

2nd Epistle to the Corinthians (Lesson 19)

Pastor Joh. W. Matutis
www.nnk-berlin.de
Mail: pastor@matutis.de

Concerning the studying

I **recommend** you to read through the respective book in the bible at first. Our manual is the bible. And then to go through one or two pages of the material every day, which implies to also look up and read the given bible scriptures to become thoroughly acquainted with the subject. Another suggestion would be to use this material as one's regular devotion.

If you would like to **obtain a degree (certificate) at the end of the seminar**, you need to answer the **test questions** at the end of each lesson and send or email it to us with your full name and address. And now I wish you lots of joy and spiritual profit during your bible study.

Pastor Joh. W. Matutis

MISCELLANEOUS

Concerning **the history** of the church plant in Corinth please refer to 1st Corinthians – see **lesson 18**, the bible study for 1st Corinthians. Paul started this 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians due to the many trials and accusations he had to face. He is **shorter and more reserved** than in 1st Corinthians.

Right in the beginning he emphasizes that he is an apostle of Christ and received authority from Him. His authority as an apostle is not a human or personal one, but rather the highest, God-given authority. In Corinth the apostle had to defend his authority as an apostle like nowhere else.

2nd Corinthians explicitly shows **Paul's apprehension of the apostolic office**. He was not commissioned by people to become an apostle but by the grace of God alone. He proved himself by persistent ministry but also by signs and wonders that demonstrated his power (2Cor 12,12). He planted and built churches in places where the gospel had not yet been preached (1Cor 3,10;4,15/ 2Cor 4,6;10,8;10,13-16). Therefore the apostle has a **unique position** in the church and also keeps that authority towards all ministers who came after him (1Cor 4,15;9,2/ 2Cor 1,14;3,1-3).

He is the Father and establisher of the church. In his 2nd letter **he consciously mentions Timothy**, who was perhaps also rejected by the church. Timothy was also involved with the plant and development of the church (Acts 18,5/ 1Cor 4,17;16,10f./ 2Cor 1,19/ Phil 2,19-22). The church is expected **to obey their apostle with eagerness** (2Cor 7,7;7,11-13). For Paul the continuous suffering during his ministry was the special evidence for the **authenticity of his apostolate** (1Cor 4,9-13/ 2Cor 11,23-33;12,9 f.).

Many of the texts in 2nd Corinthians are **hard to translate and interpret** because they cannot easily be analysed semantically. The apostle speaks to his spiritual children as a father (Acts 18,1-17). He appears as a counselor, more than in any other epistle, and speaks from his heart, addressing **deep psychological issues**. In a **night vision** he was prepared to do that (Acts 18,9-10). The Corinthians were strongly influenced by mysticism and easily impressed by spectacular appearances of all forms and cults, such as spiritual gifts and speaking in tongues. They were carnal children in Christ and walked more by sight than by faith (2Cor 5,7).

Paul wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians in some sort of enthusiastic, pastoral fashion. He saw how many things went wrong in Corinth and dealt with the most important issues in detail. The result was a practical letter with few theological foundations. The church members in Corinth were not pleased with the authority Paul claimed in this letter. **Many Corinthians were shaken by it** (2Cor 7,8). But Paul himself was also upset with the Corinthians (2Cor 2,1).

2nd Corinthians is some kind of **reconciliation letter** (Chapter 1-8). In 1st Corinthians he called the bad things by name, but it caused misunderstandings. When he came back to visit he realised that (2Cor 2,1) the situation was even worse than he had assumed. Also **Timothy** (1Cor 4,17; 16,10f.) brought alarming news when he returned from Corinth (2Cor 2,1). The apostle then decided to write to them immediately and to visit them at his earliest convenience (2Cor 13,1,2). Therefore he also changed his schedule and promised to visit the Corinthians soon (1Cor 16,5-8). His visit, also known as »**the painful visit**« (2Cor 2,1) was not

successful. Somebody at the church (perhaps one of the false apostles) even offended him publically (2Cor 2,5-8.10;7,12). **Disappointed by the Corinthian's lack of faithfulness** to defend him and to spare them further reproach Paul returned to Ephesus (2Cor 1,23) maybe even hoping they would come to their senses in due time. From Ephesus Paul wrote to them the so-called »**letter of tears**« (2Cor 2,4) and sent Titus to deliver it to the Corinthians (2Cor 7,5-16). Between the lines we can guess what had happened in the meantime. Like mentioned above the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians had stirred an **anti-pauline mood** in the metropolis.

When we can say that the 1st letter is an „**ecclesiastical document**“, because Paul laid down the rules for harmonious growth and development of the church, then we can also say that the 2nd epistle is an „**apostolic document**“.

While the former dealt with particular **issues concerning the services and church order**, and everything was addressed calmly and in order, the latter – except for the chapter about the collection for the church at Jerusalem- only dealt with one topic: the apostolic authority of Paul. None of the themes of the 1st letter are even mentioned again. In addition this letter reveals to us Paul's **character and personality** more than any other letter. Paul found himself pressed to defend against the ugly attacks of some Corinthians. His apostolate, his character and ministry had been attacked and questioned. It is one of the most personal letters of the apostle Paul.

The 2nd letter complements and amends the historical report about Paul's relationship with the church at Corinth which we could read about in Acts and 1st Corinthians. In addition we also find many **biographic information** about Paul in this letter.

In **2nd Corinthians** we hear about the threatening tension between the apostle and the church. Probably also as a resulting **reaction** upon the 1st letter, which did not please them and they did not want to follow his instructions. At this point they **rejected the apostle himself**, questioned his commission and calling. **In this situation he had** to show himself determined to request acknowledgment of his divine appointment and calling to justify his **apostolic commission and ministry** (2Cor 3,1-4,5). The letter closes with a defense against the personal insults of the Corinthians (2Cor 10-13). When he had a grip on the difficult situation with the church and calmed down their raised tempers and had justified his position he also talks about his mission (2Cor 4,6 – 6,10), his main ministry at that time and the collection for the church at Jerusalem (2Cor 8-9). Therefore Paul did not refer to the **topics of the 1st epistle again**, but rather **defends** his position, his commission as a messenger of Christ, his personality and requests that they hear him and obey the teachings of Christ that he stands for and taught them.

This explains the agitation we can sense in this letter. Many statements of the 1st letter become clearer in the light of the second. It adds more weight. The two letters belong together and their unity and belonging stands out. The second document shows how serious the tension between **the apostle and the church were even at the time of the first writing**. There were already men in Corinth who were public opponents of Paul and **denied his apostolate** to edge him out of the church. Some even said triumphantly: “Paul will not even dare to come back to Corinth.” (1Cor 4,18)

Against these claims and because of the division it caused, Paul had to emphasize his **unique importance** for the church in Corinth (1Cor 1,1;3,10; 4,15-17;9,1.2). This helps us to better understand some of the statements in 1st Corinthians (such as 1Cor 2,1; 3,17; 4,8-13.18-21; 9,1-12;9,19;14,37.38; 3,1-4;4,8;4,21;5,2;8,12;11,30-32; 5,33 f.). Because his time with them was short, Paul was not able to **meet their needs and solve the problems** when he was at Corinth. He then gave up his former travel schedule and promised a **long visit**. He wanted to come to Corinth from Ephesus by sea, which is the shortest way (2Cor 1,15f.).

But Paul did not visit them as he had planned. He mentions his reasons in 2Cor 1,23;2,1-4. Something had happened which made the apostle very sad and would have made the visit tough for the Corinthians and himself. Paul also mentions a man in his letter who was saddened and had experienced injustice there with them (2Cor 2,5;7,12) and is perhaps referring to Timothy, the messenger who delivered the 1st epistle.

2nd Corinthians is a tough letter (2Cor 2,4). The church is challenged to **take a clear stand** and **discipline the offender**. Part of the church had distanced themselves **from this sinner** but overall Paul was not able to prevail. So he softens his tone (2Cor 2,5-11) by addressing the incident with this other man (2Cor 7,12). This also seemed to be a major conflict.

This letter is also called „**letter of tears**“. **Titus** brought this letter to the recipients. In the meantime Paul had changed his travel plans and waited in **Troas** until he would hear how his letter was received. What kind of reaction would there be? And so he waited what news he would receive from them (2Cor 2,12 f.). But Titus did not come back as early as expected. So Paul already continued to Macedonia.

Then Titus finally met Paul (perhaps in **Philippi**, where Paul was staying at the time) **and brought good news from Corinth**. The majority of the church had executed church discipline against the offender and their awareness of belonging to Paul was stirred again. **Paul was full of joy** (2Cor 7,5-16). Then he was able to write the 2nd letter to the Corinthians and there were no more obstacles keeping the apostle from visiting them in Corinth (1Cor 16,5-8).

Paul announced his visit to the church (2Cor 13,1-4) and prepared them for the **accusations people might raise against him**. He also **addressed the trouble makers** at the church. These men were **not particularly false teachers** that Paul had to deal with in matters of theology. There were just **certain attitudes** (such as seeking to be free, denying the power of the cross and the resurrection, etc.) **and extreme practices** that were done under the claim of „**freedom**“. Marrying the step-mother (1Cor 5), taking law cases among brethren to the secular court (1Cor 5 6), promiscuity (1Cor 5 6,12ff.), participating in temple meals (1Cor 5 8), women who gave up their duties as women (1Cor 5 11,2-16), enjoying the communion as a feast to eat rather than worship and fellowship (1Cor 5, 11,17ff.) etc. The apostle charged **"many"** that they **"did not know God"**, but he was not referring so much to false doctrine but rather a **misapplication or misconception** concerning life style. **"Life" and "doctrine"** cannot be separated. These trouble makers were not necessarily people who came later or from the outside. They probably just misunderstood Paul's or even Apollos' teachings and maybe thought they are already **"Christian"** in all of their ways and understanding (1Cor 1,12). Therefore they proclaimed a Christianity regardless of authority and beyond the teaching of scripture (1Cor 4,6) without submission to an apostle or a church leader. Therefore they tried to break loose from Paul, whose leadership seemed **too strict and mentally and spiritually meaningless** to them. They wanted to be their own leaders and take the church to their own anticipated spiritual heights.

