 8:14)
 - j) Transports (Acts 8:39; Ezekiel 43:5)
 - k) Teaches and reminds (John 14:26)
 - l) Comforts (John 14:16; Acts 9:31)
 - m) Strives with man (Genesis 6:3)
 - n) Strengthens (Ephesians 3:16)
 - o) Forbids (Acts 16:7)
 - p) Consummates spiritual birth and gives life (John 3:6; Galatians 6:8)
 - q) Testifies (John 15:26)
 - r) Bears witness (Romans 8:16)
 - s) Guides (John 16:12-13)
 - t) Searches (I Corinthians 2:10)
 - u) Bears fruit (Galatians 5:22)
 - v) Gave 9 miraculous gifts (I Corinthians 12:4-11)
 - w) Fills and dwells in men (Luke 1:15; Acts 2:4; John 14:17)
 - x) Gives life (II Corinthians 3:6)

- y) Communes (II Corinthians 13:14)
- z) Can be received (Acts 19:2) and resisted (Acts 7:51)
- 3. Has emotional qualities
 - a) Grief (Ephesians 4:30)
 - b) Vexation (Isaiah 63:10)
 - c) Able to be quenched (I Thessalonians 5:19)
 - d) Able to be lied to (Acts 5:3)
 - e) Able to be blasphemed (Matthew 12:31)

II. The most visible work of the Spirit – Custodian of Truth.

There are many passages which clearly speak concerning a work or role of the Spirit as the Custodian of truth. This work is the most visible because of the number and clarity of passages concerning it. However, there are some other works of the Holy Spirit that are less eminent because of the scarcity and inconclusiveness of passages concerning them. We will first examine this clear aspect of His work in which we can be confident of our understanding, and we will reserve the other works for the next section.

The only scriptural titles that are given of the Holy Spirit are “the Spirit of Truth” and “the Comforter” (John 14:16-17). Other references are made such as “the Lord’s Spirit”, “the Spirit”, and “the Holy Spirit”, but these references serve more as names of who the Holy Spirit is, as opposed to titles that describe His work. As “the Spirit of Truth” he reveals, confirms, and preserves truth; i.e., the Bible. Some authors have labeled His role in the Godhead as one of a Revelator. Obviously, this is true, but His duty to truth includes much more than just that. In fact, it includes every aspect of truth being delivered to mankind. He is in fact the Custodian of Truth. It is this work, which is most visible in the Scriptures, which we will study first.

A. Jesus description of the work of “the Spirit of Truth” (John 14-17)

The above passage is one of the best proof texts for defining the work of the Holy Spirit. The whole of His work when He would come as an “another Comforter” is defined by Jesus here. All of the other less visible works were being accomplished before He came, but certainly, they could be stretched to be classified as part of His work as the “Spirit of Truth”.

1. He would be given by the Father because of Jesus’ prayer (14:16)
2. He would be “another Comforter” and the “Spirit of Truth” (14:16-17)
3. He will be here “forever”, until the end of time (14:16)
4. He dwelt in them already and would be in them (14:17)
5. Christ would not abandon them, but would come through the Holy Spirit (14:17-18)
6. He would teach them all things and cause them to remember all that Christ had said to them (14:26)
7. “The Spirit of Truth” would proceed from the Father and would testify of Christ (15:26)
8. It would be to their advantage for Christ to leave so He could send the “Comforter”. He could not send Him until He left and returned to the Father (16:7)

9. He would convict the world of sin and righteousness (16:8-12)
10. “The Spirit of Truth” would tell them the things that they could not bear then to hear from Jesus. Moreover, the Spirit would guide them into “all truth” (16:12-13)
11. He will speak what was given to Him by Christ (16:13-14) which was given to Christ by the Father (14:6-11,24,31; 15:10; 16:15)
12. It would be through God’s word, the truth, that Christians would be sanctified (17:17-18)

These passages state that the Holy Spirit would serve as the “Spirit of Truth” by revealing and guiding into all truth. He would have of necessity confirmed the truth, fulfilling His role as comforter and the “Spirit of Truth”. Finally, His job would continue in preserving the truth for all generations since He would abide forever. Although Jesus clearly defines the Spirit’s role in this passage, other parts of Scripture elaborate on these points further, giving us deeper insight into His work as the “Spirit of Truth” and “Comforter”.

B. The Holy Spirit as Revelator

1. Jesus received His message and commandments from the Father (John 14:6-11,24,31; 15:10; 16:15).
2. The Holy Spirit received from Christ the truth to reveal (John 16:13-15)
3. The Holy Spirit revealed all truth to the apostles, thereby providing them with the will of God and the mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:10-16; I Peter 1:12; II Peter 1:3)
4. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the apostles and prophets penned this truth from God (Ephesians 3:3-5; II Timothy 3:14-17; II Peter 3:1-2)
5. Therefore, it was the Holy Spirit who revealed all truth to men and inspired the texts which we now read (II Timothy 3:14-17; II Peter 1:20-21)
6. It appears that it may have been through the Holy Spirit that even Jesus taught while He was on the earth (John 17:8; Acts 1:2)

C. The Holy Spirit as Confirmation

1. The Holy Spirit provided the early church with the ability to perform miracles that would undeniably prove that the truth they spoke was from God (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3-4; I Corinthians 12:1-11, 14:22-25; I Thessalonians 1:5).
2. The apostles had special miracles that only they could work to prove their apostleship (II Corinthians 12:12). One of which was the ability to impart the Holy Spirit through laying their hands on believers (Acts 8:14-21).
3. It appears that it may have been through the Holy Spirit that even Jesus worked miracles to confirm His testimony as the Messiah (John 14:10-12; Matthew 3:16; Luke 3:22; Matthew 4:1; John 3:34; Luke 4:1,14).
4. The greatest miracle of all was and will be accomplished through the Holy Spirit – Christ resurrection and our future resurrection (Romans 8:11).

