

SLOW PAUL: 2 CORINTHIANS 7:5-13:14

For **Introduction to 2 Corinthians** see *Slow Paul 2 Corinthians 1-7*.

7:5-9 ⁵ For when we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn – conflicts on the outside, fears within. ⁶ But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, ⁷ and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever. ⁸ Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it – I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while – ⁹ yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us.

From anguish to encouragement

[7:5] So, to take up my story from where I left off: we got to Troas on the shores of the Dardanelles, failed to find Titus, and in the depths of anguish pushed on into Northern Greece/Macedonia. As I'm going to tell you shortly, the churches here are full of wonderful people, and we might have expected at last to have found rest and refreshment for our aching bodies and souls, but not a bit of it. We felt exactly like the grief-stricken prophet of Lamentations who has lost members of his family and feels bitter and rebellious – how could God allow this to happen? The attacks never stopped coming; we sat up all night taking turns to keep watch, with our hearts hammering in our breasts (never tell me Christians don't feel fear: we do, and it's made worse by the consciousness that our faith should bring us peace of mind, but it doesn't, day after day and night after night). And all the time we were thinking the worst had happened and we would never see our friend Titus again in this life.

[7:6] Then the miracle occurred: he turned up, walked into our camp large as life and gave us bear hugs all round. God's like that – when his people are down and out, he so often sends them unmistakable signs of his love and encouragement. No wonder the Lord called his Spirit 'The Comfort-giver'. [7:7] Well, it was wonderful to have Titus with us again; but even better was the really good report he brought about you – the way you had bucked his spirits up by your desire to be reconciled to me. He said many of you expressed a deep longing to see me again, while others were quite emotional over all that had happened, and, best of all, everyone pledged their one hundred-per-cent support for me. You can imagine I was walking on air after that news.

[7:8] Do I regret sending That Letter? Yes and no. I'm acutely aware of the grief it gave you, and I acknowledge full responsibility for causing such distress by writing as I did. But it was never intended to signal a permanent rupture in our relationship. [7:9] I certainly didn't take a sadistic delight in blasting you to kingdom come. What I am now so relieved to know is that it brought you low before God; it spurred you to examine your attitudes and to sort things out vertically as well as horizontally. That's top quality repentance! The result is that so far from any harm being done in terms of broken relationships and long-term damage to the cause of Christ in Corinth, all the breaches have been repaired and we can go on together.

7:10-13a ¹⁰ Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. ¹¹ See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. ¹² So even though I wrote to you, it was neither on account of the one who did the wrong nor on account of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. ¹³ By all this we are encouraged.

Great relief all round

[7:10] You might ask, 'Why can't we sweep all this under the carpet and get on with our lives?' The question is, what lives? Unlike most folk, Jesus' people don't just live for today and tomorrow, but for eternity, because they've brought God into the reckoning. If they make a mess of things and cause hurt to others, they sort it out on their knees before God, and by his grace this clears a path through the whole business; it brings them out into the clear light of full restoration with him and with each other, and there's nothing left to be permanently sorry about. Whereas if you simply try to repair the damage with the sticking plasters the world offers (like lawsuits, financial compensation, third-party arbitration and so on), you leave an infection of resentment and recrimination which ultimately destroys a fellowship.

[7:11] It's always one of God's miracles when it happens, this attitude-changing determination to bring things to the Great Physician and ask him to operate whatever pain it may cause. By all accounts, the healing you have experienced has been anything but superficial. You agreed that the thing needed sorting out as quickly as possible. You heard everybody's side of the matter, whether it was admissions of guilt or declarations of innocence. You allowed people to give voice to their anger, if that was what they really felt. If some showed extreme anxiety about the possible fall-out from the affair, you took them seriously. As I've said, I've been particularly encouraged by your desire to have me back, rather than never wanting to see me again, and by your eagerness for gospel truth to prevail. It was so important to you that justice should be done, that the truth should be transparent to everyone, and that the name of God's people should be cleared. In all this you demonstrated a passion for holiness and integrity, and a determination that this kind of thing should never happen again.

[7:12] So why did I write That Letter? Was it to throw the weight of my authority into the scales, either on behalf of the wrongdoer or on behalf of the one to whom the wrong was done? Absolutely not! It was a last desperate gamble, to give you the chance to settle once and for all, before the throne of God, that you weren't going to imperil the relationship you had with us, but on the contrary to declare in the sight of humans and angels that you were standing four-square with us and that was that. [7:13] Great relief all round!

7:13b-16 In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you. ¹⁴ I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me. But just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well. ¹⁵ And his affection for you is all the greater when he remembers that you were all obedient, receiving him with fear and trembling. ¹⁶ I am glad I can have complete confidence in you.

Uninhibited welcome

Well, of course the Great Encourager doesn't do things by halves. It was one thing to have our own pressure lifted, but it was a further source of joy to see how exhilarated Titus himself was. It had been no ordinary commission on which we had sent him and it was understandable that he should have been apprehensive, to say the least, about the prospect of what could go wrong when he acted as my ambassador to you. Instead, the clouds rolled away and he basked in the sunshine of your unanimous welcome and your total compliance with his mission. [7:14] Naturally I had tried to reassure him that you were spiritual and sensible people, but he needed proof of that, and now he's got it, and I haven't been made to look a fool. Truth is so precious, isn't it? I staked everything upon it when I delivered that broadside to you; and now my constant assertions to Titus that you would prove loyal to us have been shown to be nothing other than God's own truth.

[7:15] Forgive me for going over the top about this; but it touches the heart of the gospel, because it's all about reconciliation and friendship. Just as our Shepherd-hearted God is utterly delighted whenever a lost sheep returns to the fold, so in this particular case Titus has been weeping tears of joy whenever he

recalls that uninhibited welcome you gave him. He might have expected you to be surly, standoffish and uncooperative, but you were the complete opposite. You fell in instantly with his every suggestion, you treated him as the messenger of Almighty God, and you were almost pathologically anxious not to offend him in any way. [7:16] I think that is absolutely fantastic and I'm over the moon about it as well. You've given me a bellyful of encouragement because I now know (what I knew all along) that you're as sound as a bell and won't let me down as we go on together.

8:1-7 ¹And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ²In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. ⁵And they exceeded our expectations: they gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. ⁶So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. ⁷But since you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you – see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

Outpouring of generosity

[8:1] Which brings me to a different but related topic. Titus wants to come back to Corinth, and, my dear friends in Christ, I'll tell you why. You may not know about this, but there has been an extraordinary outpouring of generosity among the hard-pressed churches up here. I'm talking, of course, about God's generosity. I will never cease to praise him for the gift of his Son; but he hasn't stopped there. The flood-gates are well and truly open! [8:2] The news you are probably getting from Northern Greece is that it's very, very hard to be a Christian up here. This has been the case for years, of course, ever since we first preached the gospel in Europe. People have been flung into jail, families left destitute, homes gone up in smoke, lynchings and beatings, you name it. There's no room for a sitting-on-the-fence faith, 'waiting to see if life with Christ is any easier than life without him' kind of thing. It isn't, and that's flat! You need real character and determination to survive spiritually. You risk losing every shred of financial and material security, and many have. So you would expect to find every professing believer to be going about tight-lipped and grim-faced. Not a bit of it! They're all radiantly happy. Why, if they're going about in rags not knowing where their next meal is going to come from? Because they've scraped together the little they do have left and they've given it all away. They're poverty millionaires. They're like beggars sitting beside the road, holding out their bowls with a few coins in and saying 'Take the lot!' [8:3-4] If you were here you would see it with your own eyes, as I do every day. You can accuse me of hyperbole if you want, but not only do they raise as much money as they can from their own resources to support the needy, but they borrow from their better-off friends without a hope of ever being able to pay it back. Such reckless extravagance! 'Well,' you say, 'it must be the power of your preaching that makes them feel they've got to give everything away.' Not a bit of it. They have done it of their own unconstrained free will. They've been down on bended knee, pestering us ceaselessly for what they call the 'privilege' of playing a part in the communal funding of Christ's kingdom on earth. One of them put it like this: 'Show me one single true Christian who hasn't enough to live on and I'll be personally responsible for seeing that they don't starve.' Do you want to know what ministry to Christ looks like? That's it!

Jesus in charge

[8:5] Then there was something else that took us completely by surprise. We thought they would do the usual kind of thing, hold meetings, form committees, appoint officers, publish programmes and so on – operating very much like any local social amelioration project. Actually, no. They decided that the most important thing of all was that the Lord himself should run this project. After all, the motivational power had come from him, so it was logical that the directional and organisational power should as well. So they came to us and said, 'We want the Lord Jesus to be in charge of all this. We can't handle it

ourselves. He told us, didn't he, that without him we couldn't achieve anything of spiritual significance. We just want to be 100% available to him for whatever he decides to do. And of course, we'll go along with your team, Paul, in whatever you think is the Lord's will for us.' Incredible humility! It drove us to our knees immediately. And something quite extraordinary happened.