Surely some **Judaists** who belonged to **Peter/Cephas** were also part of the turmoil. In 2Cor 3 Paul addresses the „**Jewish-Christian influence**“ when he speaks of Moses and the commendation letters (1Cor 1.10/ Acts 15.1). This is the group of people who surely questioned the authenticity of Paul's apostolate with regard to **the "twelve" in Jerusalem** (Acts 1.4/ 2Cor 11,5,12-15; 11,23). This would also explain the ironic comment by Paul that he is not inferior to the great apostles, but rather surpasses them by the measure of his suffering in the ministry (Phil 3,2,17-19/ Gal 6.12/ Rom 16,17).

Chapter 10-12 imply that the peace between the church and the apostle has to be restored. There was a small group in the church who still resisted and whom Paul wanted to address personally (2Cor 10,2.9f.;11,13-15;12,21;13,2). Therefore he announced his visit **using military metaphors** and tough sentences (2Cor 10,1-6.9f.;11,13-15;12,21;13,2) and stated that they would not be spared. **Titus** was accompanied by two brothers **to travel to Corinth once more** to hand over this letter to the church and to help collect money for the church at Jerusalem (2Cor 8,16-24). The visit of the apostle was supposed to follow after that.

The authenticity of 2nd Corinthians cannot be doubted. Only Paul would be able to address difficulties, tensions and tribulations so specifically. The apostle's struggle for the Corinthians **was not in vain**. Paul was victorious in this battle against his foes. Now the apostle was able to resume his travelling plans again and continue. That also included his journey to Jerusalem to deliver the collection and to continue to Rome and travel to Spain (2Cor 10,15 f.). **When Paul was in Corinth he wrote the Epistle to the Romans**.

The meaning of 2nd Corinthians for us.

We are dealing with a special letter here, that speaks to particular people and their circumstances. **This letter is therefore not easy to understand but requires historical interpretation**. We cannot simply apply every sentence to ourselves but have to understand what he is saying to the Corinthians first. The reader of the bible must also bring a huge portion of **interest in history** and must not be discouraged by the additional efforts to understand the world and age of that time. 2nd Corinthians corrects the false Christianity they idolized more strongly than his first letter. We might have expected that at least among the first Christians everything was „**perfect**“ und „complete“.

The **churches of Christ** have never been **fellowships of wonderful people who are perfectly holy, but rather a gathering of sinners** amongst whom their old nature still breaks out sometimes and threatens the fellowship. Even from the beginning of Christianity hard work and painful battles for the maintenance and survival of the church were necessary. From the beginning there have been **deceptive and selfish people** who only tried to gain power and confuse the members with their new teachings. Yet the apostle addresses them as the „**church of God**“.

There have always been lack and difficulties from the beginning. But we should not let this be our comfort. 2nd Corinthians reveals how Paul struggled for this church. **He did not put up with their errors and mistakes**. With relentless and determined love he challenged them to repent and brought them to a godly sorrow which worked a sincere change of mind.

And with his **third visit he would relentlessly fight until** he has captured every thought unto the obedience of Christ" (2Cor 10,5;6,14-7,1).

Titus had done a great service at the church in Corinth. Paul had given him authority to do so. In 2nd Corinthians we see how the church should exercise **church discipline**. Those who had been exposed as **lying apostles** were supposed to be brought to repentance. If they chose to refuse to repent and remain undiscerning (2Cor 13.1), they were supposed to be expelled from the church. The exclusion was more than just a practical measure, it was also a spiritual breach with them. The apostle viewed the church as something more than **just an organisation** but as the body of Christ. The exclusion of people from the church would separate them from the body of Christ and delivers that person to the god of this world (2Cor 2,5-11).

The 2nd letter also offers essential contributions to "**practical theology**". We can see in 1Cor 3,1-3 how Paul called the **church at Corinth "immature and carnal" regardless of their spiritual giftings**.

His Apostolic authority was mixed with a **brotherly pastoral concern** which helped him win the hearts of the sincere and embattled. Like no other book of the New Testament this one reveals a very **personal impression of the apostle**. Next to the Epistle to the Phillipians this is one of his most personal writings. At the same time it is also one of the **most difficult letters** of the bible. In the contrary to the first letter we find **little doctrine** but many chapters that reveal the **thoughts and emotions of Paul**. Paul reveals **his inner motives concerning the work for the Lord** (2Cor 1,12ff.; 5,14;12,19) and his deepest desire for reconciliation with the fellowship of the Corinthians. The **central theme** of this letter is the authority and ministry of the apostle Paul.

AUTHOR

The author names himself in the beginning of the letter (2Cor 1,1) „**Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ**“. He often **refers to** his person and experience which must have been familiar to the Corinthians (2Cor 1,23-24;2,12-13;10,1;12,1-2;13,1 etc.). He was also the initiator of the collection for the church of Jerusalem (Ch. 8 & 9). The author must therefore be the apostle Paul.

RECIPIENTS

Besides the church at Corinth the letter also addresses the believers of Achaia (Greece) (2Cor 1,1).

TIME and PLACE

The letter was written **shortly** after the first. In 1Cor 16,8 we read that Paul wanted to stay in Asia until Pentecost, which tells us that the letter was perhaps written around the time of the pass over festivities. Perhaps he left Ephesus in early summer and spent some days in Troas where he did not find rest but felt he had to go to Macedonia (2Cor 7,5). There he visited most churches and it can be assumed that the summer months were over before he wrote 2nd Corinthians. The **place of writing** should be somewhere in Macedonia (2Cor 2,13;7,5;8,1;9,2-4).

COMPOSITION

The apostle Paul wrote the 2nd letter to the Corinthian **with the comfort** he received from Christ. In this letter he addresses his **suffering in Ephesus** (Acts 19,23). Almost all of the **Epistles of the New Testament** were rather "**speech**" and **not "writing"**, therefore it can be assumed that he dictated them. The word of God is always passed on **orally** (rhema) (Rom 10,8-18). **Timothy, who delivered 1st Corinthians** (1Cor 16,10/ 2Cor 1,1) returned to Paul with bad news. Neither the letter nor his mediations had the desired impact. Then Paul **travelled to Corinth personally** as he promised in his letter (1Cor 4,19).

This **short visit** had fatal consequences and he had to depart without accomplishing anything (2Cor 2, 5-11;7,12). This thesis can be supported by the things Paul writes to the Corinthians (2Cor 12,14;13,1-2): „**For the third time I will visit you.**“ The **first visit** led to the planting of the church (Acts 18), the **second** was a flying visit and the **third** happened after this letter (Acts 20,3-5).

After the **short visit** Paul was rushing back to Ephesus where he wrote a sharp letter to the wayward Corinthians, which cost him many tears (2Cor 2,1-4. 9), but bore its fruits (2Cor 7,8ff.). We do not have this letter but it was probably delivered by **Titus** (2Cor 12,18), who also had the assignment to organise the collection with two delegates (2Cor 8,16-24). Shortly after **Titus' departure** there was a riot in Ephesus (Act 19, 23-20,1), which forced Paul to leave his current field of work and **change his plans**. He travelled to **Troas**; but when he did not meet Titus there he had no rest and travelled to Macedonia by ship to meet him half way (2Cor 2,12.13;7,5-7). His joy to see Titus was great and also because he heard that he had succeeded to complete his assignment and that the church at Corinth had realized that they had been wrong (2Cor 7,4-16).

These good news caused Paul to write a new letter in which he made peace with the church (2Cor 8,16-18) and announced his **third visit**.

AUTHENTICITY

The authenticity of this letter has never been doubted. The **only concerns** that came up are caused by the two different parts of the letter. Some bible interpreters believe that the **lost second letter** is contained in **the 2nd Epistle we know it**. This thesis could be supported by the **tone of the letter**, which is friendly and loving in the first 9 chapters and rather sharp and agitated in the last 4. The last 4 chapters are therefore sometimes referred to as the **4-chapter-epistle**.

PURPOSE and GOAL

Both epistles are a reaction upon reports that Paul received:

- one report by the cohabitants of Chloe (1Cor 1,11) and
- another report by Titus (2Cor 7,6-7).
The first report filled him with sadness and the second with joy and confidence.

These are Paul's goals for this letter:

- Ultimate correction of former mistakes and aberrations of the church (2Cor 1,6-7;7,2-16).
- Preparing the church for the collection for the poor at the church of Jerusalem (2Cor 8,6;9,1-15).
- Defense of his apostolate which his offenders tried to undermine (2Cor 10-12).
- Announcement of the third visit (2Cor 13,1-10).

CHARACTERISTICS

The structure and style of this letter **is very different from the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians**. Perhaps his passion, emotions and concerns of his heart lead him to speak this way. To divide the letter according to main themes was easy for the 1st letter but for the second it is more difficult. The **first 7 chapters** seem to be an entity, which makes it hard to subdivide them. The **cross and the death of Christ** are the universal remedies for all sickness in the church in letter 1, whereas the main theme of letter 2 is **His resurrection and glory**. While Paul usually separates between doctrinal teaching and practical application, in this letter it all **flows together**. He describes the glory of the gospel, the resurrection of the saints, the judgment seat, the rejection of Christ and Paradise or the power of Satan in ways that immediately affect our practical life as we affect Christ with our life. For Paul teaching should always affect the life of the believer.

In this letter **there is no indication about the return of the LORD**, not the hope for rapture is the driving force but rather the risen LORD and all of His present glory. Furthermore there are distinct antithesis in this letter: „tribulation“ and „the weight of glory“ (2Cor 4,17); „destroyed tent“ and „eternal house“ (2Cor 5,1) etc. In no other letter Paul uses **so much irony**: „the great apostles“, „since you are wise“, „But because I am wise I entrapped you with guile.“ etc.

