

# 2 CORINTHIANS



Day 238

## “Prayer Alert”

August 26 - 2 Corinthians 1: 1-11

**P**aul writes, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God,” (2 Corinthians 1: 3-4).

My kids joke about the tours I have given them of the city I grew up in. They were pretty patient because they really just wanted to head to the beach, but they listened to my ramblings as we toured around.

“This is where I went to elementary school,” I would say.

“And this is my intermediate school...and this is my high school; remember all of the cool stuff I told you I did back in those days? Well, this is where I did it. Interesting, huh?”

“I’m getting hungry, dad,” was all I heard in return.

“We’re almost done, one more stop,” I said excitedly.

Even though the town had changed a lot, I could still get around very well because I had spent about two decades there. As we drove around there were plenty of stories, some I could tell and others that I chose to keep to myself. As we’d pass a significant house, a flood of memories would wash into my mind, but my kids were clueless. They had not lived where I had lived. They had not been through the same experiences I had.

There is a great deal of truth to the statement that “only those who have suffered can understand the path of suffering.” Of course, there are many roads of suffering and some are more difficult than

others, but it is the one who’s been down that road who can clearly speak to another sufferer. Compassion does not come cheaply. It is usually forged in the fires of affliction. Those who have experienced an unwanted divorce, for example, can empathize with a person who just heard that his partner has another partner. The aloneness and misery of that experience can only be understood by the person who has been down that road. Just as there is no uncommon temptation, there really is no uncommon path of suffering. Suffering happens in our world, in our families, in our community on a daily basis.

Paul says that suffering has purpose. It makes us like God, the great sufferer. It makes us into more compassionate people. God became a man and experienced the most dramatic forms of suffering—physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. Isaiah said about Jesus, “He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”

Jesus knew firsthand what it meant to be misunderstood, rejected and run out of town. On more than one occasion the crowd picked up stones to do Him in. They believed He was committing blasphemy against God because of the elevated statements He made about Himself. Peter said, “Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin,” (1 Peter 4:1). I’m not totally sure what “arm yourselves” means, but I’m sure it doesn’t mean that we shy away from the subject of suffering and don’t consider its spiritual significance in our lives.

Paul believed that difficulties were God’s class-



## “Yes!”

August 27 - 2 Corinthians 1: 12-22

room chalk talk to teach us to serve others. Paul says, “If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer,” (1:6). If you put on this attitude, you might find yourself thinking things like: “I’m suffering so that I can better serve others,” or “God will use this awful experience to one day enable me to reach out to others.”

Paul was others-minded and is a good example for us as we seek to follow Jesus, who was a servant as well. What a privilege it is to be a servant of Christ. Believe me, He can use servants. He can take your desire to serve Him and do such great things with it. But before He can do that, we must learn the lesson that we are merely His servants.

The Apostle goes on to explain to the Corinthians the troubles he and his companions were having as they went about preaching the Word. At one point Paul thought it was all over. He felt like there was no way out and that surely he’d be dead soon. He was in a desperate place, a bind, a pickle, between a rock and a hard place, “but this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead” (1:9). When the chips are down, to whom do we turn? Where do we go when there is no possible human way out? When we have given up on the inside and are despairing even of our lives, to whom do we turn? It is human nature to try to figure out our own solution. We want to somehow be the hero and save the day, but there are some circumstances when there is no possible way out. Years ago in Florida, Hurricane Charlie swept through and devastated

the southwestern portion of that state. Many people were destitute. I’m sure many were despairing. Not all, though, because in situations like this people pull together. Sometimes, even when there is no earthly way, all of a sudden, there is light on the horizon and help is found. In situations like this people pray. “God, help us,” and, “God, we need you; please come here and get us out of this mess.”

Paul attributes the work of God in his life to the prayers of the Corinthians. He is grateful that they helped by praying for him and lifting him up to God. He acknowledges that prayer is time well-spent. Prayer draws us close to the One who has resources that we know nothing about. God can provide when there seems to be no way out.

Your family, your church, your neighbors, your work associates, your fellow students, and the missionaries you know all need your prayers. You can help by praying for them. Let’s not neglect prayer this week. Let’s give up a favorite this or that to find the time to pray. Would you join me in praying for everyone who receives this email? Ask God to give them wisdom and bless them and encourage them. Ask God to shine His light on His Word as they read, so that they can get the maximum out of it. Ask God to use the difficult stuff in their lives so that they can reach others.

I pray that God will bless you today.

Rejoice in Jesus Always,

God’s blessings happen in the good and tough times,

Pastor Steve

**G**ood Day to All of You,  
It is difficult when someone does not believe in you. When someone puts you on the defensive and makes you justify what you are doing, you feel put on the spot at the very least. We all desire for others to love us and believe in us. Sometimes we need this too much, even to the point of feeling despair if a single person shows disapproval with us.

At one time or another we will have to face the fact that someone does not think too highly of us. This is hard if it is a person with whom we have to rub shoulders on a regular basis. We might find ourselves living in dread that we will have to walk under the disapproving gaze of our critic. It takes real skill to work with people whom we feel look down on us. It takes a gracious attitude, and a willingness to live with the incongruence of the situation.

Paul’s second book to the Corinthians is full of explanations of the apostle’s authority, because there had come to the city some “super apostles,” self proclaimed very spiritual men who were throwing mud at Paul’s claim of apostleship. In Chapter 11 we will see these men in more detail, but here in the beginning of the book Paul has to defend his own apostleship and authority to instruct them in Christ. By the way, Paul hated to have to speak like this, but he felt he had to in order to preserve the simplicity of the message of the gospel. These rabble-rousers were diluting the gospel of Jesus.

Paul’s motives were pure. He wanted the glory of God and the expansion of the gospel. He was not interested in the promotion of his own name. Yet he knew that for the sake of the future of the church in Corinth he would have to level the big guns at those who were demeaning his motives. So Paul says that he acted toward them out of “holiness” and “sincerity.” He was not interested in worldly acclaim; he was all about proclaiming the message of Christ in the spirit

of grace and in the power of God.

Some might have been saying that Paul was wishy-washy, but he flat out says that he is confident in Christ. He reminds them that his message was the straightforward message he had always proclaimed in Christ—a message founded on the promises of God, one that deserved a “yes” and “amen.” You see, Paul believed the Corinthian folk were his spiritual kids. He believed in them and loved them and wanted the very best for them. He just hated to see them sink into spiritual pride or immorality or unethical behavior or idolatry or false beliefs. So as a good spiritual father, he really let them have it on the chin. He wanted them to grow up and start acting like mature believers and not spoiled brats.

How about us? Would Paul have to write us the same way he had to write the Corinthians? Would he have to weep over us and correct us from ungodly errors? Would he have to slap us and give us a wake up call so that we didn’t fall into harmful beliefs and practices? Paul wanted to come to them in a loving way, but he was ready to bear the rod if that was what was needed to wake up this struggling body of believers.

Paul gives the church several reasons, right off the bat, to believe in him. He says that God is at work in his life giving him the confidence to stand. He then says that God had anointed him. In other words, he was commissioned by God to be an apostle and to have authority over the churches. Then he makes it clear that he is God’s property. It was God who was working through him in order to exhort the church. Then he affirms that the Holy Spirit is in him, directing him and reminding him of what is to come. All of these proofs are designed to assure the church that he is the man to follow, and that they ought to reconsider the words of those who were putting him down.

Paul makes it clear that the promises of Christ are always positive. All of the promises are true, and they

will stand under the most intense scrutiny. The promises do not vacillate from one minute to the next. The very promise we learned today will be applicable tomorrow and the rest of our lives. In other words, Paul is affirming to them that what he has taught them from the Word stands. He didn't go back and forth and use Scripture first one way and then another; he was decisive about the meaning of the Word and meant what he said when he instructed them.

The application for us is the same. The promises of God, called by the Apostle Peter "precious promises," form the basis of our confidence in Jesus Christ. It is His promises that give us the hope we have in this life and in the life to come. Without the promises we would be left to guess about what God's will is and what He wants for us. And so Paul calls the Spirit a "guarantee" of what is to come. The Spirit internally teaches us truth about the lives we live now and the life that we will all enjoy when we are in heaven and

are transformed into a person who will be altogether perfect.

God's blessings are yes and amen,  
Pastor Steve

#### **Addendum:**

I wonder if the Corinthians were a bit fickle about Paul's apostleship because they did not fully appreciate his background in Judaism and in the Holy Scriptures. As Gentile believers, Judaism and the Bible would not have been a part of their daily life. They would have been treated as a common thing rather than a holy thing. Paul would have to remind them that God had spoken through the prophets and in Jesus and through him.

When other teachers came along promising them deeper things, they were naïve enough not to reject it simply on the basis of Paul's work among them.

maybe you are in one right now and you wonder how you are going to make it work? Maybe you have tried every possible way except moving to Nebraska in order to work it out, and still you haven't really made any headway. Can you shuck corn? You know that your heart's desire and God's will is for you to make things right in the situation but for the life of you there is no way to see the way to go.

Relationships can be messy. They can challenge us way beyond our abilities. From the very beginning of time people have hurt others and the results have been tough. Bickering and fighting and slander and name calling and murder have all happened because people could not get along. This is true today and has been true since the clock began ticking in the human race.