Spiritual billionaires

[8:6] Titus had been exhausted from his travels and from the emotional roller-coaster he'd been on for so many months. He needed a complete break. But the conviction came to him and to us (Timothy, me and the others) quite independently, that his job down south wasn't done and dusted, in fact it had only just begun. Why shouldn't you at Corinth be allowed to get caught up in the spontaneous outflow of Divine extravagance? Why couldn't he go back to you and include you in this cascade of generosity? Of course he needed a lot of reassurance that this was from the Lord and not some crazy scheme cooked up by impractical visionaries. [8:7] But it made abundant sense. Here are you, the church God has blessed more than any other we've been involved with, spiritual billionaires. There are dozens of prayer meetings all over the city, telling God every day how much you trust him, praising him for his faithfulness. The word of God is expounded and applied in home meetings and evangelistic gatherings. You have biblical scholars ransacking the scriptures for Messianic glimpses of Christ; you have prophets and prophetesses speaking words of knowledge into people's lives. Everyone is galvanising each other into deeper dedication to the Lord, more wholehearted sanctification. And thanks to your willing reception of the reconciliation we've offered you, there's an intensifying of the love that unifies the church and reaches out to the needy. Only one thing is lacking. What has happened to the arrangements we made for your outflow of generosity to the needs of the Jerusalem church? If God wants to bestow this gift of giving on you, why isn't he doing so with his usual reckless abandon?

8:8-9 ⁸ *I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.* ⁹ *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*

The King's example

[8:8] 'Uh-huh,' I hear you saying. 'Another apostolic directive from Paul. All sweetness and light one moment, all fire and brimstone the next.' Not in this matter. I just hate to see you lagging behind when others are going all out for Christ. It's also a practical test of the genuine solidarity you say you now share with us again. Will you come in with us in this work of fundraising? [8:9] Even more vital, will you follow the example of the King himself – our Master Jesus, who could have clung to his heavenly privileges and stayed aloof from the trials and tribulations of earth, yet so willingly stripped himself of his Divine splendour and ended up without even a stitch of clothing he could call his own? Was it for nothing that he took upon himself our spiritual beggarhood, for us to inherit his incomparable riches? I put to you the question I so often have to ask myself: 'Is the Messianic banquet just for you?'

8:10-15 ¹⁰ *And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so.* ¹¹ *Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.* ¹² *For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.* ¹³ *Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality.* ¹⁴ *At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality,* ¹⁵ *as it is written: 'The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.*

You have started – why not finish?

[8:10] No, this isn't an apostolic directive, more of a doctor's diagnosis: carry on taking the medicine,

and you'll get stronger every day! What am I talking about? Only the fact that you started fundraising for the Jerusalem churches last year, and your enthusiasm for it was generated from yourselves, it wasn't in reluctant obedience to some overbearing command from on high. [8:11] So now we've settled those other distractions, it's the ideal time for you to return to what you started doing, to put your money where your mouth is so to speak, and to prove that all that head of steam you generated wasn't a lot of hot air.

After all, you can afford it. [8:12] I'm not asking you to give away what you haven't got. Nor am I compelling you to do something you had no inclination for in the first place. You really wanted to help your poorer brethren, and God honours such noble intentions; he won't criticise you for not parting with what you haven't got. (If I seem to be going back on what I was saying a moment ago about the Macedonians giving beyond their means, the two cases are very different: they're a small persecuted church living from hand to mouth, you are an affluent institution which is largely regarded with favour by the society you live in.) You ought to be able to command fantastic sources of revenue – if you would just pull your finger out! [8:13] It's not as if you've suddenly got to endure the torture of complete destitution just so that others can enjoy a tolerable standard of living. I picture it like this: here are two groups of people sitting down to eat at the same table. The people at one end have their plates piled high with all kinds of delicious food, while those at the other end have to make do with a few stale crusts of bread. Wouldn't it be a matter of common human decency for the first group to share some of their plenty with the second group? Situations change; fortunes ebb and flow. There might come a time when the folk needing your help now are in a position to support you in the wake of some catastrophe or other. Human societies seem to be content, by and large, with glaring inequalities and huge gaps between rich and poor; but in Jesus' kingdom there's a principle of fair shares for all, mutual interdependence, that kind of thing. [8:15] I'm sure you are familiar with the story of the manna in the wilderness: some of the Israelites gathered more than they needed, while others didn't gather enough – but God somehow ensured that they all had the same amount. Maybe he was trying to tell us, for whom the old stories have a new meaning in Christ, that what was a miracle then should be the normal situation now. Otherwise what difference is your faith going to make to other people?

8:16-21 ¹⁶ Thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. ¹⁷ For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative. ¹⁸ And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. ¹⁹ What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honour the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. ²⁰ We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. ²¹ For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man.

Titus and his deputation

[8:16] Well, you'd better stir your stumps, because Titus will soon be on his way back to you. (I'm sending this letter ahead of his deputation, so that you can get guest rooms ready and be well prepared for them, but they'll probably turn up not long after you get this.) I'm so grateful to God for the way he stirs us up to have a passion for his work: he's done it for me, and now he's doing it for Titus. We both feel desperately concerned for your continuing spiritual progress, and it's a concern that comes straight from the Father's heart. [8:17] But I must stress that he is returning to you entirely of his own choice; yes, he's been mightily encouraged by his recent visit, but that's made him even more eager to get back among you – he's a regular Corinth junkie!

[8:18] He'll have two other friends with him, whom I'm not going to name in case this falls into the wrong hands. One is a person whose gospel preaching has become a legend wherever there's a church, so he'll be no stranger to you. He was the unanimous first choice of all the churches round here, to join

my team as we take this offering to Jerusalem; we feel it's a service we can personally undertake, firstly of course because we want to bring honour to the name of Jesus, but also because it's something we desperately long to see successfully accomplished. [8:20] I know how to delegate, of course, but in this case there is every reason for other leading evangelists as well as myself to be involved. The one thing I want to avoid is to give a chance for anyone to grumble that we have been dragging our feet in expediting this collection, so that it's only half as big as it ought to be or could have been. [8:21] Afraid of people's opinions? Of course not! It's the Lord's opinion I value first and foremost; but that doesn't mean human evaluation is worthless, and I'm sure you would agree that we ought to set the highest possible standards of honesty and diligence where financial matters are concerned.

8:22-24 ²² *In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you.* ²³ *As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honour to Christ.*

²⁴ *Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.*

Further recommendations

[8:22] The third member of the delegation is also (until you see him) anonymous, but he's someone whom I have had many occasions to consider completely reliable, and he has always been very keen to take part in this enterprise, and all the more so because he is cheered by Titus' news and his doubts about your possible cooperation have totally vanished. [8:23] So that's the team: you've got Titus, my close associate and my personal representative in all matters pertaining to Corinth, and his two companions, fantastic Christians who have been personally selected and delegated by all the churches up here. I'm sure they will be a credit to the Lord Jesus – all praise to him that we have such men to embody his wonderful love and goodness. [8:24] It is now up to you to demonstrate the same sacrificial care and attention to them as you have bestowed on us, and to prove that the report we've been giving about you in every church we've turned up at is abundantly justified. We're like proud parents who can't help showing pictures of their children and boasting of their exploits to everyone they meet! Please, please don't let us down now.

9:1-5 ¹ *There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the Lord's people.* ² *For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action.* ³ *But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be.* ⁴ *For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we – not to say anything about you – would be ashamed of having been so confident.* ⁵ *So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.*

A question of attitude

[9:1] 'OK, Paul, I think we've got the message: you're telling us to get off our backsides with regard to the whip-round for Jerusalem, and you are sending this delegation to check up on how seriously we are taking your instructions. There's no need to go on about it!' I agree absolutely. [9:2] Never for one second have I doubted your enthusiasm for this project; as I said, I've been consistently going over the top in my assertions to all the churches in Northern Greece that there is a tremendous ground-swell of support for the scheme down south, and indeed there has been for the best part of a year. 'Look at the way these Corinthians have laid the foundations for a fantastic fundraising effort!' say I, and I'm glad to say that the vast majority of assemblies have risen to the challenge and emulated your dedication to the project.