CONTENT and DIVISION

<u>Introduction</u>	(1,1-11)
Addressing and blessing	(1,1-3)
Thanksgiving for comfort	(1,4-7)
Thanksgiving for rescue	(1,8-11)
<u>1. The comforted apostle</u> (clearance of misunderstandings)	(1,12-7,16)
● Change of travel plans	(1,12-2,4)
● church discipline: caring consideration	(2,5-11)
● Power and glory of the ministry	(2,12-4,6)
● Suffering and reward for service	(4,7-5,10)
● Selflessness and joy	(5,11-6,10)
● Exhortation to holiness	(6,11-18)
● Joy about reconciliation	(7,1-16)
<u>2. The caring apostle</u> (help for the church in Jerusalem)	(8-9)
● role model for the Macedonian churches	(8,1-15)
● recommendation of coworkers to work in this field	(8,16-9,5)
● Exhortation to Christian generosity	(9,6-15)
<u>3. The reckoning apostle</u> (towards the Judaistic offenders)	(10,1-12,18)
● Paul is tempted to praise himself.	(10,1-18)
● Paul refuses boast in himself.	(11,1-20)
● Paul boasts, but in his weaknesses Schwachheit wegen.	(11,21-12,10)
● Paul puts and end to his own self-glorification	(12,11-18)
<u>Ending</u>	(12,19-13,13)
Certain fears	(12,19-21)
Announcing of his third visit	(13,1-10)
Prayer, greeting and blessing	(13,11-13)

Key word: Service / Ministry

Key verse: „**Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, . . .**“ (2Cor 4,1).

MISCELLANEOUS

<u>God's comfort</u>	(2Cor 1,3-7)
● His source: The mercy of his Father	(2Cor 1,3)
● His mediator: Jesus Christ	(2Cor 1,5)
● His measure: abundant	(2Cor 1,5)
● The areas: in all circumstances	(2Cor 1,4a)
● The fruit: patience in suffering	(2Cor 1,6)
● The effect: that we comfort each other	(2Cor 1,4)
<u>Names for God's servants</u>	
● bondservant for the sake of Christ	(2Cor 4,5)
● carrier of God's glory	(2Cor 4,6)
● messengers of Christ	(2Cor 5,20)
● coworkers of God	(2Cor 6,1)
● servants of God	(2Cor 6,4)

Paul, the true servant of Christ

His calling ...

- ... by the will of God (2Cor 1,1)
- ... grace to the mercy of God (2Cor 4,1)

His qualification

- His personal healing (Apg 9) (2Cor 4,67,1.3)
- Worthy life style (2Cor 6,3)
- Sound teaching (2Cor 2,17;4,2)
- Willing to suffer and rejoice (2Cor 6,4-10)
- Life of sanctification (2Cor 7,1)

His efficiency

- Realisation of his inefficiency (2Cor 2,16)
- made efficient by God (2Cor 3,5-6)
- The urging love of Christ (2Cor 5,14)

His message

- Jesus Christ as Lord (2Cor 4,5)
- The message of reconciliation (2Cor 5,18-20)

His enemies

- Satan as the deceiver (2Cor 2,11)
- Satan as god of this world (2Cor 4,4)
- Satan as angel of light (2Cor 11,14)
- servants of Satan (false apostles) (2Cor 11,13)

His weapons

- Prayer (Intercession) (2Cor 1,11)
- Weapons of righteousness (2Cor 6,7)
- Weapons of chivalry (2Cor 10,4)

His suffering

- ready to die (2Cor 4,7-12)
- tribulation and hardships (2Cor 4,8;6,4)
- persecution (2Cor 4,9;6,5)
- deprivations (2Cor 6,5b)

His hope

- Resurrection (2Cor 4,14)
- The heavenly body (2Cor 5,1-4)
- The heavenly home (2Cor 5,6-9)
- The glory (2Cor 4,17-18)

Detailed exegesis

Preview:

- (2Cor 1,3): Thanksgiving to God for comfort in tribulations
- (2Cor 1,12): Defense against charges
- (2Cor 2,5): Forgiveness for a punished church member
- (2Cor 2,12): The proclamation of the gospel as the triumph of Christ
- (2Cor 3,1): The glory of ministry in the new covenant
- (2Cor 4,1): The light of the gospel in the office of an apostle
- (2Cor 4,7): Suffering in Christ
- (2Cor 5,1): Longing for the heavenly home
- (2Cor 5,11): Messenger of reconciliation
- (2Cor 6,1): The testing of the apostle in his ministry
- (2Cor 6,11): Promotion of the church and warnings of idol worship
- (2Cor 7,5): The joy of Paul over the remorse of the church

- (2Cor 8,1): The collection for the church of Jerusalem
- (2Cor 9,1): Blessing of the collection
- (2Cor 10,1): The defense of the apostle against personal reproach
- (2Cor 10,12): The measure of judgment on the apostle
- (2Cor 11,1): Paul and the false apostles
- (2Cor 11,16): The sufferings and efforts of the apostle
- (2Cor 12,1): The revelation of the Lord and the weakness of the apostle
- (2Cor 12,11): The battle of the apostle over his church
- (2Cor 13,1): Exhortations before the third visit

2nd Corinthians contains several **important doctrines**:

- **He describes God**, the Father, as merciful comforter (2Cor 1,3;7,6), as creator (2Cor 4,6), as the one who resurrected Jesus from the dead (2Cor 4,14; comp.13,4) and who will also resurrect the believers (2Cor 1,9).
- **Jesus Christ, the one who suffered** (2Cor 1,5),
 - who fulfilled the promises of God (2Cor 1,20),
 - who was proclaimed as God (2Cor 4,5),
 - who revealed the glory of God (2Cor 4,6) and
 - the one who became poor for the believers' sake when He became man (2Cor 8,9/Phil 2,5-8).
- **The reference to the Holy Spirit as God** (2Cor 3,17.18)
 - and as the pledge for the salvation of the believer (2Cor 1,22; 5,5).
- **Satan is identified as »god of this world«** (2Cor 4,4/ vgl. 1Joh 5,19),
 - as deceiver (2Cor 11,14) and
 - as leader of all human and demonic seducers (2Cor 11,15).
 - **The last days** will bring a time of glory to him (2Cor 4,16-5,8) but also his judgment (2Cor 5,10).
- **The glorious truth of the sovereignty of God** in salvation is the topic of 2Cor 5,14-21, while 2Cor 7,9.10 describes the reaction of man to God's offer of salvation: true repentance.

2nd Corinthians also offers the clearest and striking summary of the **substitutional sacrifice and salvation through Jesus** which we can find in the whole bible (2Cor 5,21/ Is 53) and defines the assignment of the church to preach **the message of salvation** (2Cor 5,18-20).

And eventually this letter offers – besides The Epistle to the Hebrews – **the best explanation of the new covenant** (2Cor 3,6-16).

Detailed Exegesis

Chapter 01

(2Cor 1,1-7) Introduction. Usually Paul starts a letter with thanksgiving for the faith of the church. The only exceptions are the Epistle to the Galatians and 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians where he thanks God for his rescue from deadly danger (2Cor 1-11). This unique and very personal letter of Paul is full of **traditions of the Jewish praise patterns**, such as psalms of praise and thanksgiving (comp. Dan 3,28/ Ps 144,1,14;66,20;72,18;106,48). In the midst of trials, suffering and tribulation he was comforted, strengthened and encouraged by God Himself (Col 1,24), and thus he shared the comfort he experienced with the church who was also facing trials and tribulations (1Thess 4,18). Paul was also comforted by the positive spiritual growth of the church (2Cor 7,5-7,13).

In the New Testament there is no Epistle of Paul that **is more personal or intimate than 2nd Corinthians**. In it we can see the deep love the apostle has for the Corinthians despite of their fickleness. Even though this letter is a very personal one, he does not write it as a **private person**, but as an "**apostle of Christ Jesus**" - a direct messenger of Jesus, appointed by God (Acts 9,1-9). He wanted to defend his authority as an apostle against the critics at the Corinthian church (2Cor 2,14-7,2). The relationship between Paul and the church at Corinth was charged after Paul's flying visit in Corinth before. These events caused him to write this „letter of many tears“ (2Cor 2,4) as he was deeply concerned (2Cor 7,8).

It is **unusual** that Paul introduces himself as the **apostle of Jesus Christ** to start a letter. This adds special importance to this letter. Paul emphasises that he did not choose **his calling** but that God Himself had appointed him for this office (Act 9,15;22,14). He also addressed the believers in Corinth who **faced**

tribulations as someone who knows exactly what it means to be troubled. It can even appear like a physical pressure that feel as if "**Satan is beating you with his fists**"

Whoever decided to join the church and become a Christian at that time, also decided to face **hardship** such as loosing family support or hostility among neighbors up to persecution. Whoever wanted to live as a Christian had to pay a high price because **Christianity without bearing a cross** does not exist (2Cor 1,9; 4,17-18). It is also interesting to observe how Paul switches between „I“ and „we“. He applies "we" when he refers to his apostolate. When he refers to himself as the person Paul he speaks only for himself - „I“ **the servant of Christ**". **When he uses „we“ he connects** with Jesus, all of Christianity including the **apostles** as well as his coworkers such as Silvanus, Timothy, Titus and the messengers who carried out the collection. This letter is also addressing **the international fellowship of the saints**, especially those in the Roman province Achaia, which also included the regions Attika, Boeotia and Pelopones – broad parts of today's Middle- and South- Greece.

Paul blesses the church with grace and peace of God. It is not enough that they have peace with people and each other, the peace in their hearts should go deeper and come from the Spirit of God (2Cor 1.3-4). It should be the same inner peace that also gave him comfort.

In 2nd Corinthians he describes what it means to live as a Christians. He mentions the pressure and threat of tribulations **9 times** (2Cor 1: 4-2 times- and in verse 8, further in 2Cor 2,4;4,17;6,4;7,4;8,2;13). Sometimes the word tribulation is also replaced by **affliction** and **adversity**. Paul wrote to the suffering believers in Corinth as a man who has also experienced much suffering, physical affliction, hardships and tribulations.

The letters to the church in Corinth document the perhaps **toughest crisis** in the life and ministry of the apostle Paul. The congregation was a **problematic church**. He **was upset** when he left the church during his last visit, with failed attempts to settle differences.