The Apostle Paul says that it is in the arena of human relationships where the devil tries to take advantage of us. If he can get us to hate or condemn or obsess over someone else then he has us where he wants us. At that point we take our eyes off of the Lord and focus on the problem. We let the person rent space in our heads. We think too much about them and let them dominate our thoughts. Instead of letting the Word saturate us we are busy knocking down so and so in our minds. The twist here is that many times we do have legitimate gripes about the person who is on the screen of our minds day and night. We replay what they did to us over and over until we work ourselves up to a frenzy and then we are tempted to play out all sorts of wrong behaviors.

The chances are pretty good that the man Paul is talking about here in this chapter is the same guy from 1 Corinthians 5. Do you recall that it was there where the apostle turned the man over to the devil so that he would learn the lesson that moral depravity should not be tolerated in the church. It looks like the man turned it around and acknowledged his wrongdoing. So here in 2 Corinthians Paul says that the church should forgive him and restore him to fellowship before the devil has an opportunity to take

advantage of the situation. It could have been that some felt like the man hadn't gotten enough punishment and that he deserved to be punished more. Paul says that it is important to forgive so that the focus will not rest on the man but on the forgiveness offered in Jesus.

Paul reaffirms his love for the church by offering his forgiveness too. Even though this situation gave the church a black eye it could be rectified if the man changed his ways. Paul was quick to forgive and restore the man because of his attitude when called on the carpet for what he had done. It would actually honor the Lord if the man started to live in a God-honoring way. Paul felt so close to the Corinthians that what happened in their fellowship affected the way he felt as well. He was right there with them in heart, wanting the best for them and he would applaud them if they would obey his letter.

Is there someone in your life who needs to hear it straight about the way sin has been affecting him? Are you the best person to go to him and lay it on the line? If not you, then who? The devil is a cunning tempter when it comes to breaking relationships. It is always better to try and restore a relationship rather than let it go by the wayside. This is especially true if the friendship is in the Lord and the other person goes to the same fellowship as you. Go to him and try to work it out.

If the person changes, comfort him.

If the person changes, the devil will be stumped.

If the person changes, you will have won a brother.

If the person changes, you will give the church a boost.

If the person changes, we will all see Christ's forgiveness in action.

God's blessings rain down on God-honoring relationships,

Pastor Steve



## **"Satan's Ploy"**

August 28 - 2 Corinthians 1: 23-2:11

In the old days, before the wonders of modern technology, the Titleist golf ball was wound on the inside with rubber bands. My grandpa would allow me to tear into one of those spheres and pull apart all of the rubber on the inside until I reached the small hard core. It was quite an undertaking. I'd pull those pieces of rubber as they clung to the ball and, bit by bit, I'd get to the center. When I was done I had a heap of rubber like a mushy rubber band salad.

Relationships can sometimes be like that mound of rubber. If someone were to ask you to take that mess and create a viable golf ball with what you had left you would probably look cross-eyed at them. Yet many of our relationships in and outside of the church are just like that. They have become so messy and

complicated that it doesn't seem like there is any hope for restoration. Like putting a square peg through a round hole, you end up feeling frustrated because of the way things have gotten tangled up.

On top of all that, what really adds insult to injury is when a person glosses over the problems in a relationship and tries to ignore their affect on the situation. It's like trying to ignore a 600 lb. pink elephant on the living room floor. It just won't go away. You can say it isn't there but the reality is that everyone in the room is keenly aware of its presence. No, the solution will usually have to fit the problem, and if the problem is immense then the solution will require blood, sweat, and tears too.

Have you ever been in a tough relationship or

**“Much Deeper Than Rules”**

August 29 - 2 Corinthians 2:12 - 3:6

**T** rue Brothers and Sisters,  
Tell me a little about your best relationship. Why would you consider that relationship to be the best? What is it about the way you interact with the other person that excites you? Why is it that of all your relationships and interactions with people, you feel most connected to the person now in your mind? Think for a minute. Can you put your finger on the answer to that question?

All of us have relationships based on rules. Every month you have to meet at such and such a place and follow the rules of the particular organization you are involved in. The group may serve a common purpose, so you sense a camaraderie with the people, but the main focus is on keeping and practicing the rules of operation in the group so that you can proceed in the same direction together. Members of the group tend to develop relationships around their common interest in the cause their group promotes.

For example, I was a member of a group called TIP. TIP members are ordinary citizens who come to the aid of people in crisis. TIP means Trauma Intervention Programs. A TIP member goes through a rigorous training and then is required to come to a monthly meeting for ongoing training. TIP has a book about three inches thick with rules and regulations that guide the organization. This is very important because TIP is available in cities all over and the board of directors wants it to be uniform no matter where you go. Without rules, the group would be disorganized and have trouble staying afloat.

On the other hand, I have found that if we only focus on the rules and do not work on relationships with other members of the group it soon takes all the positive motivation out of it. It's like a bubble bursts. But when we interacted with one another in the meetings and on calls, or even in our private social lives, we developed a closeness that was very meaningful.

We were not designed to merely live by rules. God designed us for relationship and this includes relationship with Him, too. When you focus on rules exclusively it will suck the life right out of a group.

There are people who tend to annoy others because they are “by the book.” They also tend to nit-pick. If someone is even a hair off kilter when it comes to expressing a rule or acting on a rule, the nitpicker will stand up and challenge the others. Their focus is on rule keeping. On the other hand, when relationships are close, people can laugh and kid each other when it comes to breaking certain rules. In that kind of environment you are not always on your guard and defensive. You can let your defenses down because you know the others believe in you. If you were to make a mistake, they would handle it in a way so that you were not humiliated.

The religious leaders of the New Testament era were very much about keeping rules. Jesus said of them that they would strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. He meant they so focused on the smallest of rules that they took their eyes off of the bigger picture. They would, for example, obsess about the tithe they were required to pay on their income and produce, but then would forget about things like mercy and love and the judgment of God. They loved rules because they wanted to be right. They took more pleasure in doing things right than they did in developing a strong relationship with God.

We can get so wrapped up in rule-keeping that we forget that God desires a relationship with us. Relationships built on keeping rules may appear to be working on the outside, but on the inside people are often fed up. They feel like they can never do enough to maintain the happiness of the others. For example, God gave the Ten Commandments as a guide to holy living. But in essence it was like a mirror to show us

that we could not keep all of the rules. It shows us that we would need God's love and mercy if we wanted to really be connected to Him.

That's why when Jesus covered the commandments in His Sermon on the Mount, he interpreted the Law so that it related to the way we thought on the inside. Jesus was bringing people to the point where they would acknowledge that they needed Him. If they could keep the rules without His help, then He wouldn't have had to come to save them. But because man was lost, they had to relate to Him on the basis of grace and lordship or leadership. As soon as a person turns to the Lord he finds a rescuer and a leader who will also be a best friend. Does this negate the rules? By no means. The rules continually remind us that we need the Lord in our lives. The rules were not meant to give life, but to lead us to the One who gives life.

So when Paul talks to the Corinthians he focuses on relationships rather than rules. He emphasizes the importance of what is going on in the heart. He even feels like he has these people in his heart. They are his delight and he wants them to know that. Paul is saying that the relationships they have developed are good

evidence that God is at work in their ministry. The Corinthians themselves become the letter of recommendation, rather than approval coming from some other source. Why? Because they are, according to Paul, in each other's hearts.

Paul goes on to stress that the new covenant gives life because it brings us to God through Christ. It is about the work of the Holy Spirit who works on the inside and gives us true spiritual life. The letter (I assume Paul has in mind here “of the law”) kills because it does nothing for relationship. It will either frustrate us to death or cause us to cry out for God's mercy, where we can find some relief from the tyranny of keeping the letter of the law.

If you are a Robert's Rules of Order kind of person, that is fine and good as long as you do not try to create relationships based on your knowledge of the proper way to make things run. Otherwise, no one will want to be around you after a while.

God's blessings of life come through the Spirit,  
Pastor Steve

**“The Work Of The Holy Spirit”**

August 30 - 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

**S** omeone recently commented that it is tough for her to love the unlovely. She is struggling with the command to have love, because she has to deal with a person or two who is rude, arrogant and unkind. Can anyone else identify with this?

I think that most of us can because naturally we love those who love us. We feel like we're on top of the world when we have exchanged loving words and feelings with someone. But try to love the unlovely, and you can quickly become discouraged.

I'll never forget a Christian friend of ours who

moved into our old condo when we moved up north. She was adamant that she was going to love our grumpy old neighbor lady until she found the Lord. We were a bit skeptical. We had been this woman's neighbors for four years, and so the thought of our friend doing the impossible was—well, hard to believe.

It didn't take too long before the war began. Needless to say, they didn't get along very well. We can have all kinds of good intentions but the reality oftentimes doesn't fit our wants. Before long, our

friend couldn't stand this person she was going to "kill with kindness." She wanted to "kill" her all right, but it wasn't necessarily with kindness.