[9:3-4] 'So why send this impressive team with all these secret code-names? Why not come yourself

and see how we are getting on with it?' Again I agree absolutely, which is why I am indeed coming myself (yes, I really am coming this time!) and bringing with me a group of Macedonian observers who have asked for first-hand evidence as well as practical tips for organising the collection. I just wanted to make totally sure that all my confident assurances about your high-quality cooperation wouldn't turn out to be so much hot air. I couldn't bear it if these mustard-keen and relatively unsophisticated northerners were to arrive in Corinth and discover that all of you were hanging about waiting for someone else to start the ball rolling. That would be hugely embarrassing not only for us but, I have to say, for you as well. Can you blame me, therefore, for sending an advance party to ginger you up and give us all something to sing and dance about? [9:5] I hate to labour the point, but I know how busy you all are in the great metropolis, and with the best will in the world some things do get left to the last minute – so I've laid it on thick, and emphasised to The Team how crucial their visit is, in helping you to get the whole thing under way and leave no detail unprovided for.

Look. It's all a question of attitude. Either you can go to the Lord and tell him, 'If this is the way you want to bring a blessing to the world, we want to be part of it, so please count us in;' or you can adopt a typically mercenary Corinthian attitude, and grumble like the ancient Israelites in the desert, 'We didn't want to do this in the first place, but we suppose we've got to, so tell us what we're going to get out of it.'

9:6-8 ⁶ Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Sowing generously

[9:6] I'm sure you are the first sort and not the second sort. But if you really want to know what you're going to get out of it, let me take you to a little sequence in the wise old book of Proverbs. The Preacher-King has been on a tour of the farms surrounding his capital, and he's noticed how some produce an abundant harvest while others are living just above the bread-line. So he draws the obvious conclusion, which is applicable to other areas of life unconnected with agriculture: 'What you put into it will determine what you get out of it. Sow a stingy amount of seed, and you'll produce a crop that's barely enough for you to live on; sow generously, and you'll reap an abundant harvest which will be far more than you need, so you can share it around and start an epidemic of gratitude.' [9:7] Of course you can blame the unpredictable weather and say, 'We need to keep something by for a rainy day,' but as I said it's up to you. As the Master famously remarked, 'Where your treasure is, there your heart is too.' That's where things get decided – in the heart. Oh, the head will say, 'I don't like giving stuff away, because it hurts; if I've got to, I suppose I will, but I'm not happy.' And blindly following your heart can be dangerous, I agree. But who have you given your heart to in the first place? Who makes the decisions in your life? The Preacher-King gets it right every time: 'The Lord goes delirious over someone who recklessly parts with his precious savings: it really warms his heart, because he's a Giver God himself.'

Divine extravagance

[9:8] What is the secret of true contentment? Your philosophers will tell you it's all about cultivating mental independence and detachment from worldly goods. If only they knew the true power of our all-sufficient God! His cascade of blessing never dries up, because it's fed from eternal springs of pure goodness. His intention is that his people should draw on those springs in order to be the agents of continual and unfailing benefit to their world. If we think, 'Oh no, I'm going to lose out if I help this or that person or good cause,' then we completely miss the point. Whatever the situation, however great the need, however long the crisis goes on, we will never exhaust the capacity of God's store-cupboard or find his provision running dry. The principle of grace is Divine extravagance: his love overflowing

into us, our generosity overflowing for others. Try it and see!

9:9-11 ⁹ *As it is written: 'They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures for ever.'* ¹⁰ *Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.* ¹¹ *You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

Enlightened selfishness

[9:9] This isn't some magic formula or obsessional fantasy – it's there in Scripture for all to see. The Psalmist is describing a person who is apparently well-off, respected for his fair dealings, generosity and so on – does he have a secret supply of wealth? Well, yes he does: he deals with the Bank of Heaven. 'The idea of this bank is that you recklessly squander your material possessions for the benefit of the don't-haves, and you get it made up to you in spiritual riches (the really solid sort of wealth) which go on accumulating for ever and ever; as a by-product you might get earthly bonuses in the form of more than enough to live on, and a decent reputation, that kind of thing.' [9:10] The point is that you're not operating with an impersonal system of supply and demand, you're dealing with the Great Supplier himself, and he's shown us the principle he works on, which is that a single seed blossoms into hundreds more seeds – in a word, the more you sow, the more you reap out of all proportion. Here is Isaiah celebrating the creative power of God's Word: 'It's like the rain, which doesn't fall uselessly on the earth and then return to heaven in a kind of pointless cycle, it generates harvest-life, seeds for farmers to sow and bread for families to grow healthy and strong.' It's the same principle that governs financial wealth (which comes from God as I'm sure you realise): you not only get bread for yourself and all at your table, you maximise the amount you have for giving, and did you notice that phrase in the Psalm about 'spiritual riches'? This isn't just for the next life, it's for this one as well: the currency of material benevolence gets commuted into betterment of life here and now. Hosea goes even further: 'You think you'll get something for yourself out of meeting other people's shortfalls – well, you will, but if you tell him, "Lord, I'm not simply trying to maximise my material profits, I'm really searching for you, longing to know you better and to have your outgoing nature reproduced in me," then God's own satisfying goodness will fill your heart and overflow from you to others.' Truly enlightened selfishness! All because this is what God is like and it's how wants his world to work.

[9:11] Do you get the point? You're not going to be worse off if you come in with this scheme, you're going to go on getting richer and richer. Now I know this language is used by those who operate scams – 'you've got a win-win situation here,' they say, meaning of course that all the winnings go to them and you end up cursing God and mankind. No, I'm talking about the complete opposite, which is straightforward, transparent generosity on your part. Our role is merely to act as middlemen – it's not as if we get anything from it ourselves. This is going to generate enormous thanksgiving to God, I assure you. Let's think about this for a moment.

9:12-15 ¹² *This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.* ¹³ *Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.* ¹⁴ *And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.* ¹⁵ *Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*

Wonderful Giver

[9:12] Let's suppose though that you get no profit or benefit to yourselves as a result of digging into your pockets on behalf of these less well-off Christians in another part of the world. It's just a necessary chore that believers in Christ get saddled with, a slightly disagreeable by-product of coming in with this Jesus thing. Well, even if that were the case (which it isn't), you would still be scoring a definite plus in that people would be sending up thanksgiving to God all over the place. [9:13] Instead of

everyone saying, 'Oh these Corinthians always want to opt out and do their own thing, and you can't rely on them to pull their finger out for you unless they can see a fat profit in it for themselves,' they will be absolutely delighted and start praising God for this solid evidence of unselfish service on your part. 'God is so good! He's persuaded the Corinthians to come in with this scheme like everyone else, and look how it's helping the gospel of Christ to get accepted wherever it goes, showing that Jesus really does change people's lives and attitudes, and that Christians can work together generously not only for their own little cliques but for the good of mankind as a whole.' [9:14] In fact, instead of reeling off the odd quick prayer for you as a matter of basic duty, the other churches (especially those in Judea) will start pouring out passionate intercessions on your behalf, knowing the kind of extraordinary miracles God can achieve in transforming cold hearts into warm ones and barren wasteland into fruitful orchards and cornfields. [9:15] Yes, God is such a great and wonderful Giver! No-one will ever be able to put into words how unbelievably good he is, firstly in sending the Lord Jesus Christ to die for us, and then in raising up a community of people who put themselves on the line for everyone else. How can we ever thank him enough?

10:1-6 ¹ By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you – I, Paul, who am 'timid' when face to face with you, but 'bold' towards you when away! ² I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be towards some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. ³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. ⁶ And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.

Passionate appeal

[10:1] Now I'm writing the next bit in my own hand, because I feel so passionate about it. Yes, all this is me, Paul!! Rather than asserting my apostolic authority, I'm getting on my knees before you. After all, the Master himself didn't pull rank. Heaven and earth owe their existence to him, yet in his humanity he manifested a disregard for personal status, and a remarkable tolerance and friendliness towards his detractors, which is a great example to people like me, trained as we are to throw the full book at anyone who challenges our credentials. I don't find vulnerability comes naturally. That's why I've probably seemed like a complete wimp whenever I've been among you in person! But that's not going to stop me writing forcefully in my absence – you can see the pen biting into the scroll as I write. Over to my capable scribe again....

[10:2] So I'm just going to appeal to you instead. I'm going to ask your permission to go on the rampage – stuck right up here with no chance at the moment of seeing you – not against you, please understand this, but against you know who. They've got it coming to them. Yes, I am going to throw the entire book at these people who not only can't think spiritually themselves, but imagine everyone else is motivated by the same flawed assumptions as they are. They think (and proclaim as loudly as possible): 'Oh, Paul and his associates are only in this Jerusalem fund business because of the rake-off they can get personally, they are empire-building to gratify their own egos, and they're thoroughly jealous of the much-respected Jewish rabbis who see no reason to abandon the traditional ways of Moses' – that kind of thing.