The **source of comfort** in the midst of affliction is God Himself. Paul refers to God with **three titles**:

- He is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 1,3/ 1Petr 1,3),
- the Father and author of mercy (2Cor 1,10/Rom 12,1/ Phil 2,1) and
- the God of all comfort (Act 9,10-19/ 2Cor 7,6).
- In the verses in 2Cor 1,3-7 alone Paul uses the term **comfort** 10 times!

The suffering that Paul had to endure are a consequence of his relationship with Christ (Mt 5,11/ Col 1,24). While he preached the gospel he had to face punishment and deprivations (2Cor 11,27-29). But also the deep concern and sadness about the church at Corinth weighed him down (2Cor 2,4). But **all these sufferings for Christ** are rewarded by the blessed trust in God. The work of regeneration that God worked among the Corinthians was also a comfort to Paul (2Cor 7,10-11). The **comfort** Paul experienced can be seen in his inner strength and it was more than just experiencing mere compassion. As he was comforted he can also comfort others (comp Hebr 2,18).

(**2Kor 1,3**) The typical Jewish saying „**praised be God**“ was amended and „**christianized**“ by the following: „... **and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!**“. This is how Christianity dissociates from Judaism, respectively **expands the Godhead** by the **person Jesus**. When Jesus was still alive He already stood in a certain relationship with **His heavenly Father** (Mt 11,25,27;12,50;23,9/ Mk 14,36/ Lk 2,49;23,34,46/ Joh 3,35;5,17-45;8,19;10,15;12,26 etc.).

When Paul calls God „**the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ**“ (2Cor 1,3) he also uses a **pre-christian tradition**. It refers to the **ancient name of God JHVH**, the title "**Kyrios**" (= "Lord") which was used in ancient Hellenistic Judaism in the **Septuagint** (the Greek translation of the Hebrew bible).

But **Christians take it one step further and speak of God as the Father, such as in the Lord's prayer and „Abba, dear Father.**

(**2Kor 1,3-7**) At this point Paul uses the term **comfort** 10 times. He was not only burdened with the **troubles** of his authority as an apostle who was maligned by his offenders, but he also had some **personal sorrow**. He speaks of affliction, and it seems the „**suffering of Christ**“ came over him, which means he had similar conflicts like Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Maybe he had been **tortured** like Jesus in the courtyard of the palace by the palace guards. **Disappointments** such as the betrayal of Judas or loneliness like after Peter's denial. Paul tells of his suffering but he does not go into detail. In Verse 8 he speaks of **desperation and fear of death**. At the same time he finds out that **the source of all comfort in the midst of such affliction is only God Himself** (Eph1,3/ 1Petr 1,3). This God sustained Paul in times of severe suffering (2Cor 1,8-10) and in His mercy and compassionate love redeemed him (Rom 12,1/ Phil 2,1/ Col 3,12/ Hebr 10,28).

Just like the **gifts of the spirit** are not for the benefit of the one who has the gift but for the others (1Pet 4,10), the same way believers are supposed to comfort their fellow brethren with the **comfort they have received** (Act 9,10-19/ 2Cor 7,6). Thus Paul is a **witness** to us Christians of the comfort of God which sustains us and carries us through life and any situation, because through Jesus' suffering HE identifies with us. According to the New Testament **the new world of God** exists in the midst of a fallen world and the Christian has to deal with severe troubles and find comfort in God (Col 1,24). The Godhead in His Trinity Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the only source of comfort for the Christian (Rom 15,4).

God Himself comforts us. He comforts us so that through us others may also be comforted. The **comfort of God is not merely for ourselves** but is also for comfort of our fellow believers in Christ.

(2Cor 1.5-7) suffering and comfort – death and life (2Cor 4,10-12;6,9), poverty and riches (2Cor 6,10;8,9) and weakness and strength (2Cor 12,9-19) are the contradictory realities which a Christian constantly has to face (2Cor 7,4). Paul knows that God will not leave him alone in his affliction. The apostle Paul considers the **the suffering** of the man Jesus and His spiritual and emotional strength that motivated Him (2Cor 11,28-29/ Phil 3,10). Especially in times of suffering the Christian can experience fellowship with the crucified and risen Christ in a special way. The risen Lord **gives strength and confidence to the afflicted** through His spirit and allows them to experience abundant comfort (2Cor 6,1-13;12,6-11/ Lk 22,31.32).

Paul makes a difference between **two kinds of comfort**:

- the divine comfort and
- the human encouragement and comfort (Is 40,1-2).

Divine comfort is the requirement for human comfort. The terms "**mercy**", "**comfort**" and "**affliction**" are not explained in detail. The multitude of possible tribulations and hardships can be understood by the term "**any affliction**".

Just like suffering has no end, there is also an abundance of comfort (1Pt 4,12-14/ 2Cor 4,7-11; 6,5-10;11,23-27/Gal 6,17/ Phil 3,10/ Col 1,24). **Just like about 2000 years ago the life of Jesus** in the Gentile and godless world was marked by suffering, so is the life of those who follow Him. Paul speaks of **fellowship in suffering for the members of the body of Christ** (2Cor 1,6). Paul knows that **no Christian will be spared from affliction**. Every Christian is threatened by apostasy or gets desperate at some point. But he also knows that God never leaves the believers alone in their time of need.

(2Cor 1.8-11) Paul was saved from a deadly danger (Act 19,23), which happened **in a province of Asia** (not only the city of Ephesus) (s.a. 2Cor 11,26). The danger was so threatening that Paul thought he must die, as far as his own human strength is concerned and what people would not normally survive (2Tim 4,6). The Corinthians knew **what Paul had suffered** (Act 19,23-41/ 1Cor 15,32/ 2Cor 11,23;12,7-10;11,28). Paul was also very sure that he could have died for the sake of the gospel in this extreme situation (2Cor 1.9) and had already accepted death.

By faith in the resurrection of the dead he overcame his depression and knew that at the end of time life and not death would triumph (1Cor 15.50-58).

(2Cor 1.11) Paul challenged the Corinthians indirectly to intercede for his ministry and to stand in the gap for him in prayer (Eph 6,18/ Jam 5,16), so that God would be more glorified.

(2Cor 1.12-14) This is about Paul and his integrity. His critics (2Cor 2,7;10,2) charged him to be proud, only self-interested, not trustworthy, spiritually imbalanced and two-faced (2Cor 10,11), contradictory, incompetent, simple and an incapable preacher.

He does not want to take the blame and calls upon his clear **conscience** (Rom 2,14,15) and all the things that God has worked in his life until now (Jer 9,22.23/ Rom 15,18/ 1Cor 1,31;15,9.10/ 1Tim 1,12-17). He wants to use this as an overlude to „**reconciliation**“ and to clear any remaining misunderstandings, so that he can speak **with a clean conscience** to say that he lived his life without ambivalent motives but with sincerity and **integrity** according to the will of God and not with carnal selfishness and human wisdom.

So that our conscience works as God had designed it, it must be informed on a high moral and spiritual level, which happens when we consciously submit to the **word of God** (Logos) and the **Holy Spirit** (Rhema) (Rom 12,1.2/ 1Tim 1,19/ 2Tim 2,15/ Hebr 9,14;10,22) and live according to it. Paul did not receive monetary support from the Corinthians so nobody could call him a freeloader and could not become a victim of manipulation.

After Paul had spoken about the **deadly danger** he now speaks about the key word "**glory**" for a good and important reason. „**Defamation**" (such as slander etc.) **can be worse** or more destructive to the life of a person than any deadly danger. In an explanatory definition of „**glory**" he hints to the restoration of honor, dignity and respect of his person in his office as an apostle.

(2Cor 1,15-24) Paul had changed plans to visit the church in Corinth several times. This might have caused anger and people thought he was not reliable (1Cor 16,5-6). Why did Paul answer in so much detail to the **charges** that one could not trust his promises? The authority of the apostle Paul was negatively affected by that. He was also charged to be **strong in his letters** but weak in person and his speeches worth nothing.

Perhaps his offenders also referred to his second visit in Corinth when there was an escalation during a confrontation with the congregation and he speedily **departed**. The tension between Paul and the Corinthians is still tangible in this letter, which reveals how deeply hurt he was by the disagreement with the Corinthians.

The **charges of the Corinthians** imply that Paul had not kept his promise to visit them. When Paul wrote the letter of **many tears** he was already determined to travel to Corinth himself. He explains why he did not do it in **2Cor 2,1-4**. When Paul departed from Ephesus later, he had come back to his original travel plans, however (1Cor 16,5-7 / Acts 20,1-3). This situation can teach us to always be **flexible and to adopt** to the leading of the Holy Spirit and the situations and conditions. Jacob teaches us: "If it is the Lord's will we will live!" (Jam 4,15) and it is also demonstrated in a practical way. Sometimes there are serious reasons that cause us to alter our plans. Sometimes **changes are still possible** and you have to be open to change. The false apostles charged Paul of **unreliability** or dishonesty and tried to take advantage of the situation.

Paul **explained to the Corinthians** that he was not a fickle, unpredictable person who cannot be trusted. Our »**Yes**« or »**No**« should be yes or no (Mt 5,37), and we should really mean what we say. Paul was not a person who determines his course of action in a »**carnal way**« or without consideration of his calling or without the spirit of God. He **calls upon God as his witness**, that his word is precise and reliable.

The saying »**God is faithful**« (1Cor 1,9;10,13/ 1Thess 5,24) has the function **of a vow** (Gal 1,20) or **promise** where God is called upon as a witness (2Cor 11,10.31/ Rom 1,9/ Gal 1,20/ Phil 1,8/ 1Thess 2,5.10). Paul also makes it clear that a **word of God is not as the word of men** and it will never be. His word is irrevocable (Lk 16,17) and different than promises of people. God does not contradict Himself.

Actually this is not primarily about the **changed travel plans** but something **more central**: the consistent **proclamation of the gospel**. The adversary always wants to **question the ministry of God** by silly things. An every day conflict such as the breach of a promise can cause a substantial life- faith and church crisis.