You see, our love does go a long way, but it does not necessarily guarantee that the people we love will change. Sometimes it makes them even more resistant. Paul says that God has to remove the spiritual blinders from them before they will be able to see God's truth and light. It is like a veil that covers their eyes and prohibits them from beholding the good things of God. Our friend thought that because she could so easily see spiritual things, she would be able to transfer them to another person. It didn't work.

Paul gives us more insight into the work of the Holy Spirit in this section of our reading today. And that is exactly what we need. We need to be aware of the Spirit's work in our lives so that we can cooperate with Him, be led by Him, and be filled with Him. "The Lord is the Spirit." It is important to identify that the Holy Spirit is God. He is not the Father or the Son but is Himself God. Again, "The Lord is the Spirit." It doesn't get much more clear than that.

God is at work in your life. He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He has made Himself known as such. We cannot change that or add to that. He is who He is and that is that. Some people would like to separate the Spirit from the other members of the Tri-Unity of God, but you simply cannot do that. The Holy Spirit comes into our lives, making Jesus and the Father clear to us so that we can know God and enjoy Him.

In this portion of Scripture we learn that the Spirit is the great liberator of our lives. He is the one who wooed us to Jesus. According to Jesus, the Spirit convicted us of sin so that we would see our need for a Forgiver to make things right with God the Father. The Spirit removed the blindfold from our eyes and allowed us to see the love of God in Jesus. Once the blinders were off we could see spiritual things. We saw everything in a whole new light.

Jesus said in John 3 that you could not see the kingdom of God unless you had been born again. The "see" there means to understand or perceive. What He's saying is that once you come to Him or turn to Him and are born from above, you will begin to see spiritual things for the first time. When you read your Bible, things that once were very cloudy will be as

bright as the noonday sun.

The Spirit is the One who removed this dark covering from your eyes. He enabled you to see the things that Paul says were once hidden but now have come to light. These are things that God has made known, things that once were mysterious, but now have been revealed to God's prophets and apostles. They've been passed on to us so that we could understand them too. The Holy Spirit has given you your spiritual freedom. You were once a subject of the kingdom of darkness, but he has transferred you to the kingdom of His beloved Son. Think back to when you first came to Jesus. Can you identify some ways the Spirit was working in you at that time? Was he urging you to accept Jesus at an evangelistic event? Or, when a friend was telling you about Him, was the Spirit whispering to you about your need of Him? Did you go forward at some crusade because you felt compelled to give your life to Christ? It was the work of the Holy Spirit that brought you into the wide-open pastures of spiritual freedom.

Not only does the Spirit liberate us, but He also works in us to conform us into Christ's image. We saw this in Romans 8, remember? He does it by removing the veil that kept us in the spiritual dark. When that's gone, we are confronted with the glory of the Lord, which reflects on us and changes us. We don't always feel this but it is truly what is happening in our hearts. God is doing a work in us by the Spirit.

When Jesus was in the process of preparing His apostles for His departure he told them that He would not leave them as orphans but would come to them in the Person of the Spirit and be with them always. He said it was necessary for Him to go because if He didn't then the Spirit would not come. It was important that the Spirit, who is omni-present (everywhere present all of the time with no constraints of space and time), would come and be with every member of the church everywhere in the world. Jesus, as long as He was in His pre-resurrection body, would be localized. It was better for Him to send the Holy Spirit, who would be with all of us everywhere always. Does that make sense?

Put your faith in these verses about the Holy Spirit.

Don't allow your own weaknesses to distract you

from what God wants to do in you.

Rely on the Spirit.

Ask God to fill you with the Spirit today in an extraordinary way.

Rejoice in Jesus Always.

God's blessings are distributed by the Spirit,  
Pastor Steve



## "Fixed Eyes"

August 31 - 2 Corinthians 4: 1-18

**M**y Dear Friends,

If a nearsighted man takes off his glasses, the people and objects around him will look smudged and indistinct. Everything will be out of focus. He can squint and strain his eyes, but the result will probably only be frustration.

Some people have trouble mentally focusing on any project. They are distracted very easily and pulled away from what they are doing by the smallest of intrusions. The thing they are working on and trying to concentrate on is not so all-compelling that they cannot be interrupted by something else. Because of this, their life is usually fragmented and unorganized.

Is your life focused? Do you know why you are doing the things you do? Is there purpose in your steps? Do you get up in the morning with renewed energy and meet the day with the expectation that you will be one step closer to your dream? If not, why? Have urgent things crowded out the important things? Or have you forgotten what is important enough to you to give yourself wholeheartedly to them?

Years ago I read an article on the subject of focus that hit me between the eyes. After I read it I realized just how unfocused I was. I thought I was able to really concentrate on the important things, but the truth was that I, like so many others, was allowing myself to drift with the current cultural thought patterns or to be taken in by the latest fads. The article was about golf legend Jack Nicklaus.

Nicklaus was able to focus so intensely that when

he bowed over a putt he became oblivious to anything else around him. It was just him and the putt. So when he went to stroke the ball he knew exactly which way he would hit it and how hard he should hit it. As he stood over the ball he was so into what he was doing that the crowd and his score and the weather and the money on the line were all in the distance compared with the attempt he had at hand. He was a focused man.

Why is it so hard for us to focus? I think it is tough because life is full of motivational things that do not last or maintain our interest. They cannot sustain our desires long enough to last very long. Nicklaus has a single-minded focus on winning golf tournaments. Whether you are talking about an athlete or a politician or an engineer or a musician or a contractor, it is those who have a strong internal drive to be the best at what they do who get the job done efficiently. They are not distracted by outside forces; they are so intent on doing what they have put their hand to that no one or no thing will ever get in their way.

Paul was focused and single-minded. He considered himself a servant of Christ. He did all that he did so that the message of the Gospel could be advanced. His motivation was Christ and His glory. He brought Jesus to others so that they could experience Him like he had. His faith was for everyone and he was committed to giving it to all.

Paul's integrity was being questioned in Corinth. That is why he has to defend his motives for serving

the Lord. In the later chapters of 2 Corinthians he will introduce the false apostles who were dragging his name through the mud. As he defends himself he makes it clear to the church that it was only through the Lord's power that he was able to endure the kind of difficulties that he and the other apostles were experiencing. Paul describes the Christian life as a jar of clay filled with God. God fills and inhabits us so that we can experience His transforming power in our lives.

Paul shares with them the secret of his success despite all the difficulties of his life in Christ. He says that he does not fix his eyes on the temporary things but on the eternal things. He knew that no matter what he went through here it would never compare with what was to come. He always had his eyes on the prize. He could put up with a lot of heartache now if it would turn into eternal fruit later. He was focused on spiritual ministry and not on things like prestige or power or money or any other weak motivation for doing ministry.

Let's list a few of the "eternal things" that it would be good for us to center on:

The spread of the gospel: it will effect salvation in those who embrace it.

Growing in God's love: spiritual fruit will be seen in love.

Healthy church life: the honor and advancement of the church was a priority for Jesus and it ought to be the same for us.

Forgiveness: grudges and resentments will only

lead to distractions. Forgiveness will promote a godly and free life.

Prayer: prayers are seen in Revelation as going up like incense before God.

People: We must spread God's love to people all over the world. Making people our priority will not be a distraction as long as we do not make pleasing them our aim. Our aim should be to love people and bring Christ's love into their life.

Heaven itself: looking forward to the ultimate destination should make us aware of our attitudes now. We can put up with tough stuff now if heaven is in our thinking.

Recently I sat and held the hand of an elderly friend. She said many times that she was happy I had come because she was hoping that I'd be by. She knew that her time to die was near. Truthfully, I had been trying to avoid the issue because of my heart for her. Anyway, as I sat and held her hand we talked about heaven and spending time again in the future and her family and how the world was becoming more and more unfriendly to believers. I said goodbye. Her journey is almost over and I will follow her someday. By the way, one of the final things she needed to do before she could go in good conscience was tell her sister about Jesus. She had been able to do that earlier that day.

Goodbye, friend. I'll see you again in much better health.

God's blessings come when we focus on eternity,  
Pastor Steve



## "What Happens Next?"

September 1 - 2 Corinthians 5: 1-10

I will never forget the Christmas when I discovered one of my presents hidden in my parents' closet. Why I was in the closet I cannot remember but the important thing is that I got to test drive a remote-controlled army tank long before Santa had a chance to come down my chimney. I snuck back into the closet as often as I could to enjoy what I hadn't yet received. Somehow my mom found out I was up to something and called me on it. I think they were going to take my treasure back to the store so that a less naughty boy might find it under his tree, but in the end, unable to resist my pleas, they kept it and on Christmas gave me what I had already had a taste of beforehand. You know, because there were a couple of weeks when it was re-hidden and I didn't know where it had been stashed, once I got it on Christmas day there was a new excitement about being able to enjoy it all over again.

When you've had a taste of something you long to be able to enjoy it in its fullest as soon as possible. I guess that my story would be more interesting if the tank had inspired me to command a tank in a war. It didn't, but we could imagine it happening to someone else. Could you imagine an army tank commander saying that he was motivated to serve because of a special gift he had discovered early before Christmas when he was a kid? That idea is conceivable.

Well, in this life there are a number of experiences that give us a taste of what life after this world will be like. Sometimes we are aware of these events and at other times we are oblivious of them. For example, some people can see a beautiful sunset or peer into the Grand Canyon or experience a lightning storm and be drawn to God in a way that makes them long to be with Him and enjoy all that He has to show. Others see these same sights and simply take them for granted.