The enemy we're up against

[10:3-4] Huh! Financial greed, vainglory, prestige – what do they know about the real battles we're fighting? Yes, sure, we inhabit the same world as they do, we get tired and ill, we need clothes and shelter, we support our favourite teams and so on; but if you're under Christ's command you're operating to an entirely different set of instructions and employing totally different strategies of war. I've said a bit about these already: they're the weaponry and armour of the Holy Spirit, things like integrity, purity, love, patience, faith, gospel truth, prayer and so on. Have these guys any idea of the

enemy we're up against? Have they measured the thickness of the gates of hell? It's only God's power that can break down the fortresses of devilish pride and human religiosity, the kind of power Jesus released through his death and resurrection and which we can wield only by becoming one with him in them. [10:5] The one thing the enemy is determined to stop at all costs is pathetic human beings coming into a personal knowledge of God and finding the way to eternal life. They know that when we preach the gospel, people are brought to their senses as they begin to understand the heights of God's love and the depths of their own sinfulness. People who belonged firmly in the camp of the antichrist are being captured by the forces of Christ, their confident arguments are being demolished by the Divine logic of the cross, and knees are bowing to the Lord Jesus as they hear his call to discipleship.

[10:6] So when I say I'm going on the rampage (and that goes for all of us here, we're blazing with righteous indignation, we're really itching to get things in Corinth sorted once and for all), you must understand that it's the transgressors we're after, not the faithful ones who are listening for their Lord's voice and eager to do what he says. You are ninety-five-per-cent where your Master wants you to be – let's make it one hundred-per-cent!

10:7-12 ⁷ You are judging by appearances. If anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, they should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as they do. ⁸ So even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it. ⁹ I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters. ¹⁰ For some say, 'His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.' ¹¹ Such people should realise that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present. ¹² We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.

Judging by appearance

[10:7] 'But, Paul, these people you are waxing so indignant about, we actually find them rather impressive. They are good, upstanding Christians. Are you asking us to excommunicate them or something?' May I say, ever so gently, that you are making the old mistake of judging by external appearances. No amount of personal stature, oratorical skill or confident swagger can authenticate a person as Christ's chosen messenger, or indeed as a genuine Christian in the first place. But if these people really are sure they are kosher, why aren't they prepared to admit that we too (Timothy, Titus, myself) could be equally committed servants of Christ? [10:8] If talking up your apostolic credentials is all that's required to get the disciples kowtowing to you, then (hadn't you noticed?) I'm as good at that as anyone else, in fact rather too good! The difference being that I use those credentials for the purposes not of building my own empire but of furthering the kingdom of Christ, not for attacking and shredding other people's reputation but for producing mature Christian character. I'm not going to apologise for claiming apostolic authority, not a bit of it – [10:9-10] all I want to avoid is giving the impression that I'm trying to terrify you into compliance by writing long and weighty letters. 'Well, Paul, you must admit that you do deliver some hefty broadsides in these missives you send us, which take about an hour to read and leave us battered into submission. Yet when you eventually get here you don't cut a very impressive figure – you're not in good shape physically and your sermons are frankly unmemorable.' I seem to be in a lose-lose situation! I'm accused of trying to be a somebody in my absence and being a nobody in my actual presence. [10:11] Two different Pauls, is that it? Well, if you want consistency, just wait till I turn up one day soon. You'll find I'm not play-acting. The man you're hearing today is the man you'll be seeing tomorrow. Passionate for Christ, transparent before God. Weak in the flesh, strong in the Spirit.

[10:12] These guys have got a nerve! Issuing a league table of apostles, with themselves in the premier division and the rest of us down with the also-rans! Even when they're assessing their own colleagues they award marks for scholarship, rhetoric, spirituality and numbers of conversions. Well, they've been

warned. One day they're going to turn up at the bar of the only judgment that counts and find all their achievements filed under 'Not known here.' Then they really will look fools. Lord, open their eyes *now!*

10:13-18 ¹³ *We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the sphere of service God himself has assigned to us, a sphere that also includes you.* ¹⁴ *We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ.* ¹⁵ *Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our sphere of activity among you will greatly expand,* ¹⁶ *so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in someone else's territory.* ¹⁷ *But, 'Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.'* ¹⁸ *For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.*

Who gets the credit?

[10:13-14] Well, instead of constructing unquantifiable categories, let's operate in the realm of solid fact. What do we have to chalk up to our credit? Why, the fact that we've reached you Corinthians with the gospel! That's how God measures achievements. 'Are my messengers where I want them to be, saying what I want them to say?' If we hadn't followed the leading of the Spirit, we could still have been beating our heads against a brick wall somewhere in Northern Asia, or enduring cynical comments from the eggheads in Athens. Instead, I found myself standing up in your Gentile lecture-hall and members of the next-door synagogue were coming over to have their eyes opened to who their Messiah really was.

[10:15-16] This business of 'Who gets the credit?' needs to be settled once and for all. To start with, there is no question of us preening ourselves on account of what other workers have laboured to achieve. Each person is going to get the reward they deserve – remember the parable of the talents? Next point: our work is never finished. There's plenty to do among you, nurturing your faith, hopefully seeing it grow and spill over from Corinth into regions of the Peloponnese as yet unreached. We can't be involved with absolutely everything – others need to be trained and sent out into the harvest-field – but we can get on with what God's planned for us to do here and now, and then if he wants us to go to the ends of the earth, we'll go there as well.

[10:17] Lastly and crucially, let's never forget who deserves all the praise and glory that's going – the Lord himself. Jeremiah the prophet got it right: 'The nations of the earth award doctorates to their scholars, medals to their military heroes, bonuses to their bankers; but the Lord has a completely different scale of values. His highest accolades are reserved for those who have the sense to realise just who he is; whose highest earthly ambition is to come into a deeper knowledge of their Saviour; who offer themselves unreservedly for his mission on earth, which is to forgive sin, to challenge evil and to cause goodness to flourish.' [10:18] Your personal CV may be incredibly impressive, you may be able to produce glowing testimonials from eminent referees, but in the end the one thing that matters is the fire-test: has your life met with the Lord's approval? Have you built anything for Christ?

11:1-3 ¹ *I hope you will put up with me in a little foolishness. Yes, please put up with me!* ² *I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.* ³ *But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the snake's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.*

Innocence and deception

[11:1] Sorry – I'm throwing my weight around again, and I know you can't stand that. In fact some of you think I'm a pompous windbag. OK, then, I'm deliberately going to make myself look ridiculous. I'm going to indulge in a bit of rampant idiocy. I hope you can stand that, at least! [11:2] After all, the Lord loved us enough to make himself look a complete idiot for our sakes – so I'm prepared to go to

any lengths to show you how passionate I feel about you. You're my own dear children, after all; I'm your father in Christ. This may sound stupid, but fathers want to make the best possible marriages for their children, and you were like a young virgin daughter to me, so I chose you the best husband ever, who is the Lord Jesus Christ. [11:3] It was the Garden of Eden all over again, innocence and bliss, Adam and Eve walking with God in utter simplicity and radiant purity. Then along came the serpent and tragedy struck. Could this be happening again with you? Have we learnt nothing from our theological history? Have we forgotten the evil one's capacity for ruthless cunning and subtle deception? His one aim is to brainwash us out of our relationship with God. Is he doing just that where your Christian faith is concerned?

11:4-6 ⁴ For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. ⁵ I do not think I am in the least inferior to those 'super-apostles' ⁶ I may indeed be untrained as a speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way.

I know who I'm talking about

[11:4] When we first arrived in Corinth five or six years ago, we told you about Jesus, how he was God's chosen Deliverer and Son (as declared through the cross and empty tomb), fulfilling the scriptures and commanding repentance and obedience. You responded in wholehearted faith and experienced the actuality of the Holy Spirit, God's power at work in your midst, changing lives, forgiving sin, bringing hope. This was such good news to you! You couldn't contain your joy, and you began to pass it on to others. Then we had to leave, and other gifted speakers came along telling you that we'd got it wrong about Jesus and they knew better; what you thought was the work of the Spirit could be interpreted in other ways; and consequently the message you should be spreading was a different one. So instead of packing these people out of town, you hung around them and gave them the adulation they craved. Result: chaos!

[11:5] Look – I know these people claim to be closer to the earthly Jesus than I ever was, maybe some of them can claim to have been sent out as his delegated apostles and can tell first-hand stories about him that I didn't know – but (as I never tire of saying) I've met him too, I've heard his voice, I've received his commission, my experience of Christ is mint-fresh and just as good as their memories of him, if not better. [11:6] I may not be gifted with their silken oratory or spell-binding story-telling, in fact I may look like a stuttering imbecile compared to them, but that doesn't make me a complete ignoramus about the Lord Jesus. Have you ever had reason to question my knowledge and application of the Scriptures? Can you seriously prove that I've been getting it wrong from the start? Can you fault my honesty and integrity? I know one can be sincerely mistaken, oh how I know it, but you've seen enough of me and my co-workers to realise that we tell it how it is, we're not pulling the wool over anyone's eyes – it's far too important for that. If we were complete charlatans, you would have seen through us by now.