(2Cor 1,21-22) The Tri-une God (God ... Christ ... Spirit) **strengthens the believers** and puts their feet on solid ground (Rom 16,25/ 1Cor 15,58/ 1Petr 5,10). God »**sustains us**«, »**anoints us**«, »**seals us**«, »**and gives us the pledge of the Holy Spirit**« and gives us authority to serve for the proclamation and spreading of the gospel (Acts 1,8/ 1Joh 2,20.27). The process of „**strengthening**" is not a onetime event but a continuous process. The „**sealing**" is an old tradition for documents. A stamp in wax is proof of the author or owner, respectively it serves the authenticity and protection of the document (Eph 1,13;4,30). In a legal case the **seal** marks ownership«. Even **a small seal can seal big things** or protect letters from unwanted access by unauthorized people. **Royal authority** is conveyed to the person who has the royal seal. Important documents are sealed. The seal of the Holy Spirit bears witness of God's ownership.

A **pledge** is a warranty or downpayment that activates a contract of purchase. Therefore the Holy Spirit is the **downpayment** (literally "a first prepayment") for the believer to his eternal inheritance (Eph 1,14/ 2Petr 1,4.11).

(2Cor 1,23-2.4) The true motivation for the change of travel plans. The two-time change of the travel route which Paul had determined was not easy to understand for the Corinthians. It had **pastoral and spiritual** reasons. Paul did not return to Corinth again because he did not want to use his apostolic authority to punish them (1Cor 4,21/ 2Cor 13,2f.). As an apostle with the authority of God he could have used his power (2Cor 10,2-8/ 1Cor 5,4-5/ 1Tim 1,20) to hand out punishments to disobedient Christians. But such **authoritative behavior** is rather a characteristic of a **false apostle** and the kingdom they serve (2Cor 11,13-15), but not the ways of Christ (Lk 22,25-27) or those who stand / serve in His place (1Petr 5,3). Paul therefore ensures the Corinthians: „We are your co-workers." (1Cor 3,9), because he never worked against them or made decisions without considering them.

He wanted to spare them and not to lord it over their faith (2Cor 1.24). He also did not come earlier **so they would have more time** to come to repentance and correct their sinful behavior. And he also waited for a **report of Titus from Corinth** before he would assume further measures (Ch. 7) and hoped he would not – as before – have to come back to Corinth to **face their rebellion**.

Chapter 2

Here in **the second chapter** he reveals **the reason for the change of travel plans** and speaks of deep concern and pain that filled his heart when he wrote the letter (Verse 1-4). He then encourages them to receive **the expelled and now humbled brother** into the fellowship. Paul was very eager to come to an agreement with them concerning this matter so that the offenders would not succeed to bring division and separation as before (Verses 5-11).

He also tells about **riots in Troas** and the delightfulness of the gospel and his integrity to his calling to preach the good news (Verses 12-17).

(2Cor 2.1) The **reason for the cancellation** of his coming was that he did not want to grieve the Corinthians or himself with this visit. He also did not intend to **sin** against God and them in his **anger**. Furthermore he did not want to be offended and insulted by them (Hebr 10,33;13,17-19). This also would not have been good for the Corinthians (Hebr 13,17). Therefore Paul proved **decency** and good manners.

(2Cor 2.2-3) „For if I grieve you “, is still referring to Paul's last visit when he convicted them of their sins. As a matter of **decency** he did not want to grieve them again. The congregation should act respectably toward their **father in Christ** and follow his instruction, repent and change their actions. Then there would be joy on both sides when he returns to Corinth. A joy that would affect all members of the body of Christ (1Cor 12,26-27).

(2Cor 2.4) Paul explains once more why he his writing to them. He tells them his motivation, that he wrote them with »**great distress and anguish**« and from **the depth of his love**. After the last confrontation in Corinth Paul was concerned for the survival of the church.

(2Cor 2.5-11) The clearing up of the quarrel between the apostle and the church. After the sinner had realised his wrong and received his punishment (2Kor 7,12), Paul asked the congregation to extend grace and love to him. The church in Corinth had executed the biblical process of **church discipline** against him (Mt 18,15-20/ 1Cor 5,4-3/ 2Thess 3,6.14).

He had received his punishment and was not supposed to suffer any longer. It was time to show him grace because he had repented (Mt 18,18.23-35/ Gal 6,1.2/ Eph 4,32/ Col 3,13/ Hebr 12,11). It was time to extend forgiveness so that the man could be restored to joy (Ps 51,16.18/ Is 42,2.3). Paul knew that in church there should not be room for human limitations of God's grace, mercy and forgiveness towards a repentant sinner. With such limitations the fellowship would be robbed of their joy and unity (Mt 18,34.35/ Mk 11,25.26). Therefore the time of punishment was supposed to be replaced **by greater love**, through full forgiveness of the sinner and loving comfort. The apostle was aware that too much grief can drive a man to overwhelming desperation.

Paul **did not mention the name of the person** and also did not explain the sin he was involved in. Verse 5 tells us that the actions of the sinner had affected the whole church. This would support the assumption that the same person had also denied the authority of Paul's apostolate in front of the congregation. This had not only caused questions concerning Paul's call and commission but had also questioned the legitimacy of the church plant.

In Verse 9 Paul mentions **another motive for his letter**. He had the intention to examine the obedience of the church. He did not know how the Corinthians would react to his request to punish the sinner. But then he **heard from Titus** that the church had passed the test. The obedience towards Paul stems from obedience to the gospel the apostle had proclaimed to them (Rom 10,16).

(2Cor 2.5-11) This passage is one of the best texts of the bible concerning the **spiritual motivation and reasons for forgiveness**. Paul had left the exact means for punishment up to the church. How exactly they exercised it is not mentioned. But it was surely more than a sharp word of correction and less than a final exclusion from the church. It is very likely that for a certain amount of time **they avoided contact with the sinner**. Paul also emphasises his full agreement with the Corinthians concerning **their readiness to forgive**. Whosoever they forgive, he also forgives.

Concerning the offense he had also forgiven the offender for the sake of the church and in obedience to the risen Lord. He even said: If there is even something that needs to be forgiven. This shows that he was not motivated by selfishness. He did not **feel personally offended** and therefore did not have much to forgive. It is the evil spirit of the devil who wants to tempt us to sin and cause hostility to destroy the unity of the church. In order to accomplish this goal he uses any method – from legalism to liberalism, from intolerance to extreme permissiveness (Eph 4,14; 6,11.12/ 1Petr 5,8).

To refer to the »**intentions**« of the devil (2Cor 2,11) Paul uses the word „schemes“. The term he uses emphasises that Satan is aiming at the **mind of the believer**. But God has made a way to protect us: In the bible He exposes the tactics of Satan and also offers the healing truth. Satan is lurking everywhere to allure people out of **obedience of the will of God** to rope them in for his own ambitions and for destruction (1Cor 7,5/ 2Cor 11,2/ 1Thess 2,18).

(2Cor 2.12-13) The desperate wait for Titus. After almost three years of ministry and because of deadly danger Paul left (2Cor 1,8-11) **Ephesus** and travelled to the **harbor town Troas** (Act 16,8;20,5-12) and **Macedonia** (2Cor 7,5). There were many opportunities for the apostle Paul to work and minister. He expresses this by using a common term of missions language and calls it „**open doors**“ (1Cor 16,8,9/ Col 4,3/ Act 14,27/ Rev 3,8).

A **further reason** for his departure from Ephesus was the plan to meet Titus who delivered **the „letter of tears“ to the Corinthians** (2Cor 2,4). Paul **was concerned** about **the problems in the church of Corinth** and also how the believers would react to his instructions. Because of these concerns he was restless and weary and it weakened his ministry (2Cor 7,5.6). **His concerns** and the tension with the **church in Corinth** weighed heavy on him and distracted him so that his missionary work no longer had his full attention. He wrote this to let the Corinthians know how much he cares for this church. Because of **his restlessness and because he urgently wanted to meet Titus** Paul turned his back on the open doors in Troas to continue to Macedonia, hoping to meet Titus there.

He knew that Titus would travel through Macedonia on his way back from Corinth. **Titus** was by birth a Gentile, against whose circumcision Paul protested at the Apostolic Council (Gal 2,3). He was neutral, since he was **not** involved with the church plant there. He had successfully delivered the „letter of tears“ to win the Corinthians back to Paul. He had also finalized the **collection** for Jerusalem (2 Cor 8,6). According to the Epistle to Titus he later became the church leader at **Crete**.

(2Cor 2.14) Paul continues to give thanks and without regard to his worries he turns from the difficulties of ministry and only looks at the privileges of his identity in Christ (1Tim 1,17/ Mt 16,18/ Rom 8,37;10,14.15/ Rev 6,2).

(2Cor 2.14-7.4) The essence of the apostolate and the ministry of evangelism. This is, so to say, the »**Apologetics of the apostolate**« against the opposing missionaries at Corinth, who did not want to acknowledge Paul as a legitimate apostle. These apologetical and polemic thoughts of Paul about his office as an apostle were perhaps inspired during his anxious restlessness in Troas and he wanted to present a factual statement to the church.

(2Cor 2.14-3.6) The qualification of Paul for the apostolic ministry. According 2Cor 1,12 they charged the apostle Paul to **exercise his office with corrupt ambition**. Therefore Paul deals with his adversaries (2Cor 2,14) who also deny that he is a legitimate apostle of Christ. The main point of this offense in 2Cor 2,17 is: Paul did not appoint **himself as apostle**, rather God Himself had called the former persecutor of the Christians and had empowered him to ministry. Therefore his **first words concerning his commission** is a praise to the grace of God he received (1Cor 15,10). No person is able to call themselves to the »**ministry of reconciliation**« (2Cor 5,18) and enable themselves. **The empowerment** to ministry comes from God alone. Christ had given the church at Corinth as a visible sign for the legitimacy of his apostleship (2Cor 3,1-6).

Paul thanks God that he always **triumphs in Christ**. With this expression he includes his ministry, his calling and commission and also expresses the universal horizon of his understanding of the **apostolate**.