In Ecclesiastes there is a passage that says God

has put eternity in our hearts. I think that means every person. There is a longing in all of us to know and experience God's heaven, where eternity is a reality. Those who aren't thinking about God or heaven or eternity still spend their lives seeking to experience ultimate happiness, or order, or beauty, or fulfillment. We all seek to know what heaven must be like.

Paul takes this a lot further. He says that the Holy Spirit is our guarantee of what is to come. He is the down payment, the deposit on a treasure yet to come. What does this mean? Remember back in Romans 8 where Paul says that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God? The Spirit is at work in our life. He draws us to Jesus and makes the life of Jesus real to us. He is like a matchmaker. He introduces us to Jesus and makes Jesus real to us. This is the introduction to a love we will one day experience in heaven, but which we could not even fathom now.

I have a friend who is admittedly weird. She thinks differently than the average person. She can talk about her death and in the same breath about what she is going to buy at the market. Death to her is not the end but the beginning. I have heard others comment that they wish they could adopt her view on life and death. For many people, it's taboo to even talk about their own death. My friend revels in the thought. She is even looking forward to it. We have been in a small group together and there was another member of the group who had cancer. It was so good for this person to be in the group because of the open way we talked about dying. It was not a taboo subject around us. We even wrote our own funeral services. Sound weird? Actually, I think it is very healthy. Why ignore the inevitable? Isn't it going to happen? Of course it is.

Paul makes it clear that once your old tent is folded up you will have a new tent. This new tent will be fit for heaven, the place where a holy, holy, holy

God lives. He says that the longing for this new home causes groans down here. Why wouldn't we want to be where goodness and love reign 24/7? Actually 24/7 will not be an accurate description then; there will be no more time restraints. No more limitations. Only completeness in the presence of God, our Maker.

In the meantime, Paul makes it clear that it is his ambition to please God. He wants to live for God and please him while he's in this body or the new one. But it wouldn't take him long to make a decision if he had a choice, because he had physical limitations that made it difficult to serve God on earth. Who doesn't? Paul should be an encouragement to us to keep on doing the right thing even if we do not feel like it. Pretty soon here Paul will talk about his thorn in the flesh, which was God's reminder to him that grace was sufficient and that the power to serve came from God and not from him.

From time to time I'll talk to people who just don't have any more energy for ministry. They think their tank is empty. They are contemplating rearranging their schedules to do other things. Now, I'm all for a balanced schedule, but the bottom line is that we need the power of God to do the will of God. We cannot do it all alone. But it's not going to be easy. So many people make the mistake of thinking that if it's hard, it must not be God's will. Don't say that to Paul. His ministry wasn't easy. In a few chapters he will chronicle some of the struggles he had—struggles that he bore with gladness for others.

Along these lines you might want to take a look at Philippians 3 and 4 to get a feel for the way Paul looked at serving and pleasing the Lord.

God's blessings make heaven a reality,  
Pastor Steve

He is reaching out to them from his heart, and he wants nothing more than their wholehearted acceptance of him.

Have you ever wanted something so much that you may have ended up looking a bit silly when you tried to get your point across? Well, Paul wanted nothing more than to get his point across to the church. He would do anything to get into their hearts and win them for the sake of his gospel, the gospel of the Lord Jesus. He was naturally afraid that someone who came in with a contrary point of view might dissuade them from holding firm to the message of the gospel.

Because of these factors Paul is writing with emotion. He thinks he may even be coming across as a kind of crazy guy. Would the church understand him and be able to make the needed adjustments, or would he have to make another visit in order to set the record straight? And so he states: "If we are out of our mind is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love compels us..." (5: 13, 14). In other words, no matter how we look, no matter how we are coming across, no matter what

others think about us, and no matter even what you think, we are doing this because we love God and we love you. Love drives us to do what we do.

Another very important aspect of Paul's writing to the Corinthians is his emphasis on the work of Christ. He continually goes back to what the Lord Jesus has done for us. He wants them to focus on Jesus, and not on false teachers and teachings. He constantly comes back to the cross of Christ, through which we have been reconciled to God. I believe the pinnacle of this is recorded in 5:21, "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." Now that is an awesome promise and a truth that ought to make us yell with thanksgiving to God.

Let's accept Christ's work of love on the cross for us today. It is only His righteousness that will make a way to God. Fortunately for us, we have received Christ's righteousness based on His works. All praise be to Him!

God's blessings can make us very emotional,  
Pastor Steve



Day 245

## "Out Of My Mind"

September 2 - 2 Corinthians 5:11- 6:2

**D**ear Friends,  
It is perfectly fine to be so into Jesus that nothing else even compares. I know a little something about what it's like to be completely focused on just one thing. I'll tell you what, when I fell—and I mean fell—in love with Babette the summer before my ninth grade year, I learned what it meant to have a one-track mind. It was Babette for breakfast and Babette for lunch and Babette for dinner, and in the in-between times it was more Babette. I could not think about anything else. When I was with her I regretted having to go and when I was not with her I couldn't wait to be with her. I was smitten in love, I thought.

Of course, that relationship ran its course. A relationship with God through Jesus, on the other hand,

is for life. It is the kind of relationship that just keeps getting better over the years; like a good marriage, our connection can keep growing closer. Are you beginning to sound like a broken record to your friends and family because every time you're around, the Lord comes up or the cross or the gospel or what you think God is doing currently in your life? Jesus never gets old!

Paul was totally a Jesus person. He loved the Lord with all of his heart and wanted nothing more than to serve Him by serving the church. And so this letter to the Corinthians takes on a very personal tone. Paul wants to reassure them that he is for them all the way, for Jesus' sake. He wants them to believe that he is for real and that he has their best interest in mind. This is obviously making the apostle very emotional.



Day 246

## "Suck It Up!"

September 3 - 2 Corinthians 6:3 - 7:1

**I**f you have great purpose, then you will have great resolve to accomplish that purpose. Whether you are an athlete or a businessman or a parent or a public official, you will put up with almost anything if you love and believe in what you are doing.

If you are a parent, then you know just how challenging parenthood can be. Despite the stress they cause, you love your kids dearly and do not want to do something to injure them. I can remember how difficult it was for me when I was holding a crying baby, with no clue what to do except continue to hold him and be patient. I felt like I wanted to trade him back in,

honestly. But, of course, I put up with the frustration and fought back thoughts of gloom and doom.

I would admit that my greatest fault with my young children was that I yelled way too much. There were times in my home when it sounded like a drill sergeant was present. If my kids were getting into mischief or if they were just bugging me in some way, I'd raise my voice and push them until they did what I wanted them to do.

I recall one time right after we had moved that I got extremely impatient with the kids and blew my top. I had stacked quite a few boxes in the garage

against the walls with the intention of getting to them later. The kids, wanting to roller skate, moved the boxes to the center so that they could circle around them. When I came out the back door and saw what they were doing I lost it. "What do you guys think you are doing? I didn't want those boxes moved."

I can still see my little daughter cowering around the other side of the house and coming into the living room where I was brooding. She said she was sorry in a very sheepish tone. At that point I realized that I had been unreasonable with them. They were just arranging things so that they could have some fun; what was so wrong with that? I actually ended up apologizing to her and the others and I encouraged them to go out and enjoy their time skating.

When we love someone we ought to put up with much inconvenience for their sake. Love drives us to do everything in our power to help and protect and further the wellbeing of the other. In Jesus' sermon on the Mount of Olives, not long before his arrest and crucifixion, he said, "the love of many will grow cold." It's no wonder then that so many people are not kind or considerate of others. They do not love, and are therefore not motivated to put up with what others would consider no big deal.

Paul tells the Corinthians that he has endured much hardship for the sake of the gospel, and I think he is inferring that he's suffered for them as well. It has been his great love for the redeemed ones that drives him to endure. For Paul, his brothers and sisters in Christ were his family. He saw the Corinthians this way as well; they were in his heart, as he has said. Therefore, he is willing to put up with all kinds

of inconveniences in order to remain true to the Lord and not bring any disrepute on the gospel.

Take the time to go back over the list Paul gives of all the things he dealt with. Maybe being misunderstood would be the worst, I don't know. It probably would depend on the kind of personality you had. Paul took his ministry very personally and he carried the burdens of the churches in his pocket. He did not separate himself from the work he was doing; his work was who he was. Why? Because it was all so centered around Jesus. What he did was for the Lord.

This section of Scripture begs at least two questions:

First, what is it that you have a passion for? What do you love?

Second, what are you willing to endure for the sake of what you love?

Having answered those questions, you can begin to take steps in the direction of making a difference right where you are. A close friend of mine has a vision for change in society. He knows that he is fighting an uphill battle to make these changes. Changes in policy, especially in the area in which he works, are very few and far between. So should he give up his dream because others do not see his vision or should he fight on even though it feels like he is fighting a losing battle much of the time?

My dear friend, what do you love and how much grief are you willing to endure for making a difference? Paul knows your heartache. He also knows what it feels like to be resisted. Keep fighting the good fight!