D. The Holy Spirit as Guardian and Preserver

1. Although there is not much Scripture on this point, we do have numerous passages about the Scripture not fading away or being lost (I Peter 1:22-25; John 10:35; Matthew 24:35; Matthew 5:18; II John 2)

2. Since we know that Jesus returned to the Father in heaven, and it is the Spirit that is to remain with us until the end of time, and He is responsible for the Bible as “the Spirit of Truth”; it would be reasonable to infer that the Holy Spirit is the member of the Godhead who would see to the preservation of truth (John 14:16-18; 16:7).

E. The Holy Spirit as Comforter

The Holy Spirit was also called an “another Comforter” by Christ. The first comforter was Christ Himself. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is also a comforter as Christ was. How then was Christ a comforter, and how is the Holy Spirit a similar comforter then and today.

1. Christ comforted the people then by bringing, teaching, confirming, and executing the gospel.
2. Although the Holy Spirit cannot fully parallel the unique aspects of Christ’s life, His work is certainly parallel to that of Christ by revealing and confirming God’s will.
3. This is supported by the fact that it is through the knowledge of God’s will that one receives comfort:
 - a) Because of the knowledge of God’s promised forgiveness, immediate comfort and relief from sin and its guilt after baptism and repentant confession (I John 1:4,9)
 - b) Comfort is derived from the knowledge of God’s word and promises (I Thessalonians 4:18; 5:23-24; II Peter 1:2; Psalm 119:50)
4. Therefore, Christians, and only Christians, receive comfort from the Holy Spirit through the gospel. However, to alien sinners the Holy Spirit serves as a witness for their condemnation as did Christ (John 15:18-26; 16:7-11). The gospel certainly provides them with no comfort outside of Christ.

Conclusions We Infer

We understand, but often forget the fact that Bible speaks in accommodative language. Commonly writers would assume that the readers are aware of certain points, and write at a higher level that took for granted the understanding of the more basic points. For example, Scripture often states that we are saved by faith without mentioning repentance, confession, or baptism. All of these points are assumed by those writers because they were not material to the present discussion. Can you imagine if Paul had elaborated on the full implication of every word every time he used it? All students are expected to make certain assumptions and conclusions based upon discussions from other texts where the assumption is the main point. The question and issue becomes which conclusion to make.

This is the task we are faced with at this point. The line is somewhat arbitrarily drawn because we have made a few inferences in the section above, but the conclusions from above are generally, clearly and directly stated. However, the remaining unanswered questions are not answered so succinctly. We must draw conclusions and inferences based upon the commentary of the entire Scripture. But, despite the lack of clear language, the mature Christian should be prepared to make these inferences and ready to confess that the rest still belongs to God (Deuteronomy 29:29).

Now we will tackle the original statement of this study, “the guarantee of the Spirit”, and other related statements. It is important to emphasize that we must make some kind of assumption with these points. Therefore, these assumptions must be made as Christ and the apostles did: It must be the most reasonable, must be necessarily inferred, and it must harmonize with the rest of Scripture.

Assumptions made upon no basis, have no authority, and should be realized as such. Therefore, let us try to first make assumptions that are built upon the nature and work of the Spirit as detailed above and only resort to making assumptions outside that body of evidence where necessary. In other words, if we can explain statements by our understanding of the above clear texts, then we have no reason to go outside what has been otherwise revealed unless it is absolutely necessary.

I. The “Guarantee of the Spirit” – II Corinthians 5:5

“Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee”

A. The word *guarantee* (*earnest*, KJV) according to Vine:

“ARRABON (αρραβων), originally, earnest-money deposited by the purchaser and forfeited if the purchase was not completed, was probably a Phoenician word, introduced into Greece. In general usage it came to denote a pledge or earnest of any sort;”

Therefore, the “guarantee of the Spirit” could be any type of “deposit” having to do with the Spirit that assures us of our future home with the Lord (5:1-6).

B. Limitations and hints supplied by the context:

1. Limitation from verses 6 and 8 – It must be something that would inspire confidence and even comfort. Otherwise, Paul would not draw the conclusions, “So we are confident ... yes, well pleased”
2. Hint from verse 7 – The “guarantee” of verse 5 and the “faith” of verse 7 are closely interrelated. The “faith” of verse 7 is the means and foundation upon which Christians can have the confidence to look to the home in heaven with Christ. From the limitation above, we know that the “guarantee of the Spirit” also produces the same confidence. Since both of these produce the same confidence, they are, at the least, closely interrelated.
3. Hints from surrounding context – The superiority of Paul’s message, the gospel from God, is the main point of the latter portion of chapter 3. The gospel which Paul holds as “treasure in earthen vessels” that brings the “light of the knowledge ... of God” to the believer is one of the main reasons for Paul’s assurance in chapter 4. It is the message of reconciliation that is under discussion by the end of chapter 5. Is it possible the topic of verse 5 is the gospel revealed by the Spirit and all of the comfort derived from it and its confirmation?

C. It was shown earlier that we are comforted through the words and knowledge supplied by the Holy Spirit, thus fulfilling His role as Comforter. Based upon earlier study, the truth delivered by the Spirit, confirmed by His power, seems the best fit solution for satisfying the above hints and limitations supplied by the context.

D. Therefore, in the absence of more convincing information, I conclude that the “guarantee of the Spirit” is the confirmed gospel delivered by the Holy Spirit, which leads to our faith in God’s faithfulness (Psalm 119:111,162). This serves as a “deposit”, assuring us that God will make good on His promise to bring us to heaven.

II. The “Seal of the Spirit” – II Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 4:30, and II Timothy 2:19

“who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

“Nevertheless, the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.’”

A. The word *seal* according to Vine:

“SPHRAGIS (σφραγις) denotes (a) a seal or signet, Rev. 7:2, ... (b) the impression of a seal or signet, (I) literal, a seal on a book or roll,”

Therefore, this seal shows somehow our stamp of approval, recognition, or ownership from and to God.