In the image of the **procession of triumph Jesus is the triumphant**, who defeated the former persecutor near Damascus and made him a believing Christian and an apostle to the Gentiles as well as a preacher of the good news and now leads him on in a **procession of triumph**.

Paul explains the »**illumination to the knowledge of the glory of God in the presence of Jesus Christ**« and the double effect of the message of the cross (1Cor 1,18 / 2Cor 4,1-6). Another interpretation of this image is God as the conqueror who conquered the **powers of the world** in Christ (Col 2,15) and who leads

the apostles as heralds in his **procession of triumph**. The following image of the sweet smell of the knowledge of God describes the revelation of wisdom and the power of God in the cross of Christ (2Cor 4,6).

Paul spread the **aroma of the preaching of the word** from the cross. In Hellenistic Judaism the **wisdom of God was likened** to a sweet-smelling flower or frankincense (Sirach 24,20f.). In his **function as an apostle** Paul also refers to himself as an **aroma of Christ** for God (Col 2,3), derived from the **Old Testament sacrifice terminology »a sweet aroma unto God«**

(Gen 8,21). **The smell of the sacrifice** rises to God who is pleased by it. Paul occasionally compares his **preaching ministry** to a sacrifice (Phil 2,17/ Rom 15,16). Paul was also thankful for that privilege to please God this way. The **preaching of the gospel has two effects**, to **some** it brings the message of eternal life and glorifies God and to **others** it is a stumbling block that leads to eternal death (1Petr 2,6-8/ 2Cor 2,16;4,6/ Rom 1,16).

(2Cor 2,17) Paul presupposes that God Himself had enabled him as an apostle. As such he sets himself apart from many who call themselves apostles and the many other Jewish-Christian evangelists, who **worked with letters of commendation**. They obviously made a good business with the gospel. With their smart, deceptive rhetoric they distorted the good news and mixed Jewish traditions with Paganism. He informed the Corinthians that they **are impostors**, who gained profit at the expense of the truth of the gospel and the souls of people (2Cor 3,1;10,12.18;11,7-12/ 1Thess 2,3-7). He stood before the face of God and spoke to them as an apostle of God with all due responsibilities (2Cor 12,19). Paul already guessed that his critics in Corinth would understand it **as a self-commendation**.

Chapter 3

In this chapter Paul explains the gospel versus the law and speaks of the glory of ministry in the new covenant with reflection to the old.

(2Cor 3,1-6) Paul was blamed for self-commendation (2Cor 5,12), while other preachers came with **recommendation letters of other churches** (Acts 18,27). Paul answered that the fruit of his apostolate are the churches he planted as a work of the Holy Spirit. This alone would speak for him and therefore he is not in need of **recommendation letters**, documents, presentations or other writings. Paul clearly stated that he does not need a second-hand witness. The **false teachers** blamed Paul for the lack of documents that proved his authenticity as an apostle. Paul only had the **„recommendation letters sealed by Christ“**, which is the very fact that changed the life of the Corinthians. A visible proof that Christ had transformed them. Perhaps there had been Jewish-Christian teachers who came to Corinth with recommendation letters of the Jewish churches around the time they received the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians (1Cor 1.10). They also appeared in other churches in the area (Acts15.1) and caused **trouble**. These men offended Paul in different ways than the Gnostics and liberal philosophers.

With regard to the „twelve“ in Jerusalem they doubted the authenticity of the apostolate of Paul. It fits the scene that they call on the **authority of the first apostles** against Paul. They wanted to send messengers from Jerusalem, **maybe even Peter himself**, to restore the peace and decide on open questions (2Cor 11,4). We understand that Paul therefore ironically calls them **"the great apostles"** and **points out** that he is not inferior, yes even in work and suffering even exceeds them (2Cor 11,5;11,23). How these groups are related and how influential each of them were we do not know. But we can see that they came into agreement to **oppose Paul** and prioritized his defamation over their differences and joined together to influence the church at Corinth.

Paul had to fight on **two different fronts** at the same time to defend his legitimacy as an apostle and the gospel he preached, to maintain the church on the grounds of the foundation that he had laid (1Cor 3,10). Paul's concern was not his personal reputation but rather the pure truth of God and the salvation of the entrusted church. **The whole examination** of "**Moses**" and the "**old covenant**" could not be understood a different way. The death of Jesus warrants eternal forgiveness of sins which the old covenant could not offer (Jer 31,31-34/ Mt 26,28/ Hebr 8,7-12).

(2Cor 3,3) The church at Corinth was Paul's recommendation letter of Christ. The false **teachers** could not present any recommendations by Christ but Paul had the real transformed lives of the Corinthians as living proof that Christ had changed them on the inside (1Cor 2,4.5/ 1Thess 1,5/ Jer 31,33;32,38.39/ Hes 11,19; 36,26.27). The **false** teachers adhered to the Mosaic law **as foundation for salvation** but the Corinthians proved with their lives that the salvation is an inward transformation that God works in our hearts.

(2Cor 3,7-18) A true servant of God always preaches only the new covenant. Therefore Paul highlights in these verses the **glory of the new covenant** and how the **law brings death** (2Cor 3,6), because it only leads to sin awareness. Also because nobody can meet the many requirements of the law and all would be cursed who do not keep it. Therefore it is a ministry of spiritual death (Gal 3,22/ Rom 7,1-13;8,4/ Gal 3,10-13;3,19- 4,5).

(2Cor 3,13-18) Moses had to put a veil over his face. This was also a symbolic gesture and a sign that Moses never had the same boldness as Paul, because the old covenant was still **concealed, hidden and unknown, resp. not understood** (1Petr 1,10,11/ Hebr 3,8.15;4,7). Without Jesus the Old Testament would not make sense. For the believer of the new covenant nothing is concealing the **view on Christ and His glory** which is revealed in scripture. Through the persistent, loving and trusting look to Jesus who is transforming the true believer more and more into the image of Christ through the Holy Spirit, working in them gentleness, longsuffering, forgiving love, and gracious patience. The more a believer grows in his **knowledge of Christ** the more Christ will be revealed to him in all of His divine character and life (Phil 3,12-14).

Paul did not need any recommendation letters for the Corinthians or from the Corinthians. This does not mean, however, that Paul generally rejects the idea of recommendation letters. Paul only stated that he does not need them. He mentions that "**certain people**" of the Corinthian church need recommendation letters.

"**Certain people** is perhaps referring to other missionaries who came to Corinth and went away. Also the terms used in 2Cor 11,22-23 „**Hebrew**“, "**Israelite**" and "**seed of Abraham**" are typical **Jewish references** and suggest who those missionaries and groups were that Paul was referring to. That those people need **recommendation letters** is not to be criticized in itself, because **recommendation letters** were common practice in the ancient world, so that the recommended people would be received well and receive help.

When Paul points out that he does not need such recommendation letters he separates himself from other missionaries who appear to try to compete with him. The owners and carriers of the **recommendation letters** carried those letters like documents of identity. They protected them like the apple of their eyes. Therefore Paul said his recommendation letter is **not written on dead material** such as common papyrus, parchment or stone tablets, but directly on his heart. He rightly concludes that those who believe in Jesus are a „**living letter of Christ**“ because Jesus writes on the heart of the people of the new covenant, who are a living counterpiece to the hard stone tablets of the Old Testament (Exod 31). Paul uses this **reference** to Moses and the stone tablets to justify the legitimacy and defense of **his calling and his apostolic ministry**.

Unmistakeably we can see that **his assessment and ability** for the worldwide ministry of evangelism comes from God who enabled and empowered him. Therewith Paul bestows a higher spiritual dimension on his missionary work **as a servant of God**. He does not work in his own ability because **his enablement comes from God alone**. That is why he and Timothy are also **part of the triumphant procession**.

The mark of the new covenant is that it is the covenant of the spirit of life. The old covenant was a rigid covenant of the law. The **nature of both covenants is totally different**: While the letter alone killeth, the spirit maketh alive (Gal 3,10-14). The Mosaic law exposes us as sinners who are doomed to death, so that even a sin offering could not save them. The perfect overcoming of sin, death and disease only came through the **death of Christ on the cross and His resurrection from the dead**. The requirement is to believe in this work of salvation. **People are not able to believe out of their own strength**, but they need the initiative work of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore Paul can say that the spirit of God makes alive, and he refers to Jesus Christ **as the spirit of life** (1Cor 15,45/ 2Cor 3,17). It is also the spirit of God who enables the people to live worthily as a Christian after baptism (compare Paul's statements about the work of the spirit - 1Cor 2,10.12-14; 6,11;12,1-11 / 2Cor 1,22;4,13/ Gal 5,16-26;6,8). It seems that this was a common **discussion** everywhere at that time. There were controversies with some acknowledged representatives of the Jewish Christian missionaries of the Jerusalem church and their doctrine, who continued to insist on the Mosaic law and thought of **Christianity** as a **continuation**, or even **perfection** of Judaism. According to these missionaries Jesus only fulfilled the old, Mosaic covenant. But Paul underlines the **novelty of the new covenant** compared to the old.

These **Jewish Christian missionaries** perhaps found listening ears and support among the Corinthian Christians. Paul explained to them **the content and the message of the new covenant** and showed them the huge, important, theological **differences** of both covenants. In his defense of the legitimacy of his apostolate **Paul compared himself with Moses**, the prototype of his offenders, **and compares the church**

with the synagogue as counterpiece - just like he did it in the Epistle to the Galatians (Gal 4) where he contrasts the **covenant of Sinai** and the **covenant of Christ** in a relation that presents both as mutually exclusive. Paul contrasted **letter and spirit**, which consist of righteousness by works and righteousness by faith. He comes to the conclusion that the **Mosaic law is not relevant for Christians** because their life should be influenced by the spirit and the new covenant. This does not mean, however, that the old was abolished.

For those who do not believe in Jesus the old covenant still applies. That which only exposes sin or makes us aware of it is still only a „**ministry of death**“. In addition there is a request for precise adherence to the statutes and commandments. But since it is impossible to keep these in every way, people become automatically sinners with many trespasses. **They can bring sacrificial offerings**, but the Hebrew bible does not know **the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ** on the cross and the perfect overcoming of death by the resurrection of Jesus. Only the keeping of the commandments can save them from the judgment of God. One could say with the old covenant of laws and commands the problem or disease is clearly identified but there is **no means** to remove it.