God's blessings take time,  
Pastor Steve



## "Sorry!"

September 4 - 2 Corinthians 7: 2-16

**R**egret is a part of our life experience. We have all done things that we have trouble dealing with. Even if we have sought forgiveness, there is still that residue of bad feelings associated with our actions. I have known some very fine people who have learned to mask their guilty feelings so well that you would think they didn't have a care in the world; in actuality they struggle on a daily basis with the consequences of their awful choices.

I once met up with a really rough character. He was greasy and dirty and scraggly and unkempt. He was tough. He had been a biker for decades, living the hard life on a Harley. He was definitely a Romans Chapter 1 sort of fellow. I found him very interesting to chat with, and we talked about all kinds of stuff. I wanted to share with him the difference Jesus had made in my life. Soon enough, the conversation turned to our views on God.

He told me that he had done a lot of very bad stuff in his lifetime. You could tell that he was beginning to bare his soul a bit. He admitted that many things he had done were not right, but he said that there was only one act that haunted him. Of all the crimes, there was only one thing that made it hard for him to live with himself. I thought that must be true of most people; that they could live with some sins and not with others. The conscience is hard to figure out. One man's nagging conscience is another's playground. Why was it that only one thing bothered this guy?

How about you? Is there one thing that nags at you like there is no tomorrow? Is there one act of insanity, one night when you threw caution to the wind and for the moment didn't care what the consequences were, and now that night still lives with you in a bitter sort of way? Or, maybe it's a season in your life that you look back on and wince at the thought of. "That wasn't me!" you think. You still cannot believe

that the person you see in your head had any resemblance to you. But the scene plays over and over like a rerun of a bad movie, and each time you are reminded of your involvement in something that now makes you sick.

My biker friend had killed a dog with his bare hands. He squeezed the life right out of a living thing. That scenario stayed with him every day. As he related to me his feelings of sorrowful guilt, it was as if it had happened the day before, even though it had been several years earlier. He had no clue how to deal with it. There was something about the cruelty of it that bothered him. I know it bothered me to hear him talk about it. I felt his pain and also the brutality of what he had done.

The Corinthian church was a group of newer believers who had been living in scandal. Remember all of the difficult things Paul had to deal with in his first letter to them? They were divisive and immoral and unethical and off-the-mark biblically. He had to write them a very difficult letter in order to get them to shape up. Fortunately, the letter had a big impact on them, and did inspire love for the apostle. When Paul's ministry companion, Titus, brought back word of the church's repentance, Paul was relieved.

He was happy that they had not made a half-hearted attempt to make amends, but were ready to change their way of living. Their sorrow over the things they were doing motivated them to become more Christ-like. Then, they could see God taking their wrongdoing and turning it around to make them more ardent followers of Jesus. Paul calls this "godly sorrow."

On the other hand, when a person has done something he regrets and tries to make up for it to merely appease his own conscience, the false "repentance" only leads to death. Death here means futility or the inability to find meaning in the thing that you

have done. People in this position get so wrapped up in their own inward battles that they are unable to find peace with themselves in the light of their actions.

Godly sorrow catapults a person into a life change that produces all kinds of good fruit. Of course that doesn't justify the sin, but it does make the best possible use out of it. It gives purpose to something that only seemed to be producing spiritual, emotional, and social death.

Have you done wrong? Is your conscience bothering you today? Let the wrong drive you to Jesus first of all. Then, let it drive you to resolutely give yourself to the work of the Lord to such a degree that you can leave behind the terrors of the past. The dog killer needed Jesus' forgiveness and a purpose for his life. Because he had neither, his conscience was pinning him down. And so I talked with him about the cross. There is no other place to put away sin but at the cross. There a person can deposit his sin, and get up

free from the guilt and weight of it all. Then he can go and serve the Lord, finding meaning for the things that once tagged along in his mind and bothered him to no end.

True sorrow brings change, life change that ends in the glory of God. Worldly sorrow, the kind of sorrow that makes people feel bad because they got caught, only leads to death and the condemnation of the sinner. Fortunately, the Corinthians turned back to the Lord and the heart of the apostle. This made Paul so thrilled you can read in his words shouts of joy.

God's blessings come after true repentance,  
Pastor Steve

P.S. The gospels record that Judas repented after having betrayed the Lord. In your opinion, what kind of repentance did Judas demonstrate? He did throw the silver back, but think about where his next steps led. Was this godly sorrow or worldly sorrow?



## "The Mark of Every Believer and the Cost of Discipleship"

September 5-6 - 2 Corinthians 8: 1-15 and 8:16 - 9:5

**D**ear Friend of Jesus,  
What gives? Does love give? Love longs to give. Love grows deeper and stronger the more it is exercised. Love works out not with a clenched fist but with an open hand.

Think for a moment of the feeding of the 5,000 and the 4,000. Jesus gave, and the gift multiplied. One act of compassion spread to everyone and the love of Jesus was made known to a multitude. The gospel writers say that the numbers listed only represented the men, not the women and children, so there were actually thousands more fed.

Can you think of one Bible verse that talks about Jesus taking? It seems to me that His entire life was about giving. Remember at the end of Romans 11,

Paul says that no man has given to God so much that God has become his debtor. God is no man's debtor, because all things are from God and to God and for God. He is the source of all things and in Him all things exist.

I sometimes wonder about the giving nature of God. God could be anything He wanted, but He is by nature loving. He gives even when He knows that the object of His generosity will reject Him. How much has God given to us that we simply take for granted? Think of the oxygen in our atmosphere. Isn't this place a gift from God? There is no other known planet in our universe that could sustain life the way we know it on Earth. God has given us so much.

God's greatest gift to us was His one and only

Son, Jesus, who gave us His life so that we might have the kind of life that lasts forever. Romans 5 told us that He demonstrated that gift when we were still in our sins, and 2 Corinthians 5 told us that God took the initiative to reconcile us to Himself. God gives.

We can be thankful, we can walk in Jesus' steps (see 1 John 2:6), and we too can be givers. Giving is a good gauge of Christian character and growth. Since you committed your life to Jesus, have you become a more giving person? Do you think of ways to give to others more now than before you were a Christian, and do you follow through and give of yourself in ways that sometimes inconvenience you?

Paul spends several passages talking to the Corinthians about giving. They had made a promise to give earlier, and Paul desires to see them follow through. He uses the giving nature of God in Jesus to remind them of the responsibility they have to meet the needs of others in the church who were needier. Paul was looking for equilibrium. Those who had more should help those who had little, so that the wealth would be distributed evenly.

John talks about this same subject in his first little letter. He says that as Christ laid down his life for us, we ought to lay our lives down for one another. This can be applied in many ways, but he specifically talks about meeting the needs of those who are destitute

if it is in your power to help. If you give, then you are meeting someone else's needs and fulfilling the law of love.

How do you do when it comes to giving? Would your friends say that you are generous? What if all Christians were just like you when it came to giving; what kind of church would it be? Do you hold too tightly to your money, or are you a giver?

Let's not forget to use discretion in our giving. There are times when we should not give because it would not be the best thing for the person who is presenting a need. Maybe that person needs to take some initiative and work harder rather than rely on other hard workers for support. Maybe what the seeker needs most is your time, so that you can teach him what he can do to get back on his feet.

For Paul, the Corinthian's fulfillment of their pledge will secure the good news he has heard of their support of his ministry. It will also move them from a selfish point of view to a "ministry to others" place. That is the kind of movement that pleased the apostle, because of its effect on the church. Paul was most concerned about them becoming more and more Christ-like. Their giving simply solidified that direction.

God's blessings inspire us to give,  
Pastor Steve



## "Cheerful Giver"

September 7 - 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

**P**aul's attitude in ministry can be summed up by the word "giving." He gave of himself so that others could be saved or if they were already saved, grow in their faith in Christ. Also, he was often busy delivering money (as he is here) so that he could bring relief to the poor saints

Paul was like his Lord. Jesus was a giver and Paul

modeled his life after Him. Think of the countless hours Jesus spent with His disciples. Consider all of the people who he reached out to and healed of some malady. The gospels are replete with accounts of the Lord's gracious attitude of giving to others.

I have known many people with a Christ-like attitude of giving. They are inspiring. You can count on

them to get the job done when someone is in need. They don't dilly-dally, they get right to work and do a good job meeting the needs of others.

Paul emphasizes that the attitude God loves is that of a "cheerful giver." You can give and give and give, but if you are giving for some inferior reason then you will fall short of the kind of "spirit of giving" that God wants to see in His children. So give, that's good, but do it with a smile on your face and with joy in your heart.

Give joyfully because you have the opportunity to give as Jesus gave. Don't begrudge the opportunity to reach out and bless someone else. Don't give it a second thought or worry about the cost. This is what Jesus meant when He said about giving not to let your right hand know what your left hand is doing. Don't

make a spectacle of your giving, just give.

If cheerful giving is a barometer of your spiritual progress so far, how are you doing? When was the last time you gave all that was left in your wallet because the need outweighed your need to have cash on hand? Have you been ready to give or does it take you quite a bit of persuasion before you relinquish your cash?

Paul was excited about the way the Corinthians (Gentiles) wanted to give to the poorer brethren in Jerusalem (Jews). This would demonstrate Christ's love and be an indication that the wall between the two races had truly been decimated.