11:7-11 ⁷ Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? ⁸ I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. ⁹ And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so. ¹⁰ As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, nobody in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine. ¹¹ Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

Dealing with criticisms

[11:7] Ah, I know what it is! 'Paul, you shouldn't have taken that tent-making job. The gospel's too important for that. Even Jesus gave up his trade as a woodworker to go full-time. And you shouldn't have lodged with those exiled Jews Aquila and Priscilla, instead of accepting board and lodging at

public expense. We can tell you, your image never recovered.' So I wasn't posh enough for you. But what if that was deliberate policy? What if your reputation with God was more important than mine with you? Just suppose I'd charged the city exchequer for the privilege of hearing me speak – what would that have told you about the free and unconditional grace of God? 'Entrance into the kingdom of God has got to cost you something.' But it hasn't! Jesus paid the full price on the cross. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, that we must or could do to contribute – except for handing over our sins for him to deal with. Do you understand now?

'Yes, but Paul, you've got to face the fact that other churches beggared themselves to support you in your work at Corinth. How do you think we felt about that?' [11:9] Look – I went through these issues when I wrote to you earlier. It's quite true that after a few weeks our cash supply began to run low and we had to take any menial job going. But even that was preferable to spongeing off a single one of you, risking the accusation that we were going on about God's gifts in Christ being free as the air, while secretly we were being propped up by donations from rich citizens. I frankly admit that when the delegation from Northern Greece arrived with a staggeringly generous donation from the hard-strapped brethren up there, we heaved a huge sigh of relief, not to mention gratitude to God – at least now we could maintain our undeviating policy of not being a financial burden to any of you, as indeed we have maintained up to this very day.

[11:10-11] Do you think I'm being disingenuous or manipulative? Left to myself I might be, but once you've known the power of Christ's presence, his insistent Spirit of truth that he promised us, you can't help telling it how it is. Yes, it has been my unwavering principle that within the bounds of Southern Greece I have not accepted, nor will I ever accept, any charitable assistance towards my personal upkeep or that of my companions. 'Do you hate us so much, Paul? Is our money tainted in some way?' Completely the opposite: my love for you is undying, and I want your contribution to be one hundred-per-cent devoted to the work of Christ. If you don't believe that, I can't do anything to make you – but at least I have the comfort of knowing that God understands everything. My conscience is clear.

11:12-15 ¹² And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. ¹³ For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. ¹⁵ It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

Enemy tactics

[11:12] It should be perfectly obvious to you why I'm taking this stand and intend to go on doing so. It's to establish a clear line of demarcation between ourselves and these charlatans, who claim that they're doing exactly the same work as us and on the same terms. Well, they aren't, because they accept remuneration and we don't. That way we remove their starting-blocks and leave them standing at the start of the race, while we're off and running. [11:13] And anyway, they've no right to be competing at all. They're here under false apostolic pretences, wolves in sheep's clothing as our Master memorably warned us, cleverly masquerading as the real thing but working to their own agenda rather than the Lord's.

[11:14] I suppose one shouldn't be surprised about this, shocking though it is. Let's be perfectly clear about the tactics of the enemy. I have consistently taught, as our Lord did, that Satan will do everything he can to confuse and mislead the people of God. Naturally he's not going to achieve this by appearing with horns and a tail; much more effective to disguise himself as a sweetly-speaking, heaven-sent ambassador of God. [11:15] There's no neutral ground in this war. You're either working for Christ or against him. But you may give every appearance of working for Christ when you're really serving the purposes of the enemy of souls. Satan needs actual people to operate through – I suppose

Judas is the ultimate example – and he'll use their God-given talents to achieve his deadly ends. So how do we tell the difference? And what should we do about it? Jesus told us not to try to sort out the tares from the wheat, otherwise we might pull up the good alongside the bad. We've got to leave the final judgment to God, who will award each person a destiny befitting their characteristic behaviour. Meanwhile we see whether their proud claims match their actual achievements. I think you'll find they don't come anywhere near.

11:16-21 ¹⁶ I repeat: let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then tolerate me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting. ¹⁷ In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool. ¹⁸ Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast. ¹⁹ You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! ²⁰ In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or puts on airs or slaps you in the face. ²¹ To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that! Whatever anyone else dares to boast about – I am speaking as a fool – I also dare to boast about.

Acting like madmen

[11:16] You know those clowns who perform street theatre: they may talk and act like complete madmen, but all the time they know exactly what they're doing. I hope you realise I'm like that. Underneath all the sputtering and blather I'm deadly serious, because there are huge issues at stake here. So as long as you're clear about that, let's carry on with the play-acting for a bit longer. [11:17] I'm going to puff my chest out like a cock-sparrow and strut around telling everyone how important I am. It's not how the Lord Jesus himself would do it, mind, because he wasn't in the business of stage-acting. He never needed to build himself up to win the esteem of others. So if I seem to be pushing my own credentials, it's up to you to judge whether I'm really a fool or just pretending to be one for the time being.

[11:18] It's so sad really, this obsession with telling everyone what a great person you are, polishing your self-image, projecting your persona on the world around. But if that's the way you want it, I'll go along with it. [11:19] Oh, you're such sophisticated spectators! You clap delightedly when the clowns start their act, and you can't have enough of their fooling. [11:20] You go along with it when they call you up on the stage and truss you up hand and foot, or pretend they're a monster gobbling you up, or pirates capturing you, or they put on imperial airs and make you obey their every whim, or even start slapping you around the face. It's all entertainment, just a joke – but what if it isn't? What if we're in the real world after all, and these people are really trying to reduce you to mindless flunkies? Do you see what I'm getting at? These self-proclaimed apostolic play-actors are after your souls. They build themselves up so they can have you kneeling at their feet. [11:21] I'm so sorry we're not following suit – we're such pathetic performers – we just don't have the force of personality to batter you into submission. But we can match them at every point with our own brand of self-promotion, and here's how. ('Paul, you're being a complete lunatic. Why don't you pack up and go home?') Well, I've started, so I'll carry on.

11:22-23 ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. ²³ Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.

Ticking boxes or serving Christ?

[11:22] First item on the CV: ancestry. 'We're true born Jews,' they proclaim. 'We tick every box for direct descent from Abraham. We learnt Hebrew at our mother's knee. We're members of one of the Twelve Tribes and we go right back to the sons of Jacob. We're so kosher and we've got the certificates to prove it. As for this guy Paul, where's he from? Syria, Egypt or somewhere? In fact his parents are Roman citizens; that says it all.' Oh, do get it right; I tick all those boxes too. Jewish parents, tribe of Benjamin, Israelite through and through. Next question, please.

[11:23] 'We've been commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. We went on preaching tours and reported back directly to him. We're first-generation church workers. We've been through it all.' Do you really think so? I know I'm crazy to challenge such impeccably original servants of Christ, but I can out-experience the lot of them. How much sheer physical toil have they been through for the Master? How often have they been thrown into jail? How many beatings have they had? How many times has their life hung by a single thread? I reckon I've done more of that stuff than the lot of them put together. Hard labour for Christ? I've done my stretch and there's probably a lot more to come.

11:24-27 ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. ²⁷ I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

Indelibly imprinted

[11:24] 'Details, please, Paul.' Well, if you want my CV, I can give it you – it's all indelibly imprinted on my memory, and on my body as well. Have they ever been stripped in front of a full Jewish synagogue and had the cat-o'-nine-tails (they stop short of forty lashes each time, not out of mercy, but in case they break the law)? Well, that's happened to me five times, which is a total of 195 lashes. Would you like to see the evidence? [11:25] On the other hand, the Romans beat you up with clubs and truncheons, which cause heavy bruising and break the occasional bone, but don't leave long-term scarring – this has been done to me three times, for instance on our first visit to Philippi. Stoning isn't very pleasant either, because with each rock that thuds into you you grow more certain you're going to die, which I nearly did at Lystra. You can avoid the city mobs and stony-faced authorities if you go by sea, of course, but then you risk storms and shipwreck, which I have experienced on three occasions, including one particularly memorable night I spent clinging to a ship's timber, which continued well into the following day. My one comfort was that Jesus had been through this kind of thing for me (including the timber bit) and I was able to do something remotely similar for him.

[11:26] Of course I have had to go by land countless times, and if anyone tells you that being in the centre of God's will is completely safe, well, it's true your ultimate salvation won't be affected, but you won't be exempt from acute risk, whether it's trying to cross rivers in flood, or getting ambushed by bandits who relieve you of everything you've got and leave you half dead, or facing zealous fellow-Jews who regard you as a traitor to their traditional faith, or for that matter fanatical atheists who think that believing in God is a betrayal of your humanity. You can be walking down a city thoroughfare when someone tries to stick a knife into you, or you can be out in the bush miles from nowhere with wild animals circling your camp - and I've already mentioned the ever-present perils of the deep. But the most insidious danger of all is from your own people, the ones who profess to love Jesus but are listening to your every word if only they can find a way of tying you up in knots.