The new covenant is totally different: It is **the covenant of love**. A covenant which originated from the merciful love of God for this world. A covenant between Father and children. The people do no longer stand before God as constant **trespassers of the law**, but as His children, even if they are still disobedient. The changed life of people, not by obedience to **new laws**, but by change of heart, which makes them **a new creation**.

In 2Cor 3,1-4,6 Paul distinguishes between the Old and New Testament. He does that by contrasting the new conditions. He also interprets Exodus 34,29-35, by using passages from Exod 31, as well as from the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezechiel. He also uses the proverbs and wisdom of Solomon. He comments on Jer 31,31-33, which **prophesies the new covenant**. Paul wants to prove in this chapter, that through this new covenant **the status of the Gentiles** before God has changed. According to the old covenant the Gentiles **were cursed to death by the Mosaic covenant because of their disrespect of God**.

Jesus died for the sins of the people who were under the law. He is the ultimate sacrifice, so that no further sacrifices to propitiate God in the case of a trespass against a statute or command. But death could not triumph over Jesus Christ in spite of His death on the cross, but the divine power in Him woke Him up from the dead and He rose again to life in His glorified body.

When Jesus comes back the believers will still be sinners, but they are made righteous by the ultimate sacrifice of Christ and therefore do not have to fear the wrath of God. Who believes and becomes a Christian receives the Holy Spirit as a pledge / down payment of God (2Cor 1,22), it is the confirmation of the coming salvation. This holy, divine spirit works on the inside of the people so that Christians are enabled **"to ministry through the Holy Spirit"**. That means that they are no longer slaves to the statutes and commandments of the Old Testament and will also not be judged by it. They know they are justified before Jesus Christ and receive His merciful compassion and grace.

The **ministry of Paul** brought Jesus, and therewith God **to the Gentiles** who reconciled them with God of whom they no longer had to fear the curse of death. In his explanations Paul never went beyond „scripture“. Since he stuck with the traditioned word of God, his reasoning is also „**scriptural**“. For him the biblical **writings are witnesses of the word of God** and not the impersonation of Him. The handling of the biblical texts is a **continuous dialogue** in correspondence with concrete situations, where bible texts serve to answer and solve problems (as rhema word).

Paul calls the **"old covenant"** **"the past"** and the **"new covenant"** **"the lasting"**. To illustrate this message he reminds us of the „**veil**“ and the fleeting „**shimmer on the face of Moses**“ (Exod 34,29-35/ 1Cor 9,9/ Deut 25,4). He concludes that the old covenant is not permanent because the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross and His resurrection from the dead **superseeded it**.

Paul **proves to the Judaists**, that **the old covenant also came from God** and **also reflected the divine glory of God** (2Cor 3,7), but the fulfillment thereof was based on **human will power** and was only valid for a **time of preparation** (2Cor 3,7.11.13).

But also the **"new covenant is not lasting**, because it will be terminated when Jesus returns and ends with the **last day of judgment** (1Cor 15,24-26). That Paul still calls it „**lasting**“ is associated with our salvation and the whole work of salvation (Eph 1,21/ Col 1,16-20) and the efficacy of the Holy Spirit, which is eternal (Joh 14,16/ Hebr. 9,11-14). This is how the **new covenant works in heaven and on earth**. (Rev 21,22).

The **new covenant** and the **final completion of salvation** all originated from God's **initiative**. The same eternal, divine Lord Who established the old covenant also initiated the new. **The strong emphasis on the new covenant**, of whom **Paul is a messenger**, also shows that his opponents are perhaps servants of the old covenant. Jesus campaigned for this new covenant before His death during **the last supper** (Lk 22,20) **and sealed the covenant with His death**.

(2Cor 3,17) God is spirit, and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. The Holy Spirit is the personal tool of Christ, because He Himself is the spirit of the Lord (Rom 8,9). Jesus and His divine Holy Spirit are perfectly one in their work (Joh 15,26;16,6-15) and in the result of their efforts (Rom 8,15/ Gal 5,1). While the glory of Moses perished and faded away, it only increases with the saints in the new covenant (2Cor 4,5-6,17/ Rom 12,2/ Eph 4,23-24/ Col 3,10). Therefore it is not a surprise that Paul is so excited and convinced of the superiority of the new covenant. .

Chapter 4

(2Cor 4.1-12) According to Paul suffering belongs to the life of a Christian, this is where the Christian must **prove himself** and can experience the sustaining power of God and **must not be discouraged** (Gal 6,9-10/ Eph 3,13/ Act 20,24/ 1Cor 9,16.17/ Col 1,23.25).

(2Cor 4.3-6) The false teachers charged Paul that his gospel is veiled. Paul agrees, but it is only hidden from those, ... **who will perish**. God even caused them to be „**hardened**“ and „**blind**“. Literally translated it says: "..., **so that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, would not shine**." Jesus is referred to as "**the image of God**" .

It is also remarkable, **that Paul does not strictly make a difference between Jesus and God**. A strict separation is also not possible because Paul uses the title "Lord" ("kyrios"), with the Greek **translation of the Septuagint**, the name of God JHVH of the Hebrew bible **for Jesus Christ**. With the transfer of the title to Jesus, there is also a transfer of certain characteristics, attributes, authorities (and perhaps appearance?).

Such a transfer can be seen in 1Cor 15,24-25, where it is not clear whether God Father or Jesus Christ will overthrow the powers of darkness. It seems to be a fact that Jesus Christ as well as God Father has the power to subdue the demonic powers.

During the **time of world redemption** (and salvation) Jesus **humbled Himself in submission to God Father**. He is one with Him, but not perfectly identical. Even when He has subdued everything He will also submit to His Father (1Cor 15,28). Jesus said: „Who has seen me has seen the Father!“ This is how this oneness could still be equated with being identical.

Concerning the blindness of the people there was a different power at work. The problem with the rejection or denial of Jesus is not the message or the messenger but the hearer who is heading for hell (1Cor 2,14). They are blinded by **Satan** and the present spirit of the age (Mt 4,8;13,19/ Joh 12,31,40;14,30;16,11/ Eph 2,2/ 2Tim 2,26/ 1Joh 5,19). In order to be saved one must understand that the glory of God shone forth in Jesus Christ (Joh 1,4/ Col 1,13). The „**god and ruler of this world**“ is clearly Satan as the adversary of God (Joh 12,31;14,30;16,11). Paul refers to him as „god“. Therefore Paul is not a „**monotheist**“.

This means according to Paul's understanding that "**the god of this world is well able to act**: He has the power to blind the mind and thoughts of unbelievers. The consequence of this blindness is, that the unbelievers cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. **The blindness** does not only make them unable to see, but also **unable to become aware**. He experienced it first-hand (Act 9,1-19). **He turned blind**, and with the **recovery from blindness** of his eyes Saul of Tarsus became aware of the truth. Filled with the Holy Spirit he was baptised immediately and started preaching the gospel.

But not only the gospel is veiled, but also the New Testament. Paul says that it is veiled, hidden from the Israelites / Jews, but the meaning is obvious to the Christians (2Cor 3,12-18). For example, the Jews **knew exactly**, when the Messiah (Jesus) was supposed to be borne, but most of them were not interested in the matter (Mt 2,4-6). It is similar with the content of the gospel: The gospel is not generally veiled, but only for those who will fall under the wrath of God and perish when the last day has come. **It only applies to the unbelievers**. The gospel is not only hidden from them, but their thoughts are **downright blinded**.

That Paul would speak so open about his change of life and his preaching, while delimiting drawbacks, makes us assume that critics blamed him of double-mindedness and having **other motives** than what he claimed (2Cor 1,12-13). They implied, especially with regard to his message, that he is „**hiding**“ or

„**concealing**“ something. Maybe people from Judea had come and only knew Paul as the persecutor of Christ. Maybe his **history caught up with him** (Act 9,21-22).

(2Cor 4.6) "The light shone in the darkness!" This spells out the character of his apostolic ministry: The message of salvation of Jesus Christ should be spread in the world of darkness according to the will of God. Before **creation** there was also darkness on this earth (Gen 1.2-3/ Is 9,1; 42,6-7; 49,6.9).

God makes Himself available. It is not that we find Him. He allows us to find Him. God has **identified with us in Christ. He is distinctive.** It is His overwhelming glory, His Godhead, that shines in Jesus. **The light,** that shone to the shepherds, the wise men and disciples of Jesus, still shines to us today and there is a light in our heart. The Holy spirit is at work in us.

(2Cor 4.7-11) The believers have a treasure in earthen vessels“. This is how Paul thought of himself: low, meaningless, replaceable and dispensable (1Cor 1,20-27/ 2Tim 2,20.21). But the great power of God **exceeds and surpasses the vessel.**

The **weakness** of the messenger does no harm to their assignment, but is actually a requirement (2Cor 12,9.10). Even when **the messengers of the gospel** are fragile, weak, of no value and meaningless, this does never apply to the gospel they preach. **The power –** according to Paul it is even overflowing power – does not come from the preachers but from God. Especially the weakness of a preacher is what God wants to use, so that this will become evident. If Paul and Timothy (and the other co-workers) **displayed their own strength,** how some of the Corinthian church members expected, then it would leave the impression that the overflow of the power of the gospel comes **from people and not from God.**

(2Cor 4.8.9) Paul uses contradictory metaphors to explain how his weakness is not a hinderance, but rather a source of strength (2Cor 6,4-10;12,7-10).

(2Cor 4.10) We always carry the death of the Lord Jesus with us in our bodies. The word »**always**« indicates that Paul has suffered endless pain. This pain resulted not from the attacks against Paul and other believers but against the Lord Jesus. Those who hated Jesus took revenge on those who represented Him, the earthly messengers of God, the genuine believers (Joh 15,18-21/ Gal 6,17/ Col 1,24), so that the life of Jesus would also be revealed in our bodies.