God's blessings come to cheerful givers,  
Pastor Steve



## "All Your Mind"

September 8 - 2 Corinthians 10: 1-18

**H**ow many thoughts can you have at one time? I know that sometimes it feels like 10,000, but the answer is one. We can only think one thought at a time. While you read that last sentence it was impossible for you to think about your duties or that party coming up or that new car you're looking forward to buying. We all think one thought at a time.

I'm not saying that we all think the same way. That is far from the truth. Some people think in a very methodical way. The thoughts come slowly and at a very even pace. These folks are not usually rattled very easily, because they are able to process one thought and then another without having a train of thought that take them down dark alleys.

Other folks think in more of a picture form. They are more imaginative. They see scenes and respond to them. Sometimes the scenes flash in rapid succession and at other times they are fixed images. People

who think like this are usually creative and have some talent in the arts.

There are those whose thoughts come in such rapid-fire movement that they feel like their mind is out of control. This is especially tough when they have a disturbing thought and it is followed by another and another and so on. Finally, they get worn out; they feel like their thoughts are controlling them and that they really have no say in the matter. This person is susceptible to feeling alienated from others because the thoughts they have are sometimes disturbing. Interestingly enough, the person who thinks this way is usually very bright, with the ability to think very logically and brainstorm problems at lightning speed. The problem is that their thoughts often frighten them.

Of course, all of us have elements of these traits. It is very hard to pinpoint a single way that a person thinks. Regardless of the way you think, you can still

only have one thought at a time. Therefore, the key to developing our thinking ability is to learn to deal with thoughts one by one.

Thoughts are fascinating, aren't they? In your mind right now you can go to London and look up at Big Ben. I've never physically been there, but even as I wrote that last line I was there looking up at a place I have only seen in books and on TV. Our minds are phenomenal in their ability to process great amounts of information and select what we want on the stage of our minds right now. Our minds are like a great catalog system storing all of the experiences of our lives.

Our minds are impressionable. What our eyes take in has an impact on our thinking. Jesus said, "The eye is the lamp of the body; if your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light, But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness," (Matthew 6:22,23).

What we hear has an impact on our thinking. We should never underestimate the power of music's impact on people, especially the young people of our generation. Our minds are very complicated and will often come up with something that is "off the wall." Have you ever been walking along, minding your own business and boom, in comes a thought and you say to yourself, "Where did that come from?"

If you have a history of seeing and hearing a bunch of evil stuff, guess what is usually at center stage in your mind? You don't have to guess, do you? Most of us know all too well how difficult it is to X-out the thoughts that dominate our thinking. Have you ever been to a movie and later wished you had never seen it? The thoughts and images of that movie are still lingering around the corners of your brain. They want in and they like to control you and upset you. They are persistent and mean and they make us wish that we had never bought that tub of popcorn and sat through it. But we did, and now we need help to deal with the thoughts that hinder. Paul addresses this in our reading today.

Let's quote the same passage from the Message paraphrase: "The tools of our trade aren't for marketing or manipulation, but they are for demolishing that entire massively corrupt culture. We use our powerful God-tools for smashing warped philosophies, tearing

down barriers erected against the truth of God, fitting every loose thought and emotion and impulse into the structure of life shaped by Christ. Our tools are ready at hand for clearing the ground of every obstruction, and building lives of obedience into maturity," (2 Corinthians 10: 4-6). The NIV says "we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." "The tools" God gives us are meant to bomb away that stuff that wants center stage. It is God's Word, God's Truth that captures and destroys those mind-warping thoughts. Christ is in the business of renewing our minds, of washing away all of the old dead thoughts and giving us a mind that thinks God's thoughts after Him.

I saw the power of this many years ago when I began to take God at His Word. If He says I'm forgiven, I'm forgiven; if He says I'm a new creation, I am a new creation; if He says I am His workmanship, I am His workmanship; if He says He will work all things together for good in my life, all things will work together for good; if He says I can trust Him then I can trust Him. You get the picture. I started to believe that instead of all of the thoughts that accuse and point the finger at me.

You see, our minds are not what they were originally created to be. Our minds have become depraved, along with the rest of us. It's kind of like our minds are the stick shift and our heart is the transmission. We get thoughts and they put our hearts into gear and we obey the direction they would take us. It used to be that you were in control of the shifter, but now Christ is in the driver's seat and He is moving you in a different direction.

Making Jesus the Lord of your life means turning over the sovereignty of your mind to Him. If greed, for example, is at the controls of my mind, then I will not reflect the control of Christ. When Christ is at the controls, generosity will be the outcome. I will want to give to others and help others who are truly in need. Greed has the opposite effect.

Paul calls the Word a sword in his description of the armor of God in Ephesians Chapter 6. It can be used to cut off thoughts that would not be honorable to the Lord. Remember that when the enemy tried to tempt Jesus with thoughts of self-aggrandizement, Jesus resorted to Scripture to ward off his flaming missiles. Jesus would not even for a moment entertain

a thought that would be contrary to the Father's will for Him. He took every thought captive.

This is more difficult for the person who gets thoughts in rapid-fire succession. He will have to interrupt the barrage and deal with the first thought in the order of the train of thoughts. Once he does this he will see the benefit of taking control of his mind and having Christ reside over his thoughts.

Lastly, remember that Jesus included in the Great Commandment the phrase to "love the Lord with all of your minds." I believe that this goes well with Paul's comments. Taking charge of our thoughts and not

allowing God-dishonoring thoughts to dominate our inner workings is a key way of loving the Lord with our minds.

What have you been thinking about lately? Are those thoughts under the rule of Christ or do they seem to be taking you places that will be dark and dangerous? Take a look at your thoughts today and begin to replace cruddy ones with God's Word. "The law of his God in his heart, none of his steps shall slide," (Psalm 37:31).

God's blessings renew our minds,  
Pastor Steve



## "Will The Real Jesus Please Stand Up"

September 9 - 2 Corinthians 11: 1-15

**H**ow Are You Today?

"All religions lead to God," many say.

"All roads will end up in heaven," say others.

What do you believe about that? Do you think all roads lead to paradise? If so, what about justice? Can a person do whatever he wants, even hurt other people, and still end up OK?

An even bigger problem would be the claims of Jesus. If we trust the Bible and the witnesses who recorded the words and deeds of Jesus, how can we go with the idea that everybody is OK no matter what, even if he doesn't believe in the Savior?

In our reading today we see that there are Jesus imposters who appear to be very much like the real thing. Every non-Christian cult in our day presents a Jesus that may at first look similar, but in truth is far from the authentic Jesus of the New Testament.

For example:

"The Jesus Christ of Mormonism is a created being, the first spirit child of heavenly Father God and his senior wife (Mormons often refer to Jesus as

"our elder brother"). Mormonism teaches that their Jesus helped to make and organize this world. He was subsequently challenged in his bid to be savior by his younger brother, Lucifer (now the devil). When his alternate plan of salvation was rejected by heavenly Father, Lucifer rebelled and led a third of the hosts of heaven in a battle against the forces of good—the "war in heaven." (Another portion of the preexistent spirits was not so valiant in fighting Lucifer's forces and was condemned to live on earth in Negro bodies as punishment.) At the "meridian of time" Father God came to earth and had sexual intercourse with Mary in order to beget Jesus in the flesh, making him the only spirit so favored and therefore the "only-begotten of the Father" in Mormon interpretation. Mormonism teaches that Jesus' Old Testament name is Jehovah and that he has become a god through his consistent efforts and good works. He is also said to have been a polygamist," (Walter Martin's Cults Reference Bible, p. 48).

On the exterior, Mormonism appears to be just another Christian group but when you get down to

their views on the Lord you can quickly and easily see the contrast. Another problem with Mormonism and most every other cult is their insistence that the Bible is not all that's necessary for truth. They have developed other "holy" books that add to and take away from the faith that "was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The men who wrote the Bible were inspired by God and were also eyewitnesses of the things they recorded for us. When men come along centuries later in order to reform the faith by creating something new, we should be suspicious.

This was happening in Paul's day and continues to happen today. Men love to come in and use God-talk to influence people for their own power trips. Usually they are very charismatic and influential. But those are not qualifications to represent God. Paul appeals to his humility and willingness to let God work in the Corinthians. He makes the point that he did not play God in their lives. Paul was committed to letting the Holy Spirit work in the church and build up the believers.

So what would Paul do when wolves came in? He warned the church to beware of them, and he expected the shepherds to protect the flock. In Acts there is a moving scene along the Mediterranean shore where Paul is saying goodbye to some leaders. He says, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit had made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with His own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them," (Acts 20:28-30).

Paul's example acts as a litmus test for distinguishing between the real and the fake. False leaders and cults will exalt themselves. They will appear very spiritual, even super-spiritual, but their real aim is to not promote the cause of Christ but to promote their own cause. They are proud, not humble. Secondly, they bring a different Jesus.