[11:27] Do you want more credentials? A list of all the times I've done an exhausting day's manual labour then gone long into the evening with queues of enquirers or (more commonly) disputants? All the nights I've been hollow-eyed with lack of sleep? All the days I've gone without food because there simply isn't any available, or when I've been rendered voiceless by lack of water (quite apart from regular times of voluntary prayer and fasting)? Even the basic requirements of shelter, warmth and clothing have been denied to me and my longsuffering team.

11:28-33 ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? ³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised for ever, knows that I am not lying. ³² In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. ³³ But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

Responsibility for young churches

[11:28] I could go on about physical hardships and deprivations, but they aren't the only burden I have to bear. In fact they're relatively trivial, compared to the agonies I suffer from day to day when I think of the little churches growing up all over the world, most of which I've visited, others I hear about from time to time, but for all of which I feel acute responsibility. It doesn't matter whether they're Gentile or Jewish, or whether I founded them or someone else, they're my brothers and sisters in the faith of Christ, and (instead of trying to eradicate them like the person I was once) I long for them to grow healthy and strong in the midst of all the persecutions and doctrinal squabbles and jostlings for leadership which threaten to destroy them. You'll tell me I must cast all my cares on him in prayer, and of course I do, but then I hear of a fresh crisis and it's difficult not to worry all over again. [11:29] I can't help it, I'm made like that, I feel an instinctive sympathy with those who are having a hard time (having myself turned from bully to underdog); I feel physically drained by other people's sufferings, just as the Lord Jesus did, and being blessed or cursed with a fiery temperament I get extremely passionate whenever I hear of anyone being cruelly or unfairly treated.

[11:30] So that's about it. 'Funny kind of self-promotion, isn't all this, Paul?' Yes: most people trumpet their achievements and strengths, while I've given you a catalogue of my distresses and humiliations. But I'm proud of them and always will be! [11:31] Who's going to be my referee and sign my CV? Why, none other than the wonderful God himself, because it's for the sake of his Son, my Lord Jesus, that I've been through all this stuff, and he knows I'm not exaggerating. Do I feel any resentment towards him? Not a bit of it! One day I'm going to understand everything, so I'm practising for an eternity of praising him by doing a few exercises now.

Final indignity

[11:32-33] However, in case this seems all a bit too triumphalist or subtly ego-boosting, one more incident occurs to me which just about says it all. In those spine-tingling early days in Damascus, when I was preaching Jesus as Messiah in the synagogues for the first time, I aroused enough fury among my Jewish compatriots for them to go to King Aretas' personal representative, who was in charge of the Arab population, and ask him to arrest me as a troublemaker and if possible have me executed on the spot (which the Jews couldn't do but the Arabs could). The only obvious way out of the city is through the gates, so they set a 24-hour watch at each exit in case I tried to leave among the crowds in daylight or under cover of darkness. What was there to do? Well, one of the newly converted Christians had a house built into the city wall, and they used to put their dirty washing in a laundry basket and let it down on ropes last thing at night for the washerwomen to collect in the morning and take down to the river. So someone had the idea of hiding me under those less than fragrant garments and lowering me out of a window. There I was with the basket swaying and creaking with the strain, but everything held and I got away safely, and the mafia never tumbled to it. It was a bit of a comedown for a proud and respected Pharisee, I can tell you, especially as it took weeks to get rid of the smell....

12:1-7a ¹ I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. ² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know – God knows. ³ And I know that this man – whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows – ⁴ was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. ⁵ I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. ⁶ Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be

speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say,⁷ or because of these surpassingly great revelations.

Visionary experience

[12:1] Do I have anything else on the credit side? Well, it's not going to help in the slightest, but these days you've got to be able to testify to dreams and visions, the angel of the Lord actually appearing to you and so on. I'm really reluctant to talk about this kind of thing, so if you don't mind I'll put it in the third person. [12:2] There was this fellow who was a genuine Christian – it was about fourteen years ago when it happened, so it wasn't his conversion experience, but it was before he started his missionary journeys – it may have been when he was asleep in the normal way, or he may have been separated somehow from his body, I really have no idea, I'm happy to leave that one to God – anyway, he felt himself being transported right out of the normal human region of the five senses, into the intimate presence of the Lord. [12:3-4] I can personally vouch for this experience, even if I'm describing it as happening to someone else – and as I say I have absolutely no idea whether it had a physiological basis or whether it was entirely spiritual in character, God understands that kind of thing perfectly – this quite ordinary guy suddenly found himself planted firmly in a place which can only have been Paradise itself, a place of beauty and delight, with the Lord's own loving presence unmistakably close; then he heard God speaking, and here I'm going to disappoint you, because what he heard was so sacred and personal that he was never permitted ever to repeat it to another living soul.

Deeply flawed

[12:5] If that type of ecstatic vision happened to someone the whole time, they would be considered very special; and if that someone was me, I might feel justified in advancing myself as exceptionally 'spiritual'. But this isn't the Paul we all know. If there's anything exceptional about me, it's that I'm a deeply flawed human being with a long list of humiliations and inadequacies to my credit. (Why I use that word 'credit', I'll tell you in a moment.) [12:6-7a] I'm in a bit of a dilemma here: yes, I would willingly go on about the way the Lord has revealed himself to me, and this wouldn't be the act of a megalomaniac or a pompous idiot, because I would be speaking the sober truth. But that would be tantamount to spiritual blackmail where you and my other converts were concerned, firstly because it wouldn't tally with the very ordinary person you know me to be, both in personal appearance and in my speaking ability, but also because these revelations really have been completely out of this world and I wouldn't want to use them to put unacceptable pressure on you.

12:7b-10 Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.⁹ But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Sustaining power

[12:7b] The Lord knows how prone we all are to start thinking we're somehow above the normal ruck of humanity. So in my case he has allowed me to be subject to a particularly painful affliction – I won't go into the details – which clearly has a medical explanation but which feels as though I'm having a sharpened stake jabbed into me, or as if I was in the boxing ring with one of the Great Adversary's bully-boy henchmen. But as I say, our merciful God permitted this in order to bring me down to earth with a bump after all those paradisaal revelations. [12:8] Did I pray about this? Of course I did! Like our Lord in the wilderness, I endured three particularly vicious attacks, and after each one I asked him urgently for a miraculous and total healing from this affliction. [12:9] None came; instead, I was given these incredibly tender and gentle few words: 'I'm here with you in all this, continually pouring my reassuring love and sustaining power into your mortal frame. That's all you need to keep you going.

When God wants to do a great work upon earth, he finds the weakest vessel to fill with his strength. I've had to learn that too.' Jesus speaking. As you can imagine, that changed everything for me. Instead of moaning about my disabilities, I determined to regard them as massive advantages; instead of my needing to promote myself the whole time, Jesus could borrow my body to show himself through, letting his light and power shine through my brokenness.

[12:10] There! I've told you my secret. Every fresh occurrence of my painful ailment, every time I'm slandered and criticised, every physical deprivation I have to endure, every time I'm chased out of one city into the next, every new constraint upon my freedom of action, I'm absolutely delighted, because it gives another opportunity for Jesus to be known on earth and for his reign to increase. When I come to the end of myself, he can take over. Isn't that fantastic!

12:11-13 ¹¹ *I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the 'super-apostles', even though I am nothing.* ¹² *I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles.* ¹³ *How were you inferior to the other churches, except that I was never a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!*

Genuine article

[12:11] You probably regard me as a total idiot, ranting on like this, but you left me with no option. I just wish you had got behind me as you did at the start and consistently supported me all the way through, but let's face it, you hedged your bets. 'Suppose Paul isn't the genuine article? What if God is trying to show us that these other people are his anointed apostles and Paul is rubbish?' Well, I admit I'm rubbish, that's no problem, I've said so all along; but I'm not going to yield an inch to these incredibly talented and impressive gentlemen as regards being a true ambassador of Christ. [12:12] Let's go back to that moment when the Lord commissioned thirty-six extra pairs of what he called 'harvest hands' on exactly the same basis as the original Twelve. What instructions did he give them? At the top of the list he put toughness: he went on about self-discipline and hanging in there when things got difficult. Well, I know all about that. Then he told them to heal the sick, and thank God he's used me to do that. They had to confront superhuman powers of evil, and I'm no stranger to that. Then there's the greatest miracle of all, which is an ordinary believer who can't string two words together standing up and talking about why Jesus is God's King and what sort of kingdom he is bringing, and people getting soundly converted as a result. Yes, you've seen the old gods yielding as the True God sets the captives free! Isn't that apostolic work? And aren't we doing it as well as, if not better than, anybody else?