B. Limitations and hints from the context:

1. Hint from II Corinthians 1:22 – The sealing of the Spirit is related, although it may be distant, to the guarantee of the Spirit.
2. Limitation from Ephesians 4:30 – The sealing is done by the Spirit and its purpose is looking towards the day of redemption, judgement day.
3. Limitation from II Timothy 2:19 – The solid foundation that stands (Christians who have not strayed – vs. 14-17) has a seal that accomplishes two things: It designates those who belong to Christ, and instructs these same people to “depart from iniquity”. The first action harmonizes with Vine’s definition of a seal that designates ownership.

C. Limitations and hints supplied from other passages:

1. Revelation 7:1-3; 9:1-5 – Those who had the “seal of God” were preserved from suffering the wrath and punishment of God. The angels deliberately marked God’s people with this seal before releasing the wrath to prevent harming God’s people. This harmonizes very well with the limitation supplied by II Timothy 2: 19, “The Lord knows those who are His”.
2. Just as the seal separates us from the people of the world who have no seal, so does our behavior and our life separate us or sanctify us from the rest of the world (I Peter 2:9-12; 4:1-4).
3. Romans 8:14-16 – The Holy Spirit bears witness with our Spirit to God that we are His children. This is accomplished by putting “to death the deeds of the body” “by the Spirit” (8:13) and by being “led by the Spirit” (8:14).
4. We are sanctified by obeying the truth delivered by the Spirit (John 17:17; II Thessalonians 2:13), which means we are “set apart” made holy and distinct.

D. The summation of these verses is that the Christian is sealed, set apart, sanctified, or marked by his initial conversion at baptism and continuing through life by his lifestyle which bears the unique markings of his Creator. All of these things are accomplished by following the standard and pattern that was revealed by the Spirit. Therefore, we are sealed by obeying the truth revealed by the Spirit, which enables the Spirit to attest to our sonship based upon our obedience to His revelation.

E. The above limitations harmonize well with the work of the Spirit as described above. Again, in the absence of other convincing information, I must conclude that the “seal of the Spirit” is the gospel delivered by the Spirit, which marks us by our obedience to it.

III. “The Spirit that dwells in us” – Multiple passages

It should be noted that there is no argument about the fact that the Holy Spirit does dwell in us. No one disputes this. It is clearly stated in Scripture. The question is how the Spirit dwells in us. To answer this we must analyze at least some of the Scriptures describing the results of the Spirit dwelling in us and compare these requirements to what we know about the Spirit’s work.

- A. This phrase and variations of it especially fulfill the description given earlier of accommodative language in the Bible. It assumes how the Spirit dwells in us. We must make the assumption that harmonizes best with the remainder of Scripture, and we must only make another assumption when necessitated by the context. We cannot assume a conclusion without Scripture to support it.
- B. The Bible clearly speaks of God’s word dwelling in us (Colossians 3:16; II John 2; Psalm 119:11,15). The whole of Psalm 119 stands as a memorial to the need and power of God’s word “richly” dwelling in us. This is accomplished by us assimilating His will from His word and making it our will. By meditating upon it, studying it, and applying it, His word dwells in us and becomes part of us, as we become like what is revealed in the Word.
- C. The Bible clearly speaks of God the Father dwelling in us.
 - 1. God dwells in us (II Corinthians 6:16)
 - 2. God abides in us (I John 4:12-16)
 - 3. God abides in us by us having love as He had (I John 4:12-16)
 - 4. God abides in us by us assimilating His love, as manifested by the Spirit, and making it our love. We must love as God loved us. Part of this involves keeping His commandments (I John 5:3)
- D. The Bible clearly speaks of Christ dwelling in us.
 - 1. He dwells in our hearts by faith (Ephesians 3:17).
 - 2. This is accomplished by us assimilating the word given by the Spirit which manifests the life of Christ. When we live by faith, according to the example of Christ, we become like Him, and He dwells in us by faith.
 - 3. Taking upon ourselves the qualities of the “divine nature” is prescribed by II Peter 1:2-8. These virtues are the virtues that are most clearly and perfectly demonstrated in Christ’s life.
- E. Similarly, the Bible clearly speaks of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us (Acts 5:32; Romans 8:9, 1; I Corinthians 3:16; *et al.*)
 - 1. It would be reasonable to assume that the Spirit dwells in us in the same manner as the other members of Godhead. It would similarly be accomplished by us assimilating the word into our hearts just as we assimilated the artifacts left behind by the other members of the Godhead. God left us His commandments and love. Christ left us His life as a pattern. The Holy Spirit left us truth to guide, seal, and comfort us.
 - 2. Acts 5:32 suggests that the indwelling of the Spirit would be a sign to inspire belief in the unbelieving Pharisees. How could an unseen, unmanifested indwelling of the

Spirit serve as a sign to unbelievers? However, the truth and the confirmation of it are the collection of all signs for unbelievers to produce belief (John 20:30-31).

3. I Thessalonians 4:8 suggests that when men reject us they actually reject God because of the Spirit that dwells in us. How is it men can reject the Spirit by rejecting us, unless the Spirit somehow influenced us? Actually, men reject the message of the Spirit, truth, which is what dwells in us (II John 2).
 4. Acts 6:3,5,8,10 – This passage uses four different phrases to describe the same quality: “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom”, “full of faith and the Holy Spirit”, “full of faith and power”, “the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke”.
 - a) The fact that these phrases are used interchangeably suggests their close interrelation, at the least.
 - b) If the Holy Spirit dwells literally and directly in Christians without medium, then how can He dwell in different degrees of dwelling. Either He dwells in a person, or He doesn't. However, verses 3 and 5 said that these men were “full of the Spirit”. This suggests that some Christians did not have as much of the Spirit as others.
 - c) Verse 10 has the answer. It was by the miraculous gifts from the Spirit that Stephen was full of wisdom, power, and faith. The Holy Spirit does give people different levels and amounts of spiritual gifts (I Corinthians 12, 14). People may also have different degrees of faith based upon their knowledge of the Word delivered by the Spirit and their belief in it (Romans 14).
- F. Based upon the following facts:
1. The Holy Spirit could dwell in us through the Word which does dwell in us
 2. God dwells in us by us assimilating His love
 3. Christ dwells in us by us assimilating His life through faith
 4. The force of the similarity, that the Holy Spirit could also dwell in us through us assimilating His revelation
 5. The negative points which seem to only be satisfied by an indwelling through the medium of the Word
 6. The harmony of indwelling by the medium of the revelation and the lack of evidence for a literal, direct indwelling