This may be new to some of you. Maybe you

never considered that there would be imposters out there. Maybe you are asking the question, "How do I know my church is teaching the true Jesus?" Good question! Does your church believe in the Bible as the sole source of authority? If yes, then good. Does your church tend to depend too much on the teachings of just one person? If yes, then this could be a red flag. Some twist the Scripture because they only pay attention to their own teaching and do not learn from other teachers in the church. Does your church believe in the virgin birth of Jesus, that He lived a perfect life fulfilling all of the requirements of the law, that He was arrested, beaten, mocked, crucified, and rose three days later in His new resurrection body? If yes, good. Does your church believe Jesus is the head of the church today and that someday in the future He will return to receive His church and judge those who did not believe in Him? If yes, you are on track.

Does it really matter what I believe about Jesus? Yes. There are many false Christs out there who would have you believe that they are the way. The apostle John warns in one of his little letters that many anti-Christ's have gone out into the world. They deny the Son, and by doing so deny the Father.

It is so important for us to worship in truth. We need to focus on the truth as well, because then we will be worshipping God for who He is and not an image of Him that we project from ourselves. Jesus said that true worshippers worship God in spirit and in truth; it is these folks that God seeks to have as His worshippers.

Paul's motive is love for the Corinthians. He didn't want them to fall prey to the clutches of false teachers, no matter how charismatic. He wanted them to experience the joy of knowing the true Savior. This was his experience and he wanted it for them. I believe he would want it for our local churches as well.

Let's worship in truth today by focusing on the truths about the Savior from the New Testament.

God's blessings help us distinguish the true from the false,

Pastor Steve

**“Treated With Love”**

September 10 - 2 Corinthians 11: 16-33

**L**et all that you do be done in love, Love is often misunderstood. We all want love, and we would like to think that we are loving, but the truth is that love isn't always the most attractive position. Love got Jesus crucified. He appeared weak and unable to defend Himself. He was very much misunderstood, and yet He did all that He did in love.

For example, when you love someone you are able to put up with his idiosyncrasies, whereas an outsider looking at the same person would be apt to judge him harshly. Love overlooks those things. Isn't that the reason we enjoy being around people who truly love us? They accept us right where we are, warts and all, and they give us the feeling that we are all right in their eyes no matter what.

When married couples begin to quarrel the reason is usually tied to a lack of understanding and love because of some weakness or habit of their partner. They are feeling irritated. Then they begin to focus on that particular problem and pretty soon what started out as a small thing becomes a huge situation. They find that rather than overlooking the problem or calmly talking to their partner about it, their attitude becomes one of irritated nagging. This leads to an emotional escalation that can lead to isolation, separation and even divorce.

The antidote to this spiral is more of the love of Jesus in the individuals and in the relationship. Jesus' kind of love helps us to love another right where they are, and not demand that they be somewhere else. That doesn't mean we should be soft on sins. Sin brings a destructive aspect to any relationship. But more of Jesus' love will be like a salve on an irritating sore. We cannot love like Jesus unless we ask him to give us the love that enables us to see our partner in the light of what God can do in his life.

When we consider the love of God, described by

Paul in I Corinthians 13, and the fruit of the Holy Spirit, enumerated in Galatians 5, you can begin to grasp the humble nature of God's love. For example, take gentleness and kindness and apply them to that strained relationship. If you were able to act kindly and gently with the other person, what impact would that have? I can guarantee that it would go further than nagging and harsh words.

This was Paul's problem as far as the Corinthians were concerned. Paul, the once militant legalistic and pharisaic defender was now humble and gentle and concerned about the hearts of others. In other words, he was like Jesus. When he had established his relationship with the motley group in Corinth he had established a humble trust in the work of the Spirit in their lives. He did not demand or control or connive in any way in order to get their attention or keep it. He had come to them in a loving and Christ-honoring way.

What's the problem with that, I can hear someone saying? Well, once more charismatic men came by and began to take the reigns of the church, the believers were too easily led astray by the overbearing nature of these wolves in wolves' clothing. Paul says that they out-and-out abused the sheep.

Why is it that people take this kind of treatment? Even today there are people who take advantage of others. Husbands and wives are involved in domestic assaults on a regular basis. The most frequent 911 call involves some form of domestic abuse. Employers will sometimes take advantage of their employees in a sexual way, abusing their power by manipulating others. The employee usually doesn't feel like there is any other way out. Oftentimes when young people are sexually abused they will be made to think that it was their fault, and they shouldn't blow the whistle because then they will have to admit their "guilt." Abuse happens in a variety of forms. It is usually propagated

by people who are driven to control others for their own selfish ends.

When abuse happens in the church it becomes an especially sensitive and emotional subject. Spiritual leaders are usually well respected and receive the kind of trust that goes beyond the norm. When they mishandle that trust, people are hurt. They become disillusioned. They will often play the blame game in order to deal with their wounded souls. God gets blamed and those who knew something but didn't do anything get blamed and the church gets blamed. They will even blame themselves.

Well, these "false apostles" in Corinth were being abusive, and Paul is quick to point out the difference between his ministry and theirs. After he spells out their dominance of the church, he says, and I think with some sarcasm, "To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that." In other words, Paul was too weak in a worldly or carnal sense. He treated them with kindness and love and not with a dominant spirit like these who were coming in and upsetting the work

he had accomplished.

Instead of demanding from the church, it was Paul's approach to be an example to them. And so he goes on to list for them not his demands, but his credentials from the school of hard knocks. This was not something that Paul enjoyed doing. He felt foolish having to write about it. But he did it in order to remind the church of what he endured for the sake of the gospel and for them. Troubles were his credentials. He did it all for the sake of the gospel, for his belief in the cross and the resurrection.

Peter talks about this topic in his letters. He too had to deal with false teachers. He said that leaders had to be examples and they were not to "lord over" the flock. Jesus is the one Lord. The leaders were to follow Him and make Him known in a humble way; they were not to demand or force the sheep to go their way. Love is not rude or pushy or self-serving.

God's blessings are not forced,  
Pastor Steve

**“Spirituality Is A Pain In The Butt”**

September 11 - 2 Corinthians 12: 1-10

**P**aul's personal struggle with the Corinthians was born out of an unsubstantiated feeling of mistrust, caused by a small group of false apostles who were lying about Paul. The physical distance between the apostle and the people didn't help matters either. Please follow me as I quote from a survey of the New Testament, in order to better explain Paul's circumstances at the writing of this second letter to the Corinthians.

*After writing I Corinthians from Ephesus, Paul had found it necessary to make a "painful visit" to Corinth and back—painful because of the strained*

*relationship between Paul and the Corinthians at the time. Luke does not record this visit in Acts. It is to be inferred, however, from 2 Corinthians 12:14; 13:1,2, where Paul refers to his coming visit as the "third." Without the inferred painful visit Paul had visited Corinth only once before. The statement in 2 Corinthians 2:1, "For I made up my mind not to make you another painful visit" (RSV), implies a past painful visit which can hardly be identified with his first coming to them, with the joyful tidings of salvation through Jesus Christ.*

*For whatever reason Paul made the short, painful visit, he was apparently unsuccessful in bringing the*

church into line. Upon returning to Ephesus, therefore, he wrote a now lost "sorrowful letter" to Corinth, which at first he had regretted having sent (2 Corinthians 2:4; 7:8—the descriptions hardly fit 1 Corinthians). This is the second lost letter to Corinth. The sorrowful letter commanded church discipline against an obstreperous (unruly) individual who was leading the opposition against Paul in the Corinthian church (2 Corinthians 2: 5-10). Titus carried the letter to Corinth. Meanwhile, knowing that Titus would return via Macedonia and Troas, and anxious to hear from Titus the reaction of the Corinthians, Paul left Ephesus and waited in Macedonia, where Titus finally met him and reported the good news that the church as a whole had repented from their rebelliousness against Paul and had disciplined the leader of the opposition (2 Corinthians 2:12,13; 7:4-16). (A Survey of the New Testament, Robert H. Gundry, p.285)

Maybe this is more information than you care to know, but I thought it would be good to give some background so you understand the kind of trouble Paul had. Despite the difficulties, Paul was tenacious. Frustrated too, and angry I'm sure, but he had no intention of giving up on the church that was near and dear to his heart.

The power Paul experienced through God had transformed him, and he wanted the church to experience this power as well. He was willing to put up with almost anything so that others might know Christ as he knew Him. He spent the better part of the last chapter listing the kind of commitment he had for Jesus and the gospel. He had gone through a myriad of difficult times for the sake of the gospel. Paul saw these trials as his sacrifice for the church. True, he did it for Jesus and the gospel, but he also did it for the members of Christ's body, His church.

God had not only allowed Paul to suffer, He had also permitted him to be privy to great revelations of God. Paul even intimates that he had an out of body experience. The "man" that he says he "knew" is himself. Whether this experience was out of his body or in it was hard to distinguish, and is not the important thing. The important thing is that he saw heavenly glory and was in the presence of God so deeply that there was no earthly way to describe it.

Think about having an experience like that. What a privilege! It probably occurred when he was in Lystra where he had been stoned. He was thrown out of the city in a heap of flesh and bones. Those around him thought he was dead. Then, all of a sudden, Paul gets up and goes right back where he was persecuted so that he can continue to preach the message of the gospel. Maybe he was motivated to do this because of what he had just witnessed. It would make sense that Luke doesn't record the reasons why Paul did this. He would have been tongue-tied because of the experience. What could he say? He had just been in the heavenly places.