Jesus is not for sale

[12:13] Then this gripe you're always bringing up, 'The Lord said labourers deserve their wages, so why have you consistently refused our financial assistance, when you've accepted it from other churches?' Haven't I explained that I wanted the gospel to be totally and utterly free, gratis and for nothing? At Corinth everything is for sale – but Jesus Christ isn't. Is this so wrong? If it is, I offer you my abject apologies. I've clearly hurt your feelings by not sending you a massive bill for my services. Sorry, sorry, sorry.

12:14-18 ¹⁴ *Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.* ¹⁵ *So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less?* ¹⁶ *Be that as it may, I have not been a burden to you. Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I caught you by trickery!* ¹⁷ *Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent to you?* ¹⁸ *I urged Titus to go to you and I sent our brother with him. Titus did not exploit you, did he? Did we not walk in the same footsteps by the same Spirit?*

Agendas

[12:14] Right! I've made up my mind. I'm definitely travelling south to see you, and I'm already packing for the journey. It will be my third visit, and I intend to continue my previous practice of not making any financial demands on you as far as my personal upkeep is concerned. That way no-one will be able to accuse me of subordinating my pastoral concerns to my economic agenda. I don't want things, I'm not after your larders or your trinkets or anything else – I want real living people, and that's you! Parents don't stop being fathers or mothers when the children grow up and move away – they don't suddenly start charging for coming to stay – they do what they've always done, which is to bring precious gifts, contributions to the new home, tokens of their undying love. [12:15] I can't offer much in the way of silver or gold, it's true, but I can bring you the heavenly treasure of the living Lord Jesus Christ, and that's what I'm longing to share, even if it costs me everything in the process. What if I do go over the top in showing my love for you, and find you less than responsive in return? Well, I've got to risk that. [12:16] I've got to be prepared for people to say, when I've done all I can to avoid hassling you in the slightest, 'Oh, he's so clever, that Paul, he's like a wild animal hunter who wants to add you to his collection; he cosies up to you ever so sweetly, then you find he's put you in a cage and bolted the door. Once a villain, always a villain!' [12:17-18] Oh, give us a break! I admit I was like that once, but God can change people, you know. You may have doubts about me, but what about my team? Have any of the men I've sent to you, like Timothy and Titus (whom I had to persuade) and our anonymous friend (who agreed to be part of the group), taken advantage of you or pulled the wool over your eyes? Are we all connen collaborating in a sting operation to relieve you of your hard-earned cash? Can't you accept that we're not motivated by human concerns, our lives have been taken over by the Holy Spirit, we follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ? You can try to drive wedges between us as a team, but you won't succeed, because even though we're hundreds of miles apart, we're not working to our own agendas, we're serving our one Master.

12:19-21 ¹⁹ *Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening.* ²⁰ *For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.* ²¹ *I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.*

Accountability

[12:19] This isn't some kind of lawcourt, you know, with you as judge and jury and us as the defendants. I may have been going on and on about my integrity and transparent motives, but please don't get the impression that I'm accountable to you for my Christian service. Every word I speak – and that goes for all of us – is uttered in the sight of God, because I'm a new person in Christ, he's the one I live to please, and I'm responsible to him and him alone. That's why I can assure you, my dear friends at Corinth, that everything I say and do is for your benefit, to build you up into a mature and confident church and to frustrate the efforts of those who are trying to do the opposite.

Scared

[12:20] So yes, I'm coming south. But I frankly admit, I'm scared. Suppose I arrive and find that you're still in a thoroughly disagreeable mood. Then I will have to be disagreeable in return, and I don't want that in the slightest. The worst case scenario would be for you to be still squabbling like wildcats, passionately taking sides against each other, criticising, gossiping, allowing your gatherings to dissolve into utter chaos – tribal warfare, no less. And you're supposed to be a Christian church! [12:21] I'm dreadfully afraid that when I turn up on your doorstep it's going to be just like the last time I saw you, when the Lord allowed me to be wrung out and hung up to dry. Fine, I'm quite used to being

humiliated, as I've made abundantly clear – but I draw the line at having to attend the funeral of a church of Christ where some people (you know who you are and how many you are) might have superficially reformed but in reality have never abandoned their allegiance to their previous lifestyle. 'R.I.P. One originally healthy Church. Cause of death: Virus Corinthiacum.' And in case you pretend not to know what that is, I'll spell it out to you: a septic infection caused by moral permissiveness, sexual laxity and wanton self-indulgence. That's what urgently needs healing, and that's what Dr Paul is coming to get out of your system.

13:1-4 ¹This will be my third visit to you. 'Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' ²I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: on my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, ³since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. ⁴For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him in our dealing with you.

Consistent message

[13:1] I said this wasn't a lawcourt, but there's a useful rule in Deuteronomy about there needing to be at least two, or even three, witnesses to an alleged offence, before you need to take an accusation seriously. (The Lord's own trial before the Sanhedrin nearly broke down at this point so he had no option but to condemn himself out of his own mouth.) My visits are your witnesses; I've been twice, and I'm coming a third time, and each time I'm saying exactly the same thing. [13:2] What did I say the first time I ever came to Corinth? And what did I say the second time? Immorality is a no-go area. So even though I'm over the horizon at the time of writing these words, I'm giving you advance notice that I'm going to be saying exactly the same thing when I turn up this third time. The message isn't only for the original targets of my clean-up campaign, it's for everybody else as well: if and when I arrive – and it's going to be when, not if – you sir, and you madam, are not going to get away with anything. I'm going to come down on all of you with the full force of my apostolic authority. [13:3] I know I said earlier that I wasn't going to pull rank, but you've driven me to it, because you're refusing to accept that Christ's word is coming through me. Or you're asking for compelling evidence, which comes to the same thing.

God's own power

Jesus himself is the compelling evidence. I may appear a total wimp, but he certainly isn't. He's been there among you since day one, working powerfully through the Holy Spirit, convincing, convicting, healing, transforming. [13:4] Oh yes, there was a time when he was hanging on a Roman cross in utter inability to do anything for himself, contemptible in his public shame and writhing in mortal agony; but all that's over now, he's back alive with the power that made the universe coursing through him, God's own authority at maximum strength. Nothing is going to stop him, not that it ever did. 'So then, Paul, why are you and the others such ineffective operators? Why don't you just solve all our problems with a wave of your hand?' Because as I've tried to point out, God doesn't work like that. Divine power is channelled through human weakness. You can mock us, as they mocked their helpless Saviour, in fact you can bury us out of sight; but we'll come back a day or two later just as he did, and nothing's going to stop us meeting you face to face and sorting you out once and for all, as Jesus did with his astonished and delighted disciples. 'God with us' – have you even begun to realise what that means?

13:5-10 ⁵Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realise that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test? ⁶And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. ⁷Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong – not so that people will see that we have stood the test but so that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. ⁸For we cannot do anything

against the truth, but only for the truth. ⁹ We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is that you may be fully restored. ¹⁰ This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority – the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.

Faith-test

[13:5] Or perhaps you've got to the point where you can't honestly claim to be a Christian church any longer. Perhaps you never really were Christians. Perhaps every single one of you should look at himself or herself in the mirror and ask, 'Am I a Christian believer *today*?' I'd like to suggest a short faith-test, which might involve quite a lot of soul-searching but which gets to the heart of the matter:

- do I sincerely believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead two days after dying on the cross?
- do I gladly accept that his death achieved a full reconciliation between myself and God?
- have I invited the Holy Spirit to come into my life as God's gift to me?
- am I prepared to confess Jesus Christ as Lord before the world?

The important thing isn't a form of words, it's the genuineness of your allegiance to Christ. I'm not asking you to sign a doctrinal statement; I'm asking you whether Jesus Christ is living in you today as a matter of non-negotiable faith. He is? Then whatever you feel emotionally, however much or little you understand, whatever your success rate in living the Christian life, you belong to him. You're Christ-in-you, a new creation.

But if you can't say 'yes' to these questions, then how can you claim to be a Christian?

Ring true

[13:6] What about us? Well, my team and I have said 'yes' to these questions, I hope you realise that. We are impostors if we haven't. Test us at any point and see if we ring true. [13:7] But the important thing is your faith; we are pleading with God night and day that you shouldn't be rotten at the core, saying one thing and really believing another. The fundamental issue isn't whether we are genuine, but whether you are. We want you to be sound as a bell, even if we're giving out a cracked noise ourselves. I don't think we are, but that's not the point.

No pretence before God

[13:8] The point is, that you can't pretend before God, and neither can we. Once we start acting a lie, everything collapses. He is a God of transparent integrity who sees and knows everything. Truth streams from him like light and warmth from the sun; and when we act and speak (as I hope we all do) in accordance with the truth, then the power and glory of God get to work in human lives, however dark and twisted they've become. [13:9] That's why we apostles are totally content to look feeble idiots, because it's the words we speak that do the work, rooting churches like you in the truth of Christ and producing people of character and determination. All this needs prayer, of course, intentional and focused prayer, directed towards the single aim of picking you up off the floor and setting you on the highway of holiness.