The Holy Spirit dwells in us by us assimilating the truth as revealed by the Spirit. This is accomplished by faith in the word, which causes me to become like Christ - having the love of God. In fact I believe, that the way in which each member of the Godhead dwells in us is just a different facet or perspective of the fact that they all dwell in us the same way: by obedient faith in the revealed word. When this occurs we take upon ourselves the characteristics to which they are more closely associated because of their roles. We become merciful, loving, and just like the Father. We become holy, moral, and virtuous like Christ. We become honest, wise, and truthful like the Spirit. We become like God as they dwell in us.

The Holy Spirit versus the Word of God

As was noted earlier, the Holy Spirit is a unique being. He is not the Word of God. Once one agrees that the Holy Spirit dwells without medium, he is faced with the question, “What does He do?” The Bible lists several results of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. As we have tried to show above, a direct indwelling is not compatible with the requirements placed by other scriptures. Although most Christians would draw a blank on this question, Calvinists go beyond what is written and suggest many erroneous things that the Spirit does through the direct indwelling. This partially completed chart, which was probably originally arranged by Robert Turner and has been adapted from other sources, helps to answer some of these questions.

The Work	The Holy Spirit	The Word of God
Fills us, dwells in us richly	Ephesians 5:16	Colossians 3:16
In conversion		Psalm 19:7; Romans 1:16
Gives wisdom, understanding	Acts 6:10; I Corinthians 12:8	Psalm 19:7; 119:104, 130
Restores and gives life	John 6:63	Psalm 119:50; John 6:63
Bears witness, testifies	I John 5:6; Romans 8:16	John 5:39
?? Makes clean		John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26
Sanctifies	II Thessalonians 2:13	John 17:17; Ephesians 5:26
Builds up		Acts 20:32
?? Justifies		Romans 5:1 → Romans 10:17
?? Makes free from sin		Romans 6:17-18
Gives us faith		Romans 10:17
Begotten through		I Corinthians 4:15
Reconciles to God		II Corinthians 5:19
?? Establishes, strengthens		Colossians 2:7

The Work	The Holy Spirit	The Word of God
Works in believers		I Thessalonians 2:13
Comforts	John 14:15-18, 26; 16:5-15	I Thessalonians 4:18
Called by		II Thessalonians 2:14
Leads us	Romans 8:14	
Saves		James 1:21
Brought us forth		James 1:18
Purifies us	James 1:22	James 1:22
Gives us new birth	John 3:5	I Peter 1:23
Grow thereby		I Peter 2:2
Sources Truth	John 14:26; 16:13	John 17:17

Conclusion

The study of the guarantee of the Holy Spirit demands an extremely deep, but yet expected, study of God's Word and the nature and work of the Holy Spirit. Although, there may be some questions that I have not answered or cannot currently answer, I hold to the hope that if any continue to "seek", then they "will find"; and if they persevere in "knocking", then the "door will be opened." Let us continue to study to isolate the facts that we know, and make inferences and conclusions that are demanded by the context. Thereby, we will discover the things that are meant for our comfort.

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Appendix B – Christians and Judicial Oaths, II Corinthians 1:23

Introduction

Abcd

Appendix C – Imputed Righteousness and Sins of Christ, II Corinthians 5:21

Introduction

Often Christians are lured into a false sense of confidence that the church at large has settled all points of doctrine and that there is nothing left of the New Testament church to be restored. Our assurance of what we know may blind us to the dangers of what we do not know. There are still some remaining vestiges of Calvinism, Premillennialism, and other ancient false doctrines, that are held by a significant portion of Christians. One such doctrine is the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, and one of the proof texts that is often used is II Corinthians 5:21.

The related doctrine of Neo-Calvinism (*New-Calvinism*) is a softened version of Calvinism that has been adapted to better survive in this age of tolerance and liberalism. As the more acceptable fragments of Calvinism survived in many denominations, some fragments also survived and remain in our understanding. Neo-Calvinism and the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ has surfaced at least once already in the church during the “walking in the light” discussions. Much of what we will learn from this study of the imputed righteousness of Christ is closely related to the walking in the light issue and Neo-Calvinism, since all of these doctrines are adapted fragments of Calvinism.

Motivation

We may often rationalize to justify doing something that we know is wrong. Similarly, false doctrines achieve the same goal but through much more convoluted reasoning. Almost every false doctrine is nothing more than a scheme that allows one to practice sin with a clean conscience. The complicated reasoning often hides the error that is more obvious in simpler rationalization.

Once the illusion is dissolved, this doctrine under study is nothing more than a watered down version of the “once saved, always saved” doctrine. It permits the believer to be justified in any practice, regardless of its morality. This confidence eliminates the need for continuing diligent study and purification of one’s character and life. Possibly even more dangerous is the fact that this doctrine is a small fragment of Calvinism. Since Calvinism is a very logical doctrine, although based upon false assumptions, the entire doctrine of Calvinism can be “resurrected” by reasoning backward from this false doctrine if it is granted.

This opens the door for many consciences to become seared to sinful practices in current generations, and it provides opportunity for Calvinism to resurface in future generations. Admittedly, this statement may seem alarmist. However, who would have foreseen that Catholicism would have arisen in the church within only three hundred years after Jesus’ crucifixion?