Paul makes it clear that spiritual accountability brings personal humility. You can imagine that a person would begin to get a big head after seeing the things Paul saw. You could become conceited. Even a good stoning is not that big of deal in the light of seeing God (to some degree). But there was something else bugging Paul. He prayed about it. Then he prayed about it again. It was still there. Then he prayed about it a third time. No relief. God simply said to him that His grace would help him to live with it. It would be the thing to keep him humble. This thing would force other people to give the credit for all Paul's blessings to God.

Suffering is the way to humility. Suffering keeps us dependent on God. Suffering deflates our conceit. Before suffering, we had our act together and were the envy of others. Like Job, others sought our counsel because we were so spiritual. Then we met suffering, and our image was not as important any more. Now our prayers were desperate. Now we needed God more than ever. Now we were not as attractive. But we became humble. Now we don't look in the mirror as much. Now we are more interested in eternal and spiritual things and do not boast about the flesh to nearly the same degree.

Here's this passage of Scripture in the Message paraphrase:

"Because of the extravagance of those revelations, and so I wouldn't get a big head, I was given the gift of a handicap to keep me in constant touch with my limitations. Satan's angel did his best to get me down; what he in fact did was push me to my knees. No danger then of walking around high and mighty!

At first I didn't think of it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. Three times I did that, and then he told me, 'My grace is enough; it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness.' Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ's strength moving in on my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size—abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the

stronger I become."  
Do you have a weakness that's plaguing you? Have you prayed about it over and over? Do you hear the Spirit saying to you what He said to the apostle? "My child, I will be strong for you in your weakness; let it go. I am with you."  
Rejoice in Jesus Always.  
God's blessings sometimes come disguised as troubles,

Pastor Steve



## "How Can I Strengthen You?"

September 12 - 2 Corinthians 12: 11-21

**T**o Those Who Walk by Faith, How do you do when you are under pressure? Think about a time when someone hurt your feelings, or when someone did something to you at work that made you feel really small. How are you impacted by it?

Where do you turn when the internal pressure valve has reached its maximum capacity? Some may resort to drugs and alcohol, but where do you go? Some may blow up and take out their frustrations on perfectly neutral bystanders, but where do you look? Some may give up and throw a pity party, but where will you find the strength to go on? These questions confront all of us from time to time and it's a good idea to think about our source of strength before we need it to cope and find success in our situation.

God has designed the church so that each member would be strengthened by the whole and by the parts. In the book of Ephesians, Paul will elaborate on this, but even in the Corinthian letters the edification of the body of Christ has been a clear target. The church is to build itself up in love. The leaders are to equip the members for the work of service and the

members are to carry out their work so that the whole church is strong and thriving. How has the church made a difference in your life? Can you remember a time in your life when the church really rescued you from the grips of discouragement?

Paul loved the church and especially the Corinthians, whom he had brought to Christ through the preaching of the gospel. He would not give up on trying to reach out and strengthen them so that they could grow up in their faith in Jesus. Did it bother Paul that the church had become disorderly and fickle and immoral? You bet, but he was not going to let that dissuade him from trying to bring them under the Lordship of Jesus.

In our section of Scripture today he speaks, I would venture, like a wounded kid who has been burned by his best friend. I don't mean to say that he was being immature. No, I just think he stoops to their level so that they could hear what he was thinking and how he felt. So he says things like, "I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it," and "Forgive me this wrong!" I think he's speaking tongue in cheek. Then he calls himself a "crafty fellow" who caught

them through trickery. What in the world does he mean by that? Probably the best way to take it is that he sent himself incognito through Titus and the brother (probably Timothy), and they did Paul's footwork while he was elsewhere.

He ends this section by saying he was a bit antsy about visiting them again. He was afraid there may be some disappointment he'd have to face if there was still a remnant who hadn't done what he'd asked. For some reason there was an aspect of Corinth that intimidated Paul. Remember in the first letter how he said that when he was there he felt nervous and hesitant, even though he knew the Lord had sent him to talk about the crucified Jesus? Paul was like us, wasn't he? He was sometimes shaky about what the Lord wanted him to do, but he did it anyway. That would be

a good model for us to follow.

I hope you have someone in your life like Paul. I hope there is someone who cares about you so much that they'd go out of their way to strengthen you even if you weren't as concerned about them. Everyone needs a Paul.

If you are a leader in the church then I admonish you to be like him and be a strengthener. Jude said, "Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh," (verse 22).

God's blessings come after tenacious perseverance,

Pastor Steve



## "A Few Notes On Spirituality"

September 13 - Isaiah 30: 19 - 32:20 and 2 Corinthians 13: 1-14

I think most people these days would say they are "spiritual." To deny being spiritual would be like saying you don't have a soul. Some people even think animals have souls, so it would be hard for them to say that they are without one. Some equate spirituality with being sensitive or having a heart for others. Some associate it with religious symbols or relics that they view as sacred. Even for people who wear the cross without ever thinking to ask why Jesus died there, the symbol is not without meaning. It's just that it makes them feel spiritual. I'd say this is kind of like feeling "spiritual by association."

When Jesus met a Samaritan woman who was drawing water from a well, He told her, "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews," (John 4:22). Jesus makes it clear that you can be a worshipper in ignorance. Interesting, isn't it? You can act out a form of worship

and feel very spiritual, and still not be on the target of true spirituality.

That woman found out that Jesus Himself was the way. He was the "salvation from the Jews" who would create the way to God through His own blood. In the meantime, He told her that He had water that would quench her thirst always. In other words, He was the source or fountain of real spiritual life. And something very profound happens to the person who tastes of His water. They are never satisfied with the water of the world again. They may go back and drink the murky stuff, but it tastes nothing like it once did because they find themselves always longing for the "living water."

Does Jesus really make that much difference? Decathlete Dave Johnson would say so. Following a tumultuous childhood in Missoula, Mont., that included throwing rocks at cars and running from police, Dave

and his family moved to Corvallis, Ore. In his senior year of high school, a football teammate introduced him to Christ. Dave's faith carried him through the 1996 Olympics where he won a bronze medal. He says, "I'm just a soldier for God, and maybe learning my story could make a difference in their lives. I've learned that Christ is there to give our lives meaning and purpose," (Testimony in "Man of His Word," Promise Keepers, p. 212).

When medical corpsman Bob Weiland detonated a Vietnamese land mine in June of 1969, the force may have blown the legs off the former high school all-conference athlete, but it certainly didn't shatter his strong heart and determination. The experience shook his determination, perhaps, as he rehabilitated for a year and also battled malaria, but it did not shatter. But as Bob recounts, the seeming unfairness of losing a potential baseball career was nothing compared to the overwhelming joy of being alive. Bob professes that his faith in God has protected him from possible bitterness (Ibid, p. 116).

Christ does not change just well-known people; every day people experience the life changing power of the gospel. Lyndee slumped in the chair as she told me her story. She had been trying for years to find spiritual fulfillment. She eventually landed in Christian Science where she found the terminology and rules too sophisticated for her. She had thought they must be right because they sounded so smart. After she heard the true message of the cross and God's plan of salvation, she said that even she could understand it. She prayed and asked the Lord to forgive her and lead her life. Lyndee went away with joy in her heart and a bounce in her step. It's been years now, and Lyndee is still experiencing the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. She loves the Lord and has gotten involved in her church.

Each of these people discovered that Christ is fulfillment. To know Him is to know life and peace and joy. They have each told how they have gotten into God's Word, where they have a daily walk with the Lord. Truly, Jesus has made the difference for them.

There are a couple of key verses in our reading today that point to true spiritual experience. First of all Isaiah says, "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, 'This

is the way, walk in it.' Then you will defile your idols overlaid with silver and your images covered with gold, and you will throw them away like a menstrual cloth and say to them, 'Away with you!'" (30:22-23)

True spirituality is built on hearing God's Word and acting on it. Jesus said this in Matthew 7: "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell and great was the fall of it," (verses 24-27).

Another obvious application of Isaiah's message is that true spirituality will necessarily lead to change, both spiritual and moral. You will turn from the former idols of the heart and embrace Christ as your only God. You will treat the former lovers as filthy rags and you will want to discard them as soon as possible. You will not want to live with them any longer. Jesus has moved in, and there is no longer any room for the garbage that dominated life for so long.

Peter put it this way: "The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you, but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead," (1 Peter 4: 3,4).

Paul concludes the epistles to the Corinthians by saying, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?" (13:5). And if Christ is in you, then you cannot easily invite sinful habits to occupy the same residence. They will become putrid, stinking up the place and dishonoring the main guest, the Lord Jesus. Christ is at work in the growing Christian, developing in him the qualities that He possesses.

As we conclude, look back at the passage in Isaiah for a moment. It gives us the assurance that God will direct our steps. God will show you the way to walk.

He will direct you. Like a loving father, God will take you by the hand and lead you through both stormy and sunny weather. He speaks to you through His Word and gives you direction. Take confidence in this assurance today. Let God know that you appreciate His direction in your life.

God is speaking to you; do you hear Him? "This is the way, walk in it."

God' blessings are spoken by the Lord Jesus,  
Pastor Steve