[13:10] Do you now see why I've had to come over so strong at the end of this letter? It's to prepare you in advance for my visit. I am desperately hoping that this missive will clear away the rubbish, cut off the dead wood, however you like to put it, so that I don't have to come over all judgmental and authoritarian when I arrive. Why don't I want this? Because the Lord's commission to me isn't to reduce people to rubble, it's to hammer them into shape as graceful and sturdy dwelling-places for his presence.

13:11-14 ¹¹ Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹² Greet one another with a holy kiss. ¹³ All God's people here send their greetings. ¹⁴ May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

[13:11] Well, the time's come for me to send this off. I hope it doesn't depress you too much. Whatever you feel right now, find your true joy in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Get on with the process of restoration right now. Don't leave it to next month or next year.

Listen for the Spirit's voice (you've always been good at that). He's there in your midst, challenging, encouraging, teaching, comforting.

Stop all these party squabbles ; try to find points of common agreement. Unite round the core gospel, and let the perimeter look after itself.

The war's over. Jesus has signed our permanent peace-treaty with God, in his own lifeblood. If there's still a battle on, which there certainly is, you need each other as allies. It's not each other you're fighting.

You've got the Immanuel God on your side. Remember Jesus' parting words? 'I am who I am, and I'm right there with you, no matter what the day brings.' His love and friendship never change – they're what he's made of. Don't ever think he's gone away and left you – that's the last thing you need to worry about.

[13:12] Why not have a special time of greeting each other? Don't just make for the people you happen to like or find attractive. Here's your chance to say a cheerful 'hello' to absolutely everybody – and a final 'good riddance' to all your stupid prejudices.

Sorry I can't join in – but it won't be for long! Meanwhile all of us here greet you. Distance doesn't matter – we're all one in Christ.

[13:13] A final message from our wonderful Three-Person God: 'I come among you as Jesus, your Lord and King, who has done for you what you could never have done for yourselves. I come among you as God your Creator-Father, who will never stop loving every single one of his children. I come among you as the Spirit of holiness, who binds you together in partnership and helps you serve each other. Yes, yes, yes, with you today. It's a promise!'

CROSS-REFERENCES

References are listed in biblical order. Underlined: direct quotation from or reference to an Old Testament passage. *Asterisked: possible or probable allusion to an Old Testament passage. Some references may be anachronistic in that Paul would not have known the text referred to, but they show a similar line of thought.

7:5-9 *Where I left off* 2 Cor 2:12-13. *Prophet of Lamentations* *Lam 1:20. *Down and out* Ps 34:18-19. *The Comfort-Giver* Jn 14:16. *That Letter* 2 Cor 2:3.

7:10-13a *Great Physician* Lk 5:31. *As I've said* 2 Cor 7:7.

7:13b-16 *Truth is so precious* 2 Cor 13:8. *Reconciliation and friendship* Rom 5:11. *Returns to the fold* Mt 18:13.

8:1-7 *Hasn't stopped there* Rom 8:32. *Couldn't achieve anything* Ps 127:1, Jn 15:5. *Gospel in Europe* Acts 17:6, 13. *One thing is lacking* Mk 10:21. *Jerusalem church* 1 Cor 16:1-3. *Couldn't achieve anything* Ps 127:1, Jn 15:5. *Gift of giving* Acts 20:35.

8:8-9 *Heavenly privileges* Phil 2:6-7. *Stitch of clothing* Ps 22:18, Jn 19:23. *Messianic banquet* Lk 14:21.

8:10-15 *Jerusalem churches last year* 1 Cor 16:1ff. *Had the same amount* Ex 16:18. *New meaning in Christ* 1 Cor 10:11. *Difference is your faith going to make* Jas 2:15-16. *Financial matters* Lk 16:10-12.

9:1-5 *Macedonian observers* Acts 20:4 may give us some of their names.

9:6-8 *Epidemic of gratitude* Prov 22:9. *There your heart is too* Mt 6:21. *A Giver God himself* Prov 22:8, Eccl 11:1-6. *Cascade of blessing* Mal 3:10. *Whatever the situation* Phil 4:11-13.

9:9-11 *The Psalmist Ps 112. That kind of thing Ps 112:9, Lk 6:38. Here is Isaiah Isa 55:10. Which comes from God Dt 8:17-18. Betterment of life here and now 1 Tim 6:17-18. Hosea goes even further *Hos 10:12.*

10:1-6 *Disregard for personal status Mt 11: bbn29. A complete wimp 1 Cor 2:3. A bit about these already 2 Cor 6:4-7. Gospel truth, prayer Eph 6:10-20. Enemy we're up against Eph 6:12. Gates of hell Mt 16:18. Human religiosity *Lam 2:2. One with him in them 2 Cor 4:7-12.*

10:7-12 *External appearances 1 Sam 16:7. Transparent before God 2 Cor 4:2. Strong in the Spirit 2 Cor 4:7. Not known here Mt 7:22-23. Will look fools Prov 26:12.*

10:13-18 *Somewhere in Northern Asia Acts 16:6-10. Eggheads in Athens Acts 17:18. Who their Messiah really was Acts 18:7-11. Parable of the talents Mt 25:14ff. We'll go there as well Rom 15:24. Jeremiah the prophet got it right *Jer 9:23-24. The fire-test 1 Cor 3:13-15. The Lord's approval 1 Cor 1:31.*

11:1-3 *My own dear children 1 Cor 4:14-15.*

11:4-6 *We told you about Jesus Acts 18:6, 1 Cor 2:1-5. His delegated apostles Lk 10:1. Their memories of him 2 Cor 5:16.*

11:7-11 *Tent-making job Acts 18:3. Aquila and Priscilla Acts 18:2. Wrote to you earlier 1 Cor 9:1-18. Any menial job going 1 Cor 4:12-13. Generous donation 2 Cor 8:2. Spirit of truth Jn 15:26.*

11:12-15 *Memorably warned us Mt 7:15, 24:24. I have consistently taught 2 Cor 11:3. As our Lord did Jn 8:44. Good alongside the bad Mt 13:29. Characteristic behaviour Ezek 18:30.*

11:16-21a *Like a cock-sparrow Acts 17:18.*

11:21b-23 *Syria Acts 22:3. Egypt Acts 21:38. Roman citizens Acts 22:28. Israelite through and through Phil 3:5. Directly to him Lk 10:1ff.*

11: 24-27 *First visit to Philippi Acts 16:22, I Th 2:2. Lystra Acts 14:19. Remotely similar for him Col 1:24. Ultimate salvation Lk 21:18. Leave you half-dead Lk 10:30. Tying you up in knots Gal 2:4.*

11:28-33 *The agonies I suffer Col 1:29. Cast all my cares on him Ps 55:22. Worry all over again Col 2:1. The Lord Jesus did Mt 8:17. Messiah in the synagogues Acts 9:20-25. In a laundry-basket Mk 8:8.*

12:1-6 *Deeply-flawed human being 1 Tim 1:15.*

12:7-10 *Like our Lord in the wilderness Mt 4:1-11. Body to show himself through Jn 1:14, Phil 1:20.*

12:11-13 *Thirty-six extra pairs Lk 10:1ff. I know all about that 2 Tim 3:10-11. Heal the sick Lk 10:9. He's used me to do that Acts 19:11-12. Superhuman powers of evil Lk 10:17. No stranger to that Acts 16:18. Kingdom he's bringing Lk 10:9, Zech 9:9-11. Deserve their wages Lk 10:7. Haven't I explained 2 Cor 11:7-11. Free, gratis and for nothing Isa 55:1.*

12:14-18 *Third visit Acts 18:1, 2 Cor 1:15, 13:1-2. Like Timothy 1 Cor 16:10. Taken over by the Holy Spirit Gal 5:16.*

12:19-21 *New person in Christ Gal 2:20.*

13:1-4 *This wasn't a lawcourt 2 Cor 12:19. Useful rule in Deuteronomy Dt 19:15. Trial before the Sanhedrin Mk 14:55ff. Immorality is a no-go area 1 Cor 6:9-20. I said earlier 2 Cor 10:1. I've tried to point out 2 Cor 12:9. Through human weakness 2 Cor 4:7.*

13:5-10 *Allegiance to Christ Rom 10:9, 1 Cor 12:3. A new creation 2 Cor 5:17, Gal 2:20. Warmth from the sun Ps 19:6, 9. Dark and twisted 2 Cor 4:6. The words we speak 2 Cor 10:4.*

13:11-14 *Parting words Mt 28:20.*

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