The Doctrine as Proposed by Neo-Calvinism

The doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ focuses on the mechanics of God saving us through Christ. This doctrine proposes that Christ came and lived a perfect life, one filled with righteousness and doing good. When Christ finally died upon the cross he concluded this perfect life and thereby, opened a door for God to impute or transfer Christ’s righteousness to our account. Likewise, our sins were transferred to his account as he died on the cross. Consequently, Christ actually became and died a sinner! Because Christ bore all the sins of the entire world becoming the most sinful man to ever live, God was forced to turn his back on Christ, breaking their spiritual bond

just as God separates Himself from any sinful man. Foreseeing this Christ agonized more than any human has known, praying “Let this cup be taken from me.” Reeling upon the cross from the surprise of this divine desolation, Christ uttered the often-misunderstood words, “My God, my God, why has thou forsaken Me?”

The conclusion of this doctrine, which is rarely plainly stated, is that now that Christ’s righteousness is actually transferred to our account, God only sees Christ’s righteousness instead of any action of our own. His righteousness acts as an umbrella or blanket to cover our actions, which frees us from the consequences of our sins. Since Christ’s righteousness is seen regardless of the sin, then God sees no distinction between any Christian and denomination regardless of their practices and doctrines. Therefore, all “Christians” and denominations enjoy fellowship with God and each other regardless of disagreements.

This opens the door to eradicate all distinctions of fellowship and free the believer to practice anything without any responsibility. In brief: “Once a believer is saved, he or she is always saved”, and “Let us agree to disagree because God will save us anyway”. This is the final end of the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ and all related doctrines – unrepentant sin without consequence, and fellowship regardless of truth.

The Truth as Taught by the Bible

Although numerous passages could easily be cited to refute the conclusions of this false doctrine, let us examine the Scripture’s commentary and explanation regarding the original tenants:

I. The reason for Christ living a perfect life

- A. Neo-Calvinists often quote Hebrews 10:7,9 to prove that emphasis was placed upon Christ living a perfect life
 - 1. “Then said I, Lo, I am come (In the roll of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God” (Hebrews 10:7)
 - 2. “Behold I am come to do thy will, O God” (Hebrews 10:9)
- B. However, these passages are taken out of context. The point is that Christ was to serve as a sacrifice superior to the blood of bulls and goats (Hebrews 10:5, 6). The comparison is between the sacrifice of the Old and New covenants, proving the New Testament to be superior and annulling the Old Testament (Hebrews 10:8, 9).
- C. However, the real reason for Christ living a perfect life is that he could present himself as a perfect sacrifice, “a lamb without spot or blemish” (John 1:29; I Peter 1:18-19, 2:21-22; Hebrews 4:15; Leviticus 1:1-3). The perfect life was just to get him to the cross to make the sacrifice.

II. Imputation of Christ’s righteousness and our sins

- A. The word *impute* means “to reckon, take into account, or, metaphorically, to put down to a person’s account” (Vine’s).
- B. In fact, nowhere in the Bible does it say anything about either our sins being imputed to Christ’s account or his righteousness being imputed or transferred to ours.
- C. The Bible does mention our sins not being imputed or reckoned to our account (II Corinthians 5:19), but it does not state they are imputed to Christ’s account. There is no

mention of a transfer between accounts. What happens to the sins is explained in the next main point.

- D. The Bible only mentions our faith being imputed to our account as righteousness (Romans 4:5).
- E. If we are not redeemed through swapping Christ's righteousness for our sins, then how are we saved?

III. Forgiveness of Sins through Christ's blood and suffering

- A. The curse of physical death for all man was a consequence of Adam's sin (Genesis 3:3-5,22-24; Romans 6:12-18). Brents notes that Genesis 3:3 would be more accurately translated "dying you will be". Adam and Eve did not die that day physically or spiritually. True spiritual death, the second death, occurs on judgement day (Revelation 20:11-15). Because of their sin, all of mankind was cursed to physical death by the removal of the tree of life. Their mortality could not be renewed, and that day they began to die with no hope of renewed physical life as is suggested by the reference in Brents' book, The Gospel Plan of Salvation.
- B. The Bible teaches that because each one of us sins, we are under the curse of eventual spiritual separation from God, spiritual death (Galatians 3:10,13; Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:11-15).
- C. When Christ came and died on the cross, a tree, He suffered the punishment of another curse:

"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')" (Galatians 3:13)
- D. By dying on the cross, Christ suffered punishment that was not due Him as a perfectly innocent man. In keeping with God's perfect justice, God substituted Christ's punishment for ours. Christ effectively bore our sins by bearing the punishment for them, but He did not bear the sins themselves.
- E. Christ's physical death and suffering was a substitution for our spiritual death and suffering (Isaiah 53:4-8,10-11; I Peter 2:21-24, 3:18). Only the Creator could justly step in and make a worthy substitution of the creation.
- F. Therefore, the sins are not transferred anywhere. The punishment for them was suffered. The debt was paid for. The sins no longer exist to be transferred anywhere. This is confirmed by the uses of the words "remitted" (removal) of sins (Hebrews 9:12-22, 10:10-18; I Timothy 2:6).
- G. Consequently, it was by Christ's sacrifice that God was able to forgive or remit our sins (Hebrews 9:26; Romans 3:25; Matthew 20:28; Ephesians 4:32, 5:2). Note that God forbore all sins that were atoned up until Christ's sacrifice (Romans 3:25). They were not truly remitted until then. It is by our faith that we can access this merciful forgiveness.

IV. Christ was "made sin" and "bore our sins".

- A. One remaining question is the proof text under discussion. Does II Corinthians 5:21 reconcile with the above conclusions?

"For He made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

1. The passage states that Christ was “made sin” for us. Obviously, this can not literally be true because Christ cannot literally become sin. The readers must correctly infer the correct word or words that will state the writer’s implied thought. There are two possibilities.
 - a) *“made sinful”, that is, having sin imputed to His account.* This cannot be possible because it would stand in direct contradiction to the all of the verses we have stated so far.
 - b) *“made a sin offering”, that is, having become an offering for sin.* This reading is in complete harmony with all other passages in the Bible. Although He committed no sin, Christ became an offering for sin by enduring the punishment of sin that was due us. Whenever a passage in question can be interpreted multiple ways fairly, the interpretation that is consistent with the rest of Scripture must be chosen, else we make God a liar. Since words must be supplied to understand the correct implication, this harmonious interpretation must be true.
 2. It can be observed from the context that the substitution of Christ’s death is under discussion: “One died for all, then all died” (II Corinthians 5:14,15). In the absence of wording to demand a subject change, the “sin offering through death” interpretation of verse 21 is demanded by the context.
- B. Numerous other passages state that Christ bore our sins without stating how. We must ask ourselves, did He bear the accountability or the punishment? Again, one must use the Bible as its own commentary. All passages must be reconciled. Therefore, these passages must be interpreted that Christ bore the punishment of our sins. The notion of the substitution of punishment is assumed in these passages because it is not part of the main point. Notice how this thought is phrased both ways in Isaiah 53:4-6; 8-12.
- C. Also, if the sins of the world were imputed to Christ’s account, then He could no longer have been able to serve as the sacrifice for our sins, “the Lamb without spot or blemish” (John 1:29). He could not have paid our ransom with His suffering because He would have needed to pay His own ransom with His suffering (Isaiah 53:4-6; Mark 10:45; I Timothy 2:6). Justice could no longer have been satisfied. Only an innocent one without blame, deserving no punishment, could have justly served as our substitute.

V. “My God, My God, why has thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34)

If Christ had no sins on His account, then God would have had no reason to forsake Christ and turn His back to Christ. What then could be the reason for Christ’s statement on the cross?

- A. First, it should be noted that nowhere in the Bible does it ever say that God turned His back on Christ. This is yet another statement that was commonly used by Calvinists, another example where the tradition has become doctrine.
- B. Second, if this passage is used as a proof text for the imputed righteousness of Christ, then this verse produces a contradiction. Supposedly, Christ lamented in the garden knowing the separation that was to come. It was prophesied hundreds of years earlier why he had to suffer God forsaking Him (Isaiah 53; Psalm 22). Then why would he ask a question in surprise for which he knew the answer and had foreseen (John 18:4-11)? Therefore, the question cannot be taken literally at face value.

- C. Consider that Christ was born into this world the Son of God, divine. He showed incredible power and dominion over all elements, and even the devil, in working miracles and casting out demons (Matthew 12:22-29). God had charged his angels that they should protect Him (Psalm 91:11-12). Jesus Himself stated that He could call for twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:53). He also stated that no one could take His life unless He voluntarily laid it down (John 10:17-18). The whole of Christ's life showed His power and His authority; yet, when His life climaxed to the point of His betrayal and finally His crucifixion, there was no salvation from His physical demise.
- D. Even from as far back as the giving of the Old Law, such curses of desolation were reserved for those who had been forsaken by God (Deuteronomy 31:17-21). At this point, it appeared as though Christ had been deserted, even punished, by God. This is the point that is made specifically in Isaiah 53:3-4. It was prophesied hundreds of years before that men would have "esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted".
- E. Although God appeared to forsake Christ upon the cross by allowing His torturous crucifixion, it was Christ who chose to be on the cross. Remember that Christ could only have died if He allowed it (John 10:17-18); moreover, Christ could have called for armies of angels if He only wanted to do so (Matthew 26:53). So then there was only the appearance of abandonment (Isaiah 53:4).
- F. If this then is the explanation for the statement, then why is it phrased as a question? It should not be forgotten that Christ's statement is an exact quote of the first phrase in Psalm 22. The fact that Jesus quoted it in the original Hebrew, while He normally spoke in Aramaic, also supports that Christ was quoting Psalm 22 (Matthew 27:46). This Psalm is a prayerful request for salvation in the midst of persecution. It is a messianic prophecy, an exact wording of Christ sentiments and His prayer at that moment, arranged by David hundreds of years before. By quoting this first line, Christ was actually uttering the entire Psalm as His own words and prayer.
- G. Christ's bond with God was not severed then (John 16:32). It was actually as strong as it may have ever been, maybe stronger, because God did hear his prayer at that time (Hebrews 5:7). Three days later God raised Christ from the dead at the peak of Satan's grip, thereby destroying Satan's greatest strength, death (Acts 2:23-32; Genesis 3:15).

VI. Christ's righteousness covers all our sins.

- A. Christ bore our sins in bearing the punishment of our sins. He paid the ransom, the punishment, for us. In so doing, he became an offering for sin, or in the words of II Corinthians 5:21 "sin for us". However, this required the appearance of God forsaking Him, by allowing an innocent man to be unjustly punished and turned over, forsaken to "the dogs". At no time has God's traits of mercy and justice ever been so diametrically opposed, yet still in harmony.
- B. Therefore, each man becomes responsible for His sins, and they are not automatically covered by the imputed righteousness of Christ. We must follow the Biblical method for gaining initial forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38) and forgiveness after we become a Christian (Acts 8:22-24; I John 1:9; Philippians 3:15). We must also follow the Biblical bounds of fellowship (II John 9, I Corinthians 5, et al).

Conclusion

We could have more easily refuted this false doctrine by examining its erroneous conclusions (“once saved, always saved” and “agree to disagree”). Alternatively, we could have refuted it by examining its conflict with the justice of God (responsibility cannot be transferred – II Corinthians 5:10; Ezekiel 18:20; Romans 3:4, 21-26). However, it is necessary that we understand the root of the problem to better understand God’s Word for our sake and others. Moreover, we can learn more about God’s justice, His mercy, and the need for our diligence by better understanding these verses. This in turn will help us in better understanding other related issues that may follow and help us to fight the error of false doctrine whenever it may appear.

References

Much of this material was adapted from notes prepared by Bob Waldron on Calvinism. Copies of related sections of his typed notes are available upon request. References that he used are also included in his notes. The Gospel Plan of Salvation by T.W. Brents has proved to be a source of an immense wealth of insight into the issue of Calvinism and all of its adapted, modern fragments. Although I would disagree with some statements, I would highly recommend it. I believe it to contain commentary on almost all passages related to these issues, organized with great detail.

Appendix D – Marrying a Non-Christian, II Corinthians 6:14-7:1

Introduction

Whenever one approaches such a study as this, a word of warning is appropriate. We must always approach this issue with complete honesty and submission to God's will. If we are dishonest and go to the Scripture looking to justify our opinion, we will be able to do so (II Thessalonians 2:11-12). In addition, we must be consistent with our means of interpretation; lest in failing to do so, we manifest dishonesty. Our attitude should be one that looks to the Scripture first, and forms conclusions based upon it, regardless of its consequences (Matthew 10:34-39). We must also be aware that our emotions may potentially serve as a handicap to our objectiveness. We must not allow our emotions to cloud our judgments and make irrational and dishonest judgments.

“What Saith the Scripture?”

First let us consider a side point: How do we determine the day that the Lord's Supper should be observed? If one wants to observe it upon Tuesday, what would be the Scriptural answer? When we have answered this question upon which the Scripture does not speak directly and about which there is less Scripture than most issues, then we will be in the frame of mind to answer the original question. However, we must always be vigilant that we remain honest, consistent, and fair, that we be not distracted from this objective, truth-seeking mindset. Now, let us examine the scriptures:

- I. It is, at the least, extremely unwise – God has told and shown us in examples from Old Testament
 - A. Commandments given by God prohibiting marriages to pagans show its inherent danger
 1. Marrying those not of the Hebrew religion was strictly condemned (Deuteronomy 7:3-4)
 2. Joshua foretold that it would serve as a snare and a trap for their destruction (Joshua 23:12-13)
 - B. Examples of the weakening and downfall of faithful servants of God through their pagan marriages show its inherent danger
 1. Marriages to pagan women led to the downfall of Solomon in spite of his preeminent wisdom given to him by God (I Kings 11:1-11)
 2. An allegiance formed through marriage ruined the righteous king of Judah, Jehoshophat
 - a) Jehoshophat's son, Jehoram, was married to the daughter of the wicked king of Israel, Ahab. Jehoram took after his wicked father-in-law, not his righteous father, Jehoshophat (II Chronicles 21:1-6)
 - b) Not only was Jehoram ruined by the influence through his marriage, but even his father, Jehoshophat, was influenced to make peace and form an allegiance with wicked Ahab (II Chronicles 18:1-3; 19:2)
 - c) This allegiance also influenced righteous Jehoshophat to make peace with Ahab's son when he became king (II Kings 22:44-49; II Chronicles 20:35-37)

- d) Despite Jehoshaphat's righteousness, he was condemned for this wrongful alliance which began with his son's marriage into the family of wicked Ahab (II Chronicles 18:1; 19:2-3). Please note that Ahab was an Israelite, but he was also pagan.
- C. Reforms were led by prophets of God to reverse the Israelites' pagan marriages after their return from Babylonian captivity
- 1. Nehemiah strongly rebuked the people and "cleansed them of everything pagan" (Nehemiah 13:23-30). Please note that he also referenced Solomon as an example why they should make these marriages. Does this example and Nehemiah's reasoning still apply today?
 - 2. Ezra also rebuked the people and taught them to put away both their pagan wives and their children by them (Ezra 9-10)

II. The New Testament warns against relationships in general that "entangle" or "corrupt"

- A. The passage that is the center of concern, II Corinthians 6:14 - "*Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers*" speaks clearly.
- 1. The yoke in this case is a burden that is pulled by a team to accomplish the goal. If the beasts of burden are different animals, then the burden will not be successfully pulled.
 - 2. What greater relationship is there than the marriage bond? What relationship has more influence than that between husband and wife? What relationship can be more aptly applied to the principles taught by II Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1?
- B. Instructions are given to not "entangle" ourselves with "the affairs of this life"
- 1. We are instructed to endure hardships which include sacrificing things of this life which may jeopardize our spiritual health (II Timothy 2:4).
 - 2. Peter warns of those who do entangle themselves and are overcome (II Peter 2:20). Note the similarity to the parable of the seed that sprouted among thorns (Luke 8:7, 11, 14).
 - 3. Although all of these passages speak generally and apply to multiple aspects of our lives, we must ask ourselves if these passages can apply to our current question. Can a Christian help but be deeply entangled in the things of this world when he or she invites a person of the world into the deepest recesses of their hearts?
- C. Corrupting influences
- 1. We are warned that evil companions will corrupt our good morals (I Corinthians 15:33). If this applies to false teachers, friends, etc, does it not apply to the most influential contact we choose - our spouse?
 - 2. The above reference begins with a warning: "Be not deceived". This statement is a divine warning that we will be influenced for wrong no matter how strong our resolve.
- D. We are instructed to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11)

1. Clearly, Christians must have some association with those of the world (I Corinthians 5:9-13). We have no choice in this matter. God does not ask us to be monks.
2. However, to deliberately choose a non-Christian as our most imminent and profound influence seems to fly in the face of these passages.

III. Incompatibility

The Bible constantly raises the question, how can two people with opposite, ultimate goals have anything in common. As was noted above, we should not deceive ourselves because the Christians will come to have more in common.

- A. “How can two walk together lest they agree?” (Amos 3:3)
- B. We are to love righteousness and hate wickedness (Psalm 45:7; 97:10; 139:21-22). How can we choose as our soul mate, one who hates the Lord?
- C. “For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God.” (II Corinthians 6:14-16)

IV. Test of Love

- A. The Israelites were warned that marriages with pagans would occur if they did not take care to love God (Joshua 23:11-12)
- B. If we truly love God, we will stay as far away as possible from evil and its influences (Psalm 1; review *Incompatibility* point above)
- C. We cannot love God and things of the world. He is to be supreme in our life (I John 2:15-17; Colossians 3:1-2; Matthew 22:34-40)
- D. If we do not love God or ourselves enough to prevent marrying a non-Christian, are we willing to subject our children to the danger of I Corinthians 15:33?

Conclusion

Although there is no direct command concerning this issue, there is the example and wisdom contained in the Old Testament to consider. The principles that made it wrong, such as the power of corrupting influence upon us and our children, still holds outside of time and culture. However, there are explicit warnings in the New Testament to avoid entangling ourselves in such relationships. Our spouse is the most powerful influence we may choose in our lives; therefore, our marriage choice becomes the most powerful application of II Corinthians 6:14-7:1 and other passages. We are also commanded to love God with all of our heart, mind, and soul. He will not be second place. Although not stated directly, the implication cannot be denied. His implied request is just as undeniable as the test of love that the Corinthians faced which was not commanded, although demanded (II Corinthians 8:6). What are we expressing when we choose our most profound influence to be one that leads us and our children away from Him?

Appendix E – Paul’s Thorn in the Flesh, II Corinthians 12:7

Introduction

For ages, the mystery of Paul’s thorn in the flesh has intrigued both scholars and babes. With no clear answer provided in the Bible, we are left to speculate as to the nature of the “thorn in the flesh”. However, in spite of the lack of concrete evidence, the number and variety of speculations has abounded and the supreme lesson overlooked. Below is a summary of views from various commentators (Coffman 480):

- Tertullian thought it was a headache.
- Klausner believed it was epilepsy.
- Ramsay identified it as recurrent malarial fever.
- Chrysostom said it was “all the adversaries of the Word”.
- Calvin made it “fleshly temptation.”
- Luther decided it was “infirmities of the mind.”
- Catholic commentators, generally, “lustful thoughts.”
- McGarvey: “acute, disfiguring ophthalmia.”
- Macknight spoke of some who believed it was “the false teachers.”
- Lightfoot suggested “blasphemous thoughts of the devil.”
- Alexander was sure that it was “Malta fever.”
- And finally, Coffman proposed it was “the malignant opposition of secular Israel.”

The deviation among the opinions points to the lack of compelling evidence that would make a conclusion sure. However, several passages actually do exist that can be used to support some of these views.

Supporting Scriptures

The varying viewpoints can be divided into three different basic groups: continual and intense temptation, physical malady, and spiritual adversaries. The main ideas are listed below, along with the scriptures that seem to best support that view.

Continual and Intense Temptation

This view seems to be one of the most unlikely possibilities. As all people do, Paul surely suffered from intense temptations. However, the following references were written in general about human frailty and temptation; however, they are often attributed to Paul’s thorn in the flesh since he uses himself as an example.

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. . . . O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Romans 7:7-25

“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” I Corinthians 9:27

“I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.” I Corinthians 2:3

Taken out of context, these passages do seem to refer to a torturous, never-ending temptation. However, restored to their original contexts, it is clear that each reference is used to make different points, and each refers to temptation and self-control that is common to all men (I Corinthians 10:13).

Physical Maladies

This idea seems to have some of the best evidence supporting it. The notion proposed by McGarvey of handicapping vision appears to be specifically mentioned by Paul.

“See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!” Galatians 6:11

“What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.” Galatians 4:15

However, another reference speaks of some disfiguration that would be disturbing, possibly gruesome, to behold.

“You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. And my trial which was in the flesh, you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.” Galatians 4:13-14

Again taken out of context, these passages can seem to point to some physical handicap, whether it was bad eyesight or some kind of disfiguring palsy. However, each of these passages can easily be explained. The reference to bad eyesight could be a reference to farsightedness that comes naturally with age, and the physical infirmity could merely be some temporary sickness that he suffered in Galatia. It should also be noted that these references, which seem to point to two different maladies, are found next to each other in the same passage. Moreover, all of these references are found in the same book. How important is the context. Also, it should be observed that near the end of his life, Paul could still read (II Timothy 4:13). This appears to discredit the most plausible case of this group.

Israel and Secular Adversaries

Coffman points out that the words “in the flesh” could also be translated “for the flesh”, introducing the idea that the thorn would be inflicted for the duration of his flesh, or only while he was alive. However, most ideas brought in under this banner could still easily be made to work with the word “in”.

Whatever this thorn in the flesh was, we know it was vexing. Since Paul was dominated by his work in the gospel and for the Lord, it would make sense that the thorn would be related to the supreme focus of his earthly life. Reconsider the heaviest burden in his list of infirmities (II Corinthians 11:28). There is only one problem mentioned by Paul that rises to this level:

“I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, ...” Romans 9:1-4

Paul was an apostle chosen and sent to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21). They were the primary focus of his teaching, just as Peter focused on the Jews (Galatians 2:7-10). This specific mission to the Gentiles was not one that he chose (in general - I Corinthians 9:16-17), but one of divine origin (Acts 22:21). Moreover, Paul’s heart always remained with the Jews, his brethren, as was noted above. When Christ originally sent Paul to the Corinthians because of the Jews’ hardness of heart, he even

questioned the Lord so that he might continue his effort with the Israelites (Acts 22:17-21). Yet, Christ's mission for Paul was to go to the Gentiles.

Included with this idea, is the constant persecution inflicted by his Jewish adversaries. Their rejection of his message was compounded by the Jews that followed him, always thwarting his efforts. Surely, this hounding, never ending vexation could be described as a "thorn in the flesh". Paul even refers to the Judaizing teachers in this Corinthian letter as ministers of Satan, which connects this theme with verse under study (11:13-15; 12:7). A similar reference seems to be made in the Thessalonian letter (I Thessalonians 2:14-18).

Conclusion

Many other speculations could be made, but the one that seems the most likely to me is the view that combines the continual persecution from Judaizing teachers along with Christ's denial to his wholehearted pursuit of the conversion of Israel. That being said, it is clear that in no way did Paul resent his mission to the Gentiles because his love is made clear in the Corinthian letter and others (I Thessalonians 2:19-20).

The ultimate lesson learned is in accepting the silence of the scriptures on this point and observing the way that Paul handled the thorn. His emphasis on Christ's strength and trust in Him is the supreme lesson that must be emphasized. In the end, the nature of the thorn is not important. What is important is whether or not we have the same attitude as Paul: *"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. **For when I am weak, then I am strong**"*.