Paul's weakness highlights Jesus' strength (Gal 2,20). The false apostles claimed that his sufferings and difficulties proved that God is not with him and that he is a deceiver. But Paul rather proves the opposite, that these same things are a sign of his faithfulness to Christ, Who is the source of his strength (2Cor 12,9.10). God always works in paradoxes and thus everything must be considered in view of the cross.

(2Cor 4.11-16) Already given over to death. Paul (respectively his body / flesh) was already delivered to death (Mt 27,2/ 2Kor 5,3). **Everyday death was before his eyes** and he was ready to pay the price for the spreading of the gospel (Ps 116,10). He did it all to the glory of God (1Cor 10,31) and did not grow weary, even if the body was falling apart due to natural aging, physical exhaustion or stress (2Cor 6,4-10;11,23-27).

But the **soul of the believer** (the spiritual inner being) is continuously renewed by the divine spirit of Jesus (Eph 4,24/ Col 3,10). We spiritually grow bit by bit, until the inner man is so mature that he becomes like Jesus in all things (Eph 3,16-20).

(2Cor 4.10-11) The deadly danger in Ephesus (1Cor 15,32/ 2Cor 1,8-11) made Paul's existence appear as some kind of apostolic self-sacrifice. This emphasized his humiliation and the exaltation of Christ **in him personally.** Paul made it clear that the **ministry of an apostle is marked by suffering and death,** for most apostles of Jesus died as martyrs.

(2Cor 4.13-15) Motivation, central theme and goal of his message. It is the work of the spirit and the God-given faith, so that he could say: "I believed, therefore I spoke." He makes reference to the „**rhema-word**“, which surely also shaped his preachings.

(2Cor 4.14) He turns his attention once more to the topic of resurrection and rapture.

(2Cor 4.15) The goal of the proclamation is giving thanks and honor and glory to God. All must serve this purpose, also his suffering. From verse 7 to 15 Paul reveals that his **whole life was marked by persecution.** Before his salvation he persecuted Christians and after his salvation he was persecuted himself.

(**2Cor 4.16-18**) Through all of these several difficulties that a person can suffer in their ministry and life and faith to God **the true „inner man is being renewed everyday and his spirit matures**. This also happens when our body, the exterior and material possessions are under attack, or also as a consequence of persecution. Paul knew that we can expect from God an abundant reward for all of that.

(**2Cor 4.17-18**) **Paul expresses that our tribulations** (trials, adversity, suffering) are momentary and temporary. With his **own testimony** the apostle lists a long catalogue of suffering and persecution from his own life (2Cor 11,23-33). But the **future glory** is „an eternal glory that far outweighs them all“ (Rom 8,17.18/ 1Petr 1,6.7;4,13).

This „**glory**“ cannot be attained through certain personal achievement. At first a man must fully convert to Jesus and then spread the gospel. **Evangelism and mission**, that means leading other people to Christ, which is an essential aspect of Christian life. This procures an overflowing measure of the weight of glory for the believer, especially the missionary (Dan 12,3).

The **visible** is our temporary field of influence and the **invisible** is the eternal, future field of influence of God. One is perishing, the other is eternal (2Cor 4,18). Therefore the present life is „**increasing death**“ to Paul. A life where the life of Jesus is revealed in our perishing flesh. It is a „**theology of the cross**“, where **belonging** is expressed in the discipleship of Christ. What happened to Jesus also happens to us in similar or other forms. This creates an **identification** between us and Him (2Cor 4,7-12). With all the tough situations in which Paul was clueless, oppressed or persecuted, he showed them how **he dealt with all the threats and persevered**. Despite the pressure in his ministry he was not crushed (2Cor 4,8).

Paul explains his **suitability** for apostleship especially **with regard to the tribulation** which the ministry brings and especially how Jesus sustained him through all of it. Wherever Paul went, he did not only proclaim the gospel with **his mouth** but also with his maltreated body that carried the message: "Jesus Christ suffered and was crucified." But God rose Jesus from the dead and **therefore took away the power of death for all eternity**.

His **description** (directly or indirectly) about the **three different types / groups of people**:

1. In the beginning he speaks of himself. He explains how he never lost courage in the work that he was assigned to do.

2. Indirectly Paul also says something **about his adversaries** respectively his offenders.

We can extract **three charges** against him:

- He used deceitful methods.
- He does his own thing without a qualm.
- He distorted the message of the gospel.

3. Furthermore Paul speaks of those **who refused to accept and acknowledge the gospel**. He emphasises that he had preached the gospel in such a way that everybody who listened to their conscience would have to admit that his request and appeal to them was justified. However, many remained deaf and blind towards the message and its glory.

The authors of all biblical writings are aware that there is a power of darkness on this earth. This power is referred to as **Satan, Lucifer or also devil**. This creature of wickedness has blinded the senses of man so much that they are no longer able to believe. In the Gospel of John Jesus mentions the prince of this world and his defeat three times (Joh 12,31;14,30;16,11).

With reference to Jesus Paul underlines the thought that in Him we can perceive who and how God is (Joh.14,9). He speaks of a light that shines in our hearts. Therefore he was so convinced: „**I do not proclaim myself – I proclaim Christ**.“ This is how we **have a treasure in earthen vessels** ... (2Cor 4,7-5,8).

This is the onyl way to understand his statements (instructions / explanations) (the paradoxes):

- We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed.
- Perplexed, but not in despair.
- Persecuted but not abandoned
- Struck down but not destroyed.

Because of pride we often point to our human strenght and the powers that man is able to subdue, but the **actual characteristic of man** is not his power and strength, but rather his weakness. In the 1st Epistle to the

Corinthians Paul also pointed out that the main point of his message is **Jesus Christ crucified** (1Cor 1,23). His own life served as an example and warning how the divine power of God can be made manifest in human weakness, when our own will freely makes way to the holy will of God (2Cor 12,9-10).

Paul visibly wore **the death of Christ on his own body**, which means that his body was full of scars that originated from the wounds he received because of his testimony. Marks from countless beatings and injuries from stoning (Gal 6,17). The apostle acknowledged especially **his suffering and his weakness** as special evidence for the authenticity of his apostleship (1Cor 1,26-29/ 2Cor 3,18). In this the apostle also believed that his own suffering **would also be a blessing to the Corinthians** (2Cor 1,5-6/ Eph 3,10/ 2Tim 2,10). Yet Paul states he suffers on behalf of Jesus. Thereby he connects the church / the body of Christ with Christ (Mt 25,40).

Chapter 5

This expressly reveals how the power, strength and might of Jesus is glorified in the life of the believer and redeems them of all that is perishable, old and carnal and transfers the blessed believer into a new dimension of living (2Cor 5,1-4). At the end every faithful servant will be **revealed at the judgment seat of Christ** and be lead into the eternal, spiritual, heavenly kingdom of God (2Cor 5,9-10). In eternity and infinity as well as after resurrection **we will think and measure differently**.

Believers will not **know each other according to the flesh**, they will be transferred into the realm of new creation (2Cor 5,16-17/ Gal 6,15/ Col 1,19;3,10/ 2Petr 3,13/ Rev 21,3). The true servants of God are co-workers of Christ, His ambassadors in a fallen world. They have a **ministry of reconciliation** (2Cor 5,18-21) which they accepted and obeyed. They will then have finished their work and receive their reward.

(2Cor 5,1-8) Their tent will be destroyed. „**Tent**“ is a metaphor for the body and our earthly existence. It is only temporary (2Petr 1,13,14;2,11). In the new world in the house of God we will receive a glorious, eternal, spiritual body (1Cor 15,35-50). „**House**“ means firm, secure, safe and consistent as opposed by an instable, unsteady tent (Rom 8,19-23/ 1Cor 15,35-50/ Phil 3,20,21). The „**house**“ is also not made by man. It is a work of God alone. **Paul was hoping for his spiritual body, not for immaterialness**. In the resurrection the believer will have a glorified, spiritual body. All believers will receive such **clothing from God**.

When we die we leave „**naked**“, **without our human shell and depart from this world**. In the resurrection God will rise us up and clothe us with an eternal, heavenly and perfectly suited body. The **kind of cloting** we receive will be determined by our works for the Lord (Dan 12,3). When we do not do anything we will stand before God „**naked**“ and **empty** (Rev 3,18;16,15). While Jesus prepares **a heavenly home for us in heaven** (Joh14,2-3) His Holy Spirit prepares us for this heavenly home here on earth. The hidden, glorified spiritual body **is not part of the current creation** (Mk 14,58/ Hebr 9,11/ vgl. Joh 2,19/ Col 2,11), which is full of error, weakness and failure (Rom 7,24;8,23).When finally our **calling with God** (our assignemnt) is finished, all earthly and carnal things will end. Therefore everything in this world is only „**temporary**“ (Phil 1,21-23). The time we have here is given by grace and „only“ an important touchstone for eternity in the infinite breadths of the spiritual kingdom. If Paul was given a choice he might perhaps have ended his life as a pilgrim immediately to return to the Lord, to return to the house of his Father (Phil 1,21-23). But his calling assigned him to endure everything on earth with patience to be a blessing for others (Phil 1,24/ Eph 3,1-13).

(2Cor 5,5) The „deposit“ (the pledge, the down payment)of the spirit is given to the believer from God Himself. This „deposit“ is a „**foundational equipment**“ for the new life with Christ. Whoever is willing to be lead by the Holy spirit, remains faithful and alive in faith through the Spirit and leads a life of merciful love with the help of Christ, will be **clothed** accordingly after the physical „**divestiture**“ and not stand naked and helpless in an ugly condition.

The **gift of the Spirit**, given to us in advance is the assurance that God will finish His plan of salvation. This deposit grants us security **that the work of redemption will be completed**. Like a **golden thread** the topic **reconciliation** is mentioned several times between chapter 5,11 to 7,4.

(2Cor 5,9-11) Genuine Christians seek neither honor nor reward they only follow God and that which honors God and pleases Him. Every serious Christian knows that he will stand before God (the judge) with all the **works** that the believer **has done during their time of ministry on earth**. **Our sins** will not be taken into account, because their judgment **was on the cross** (Eph 1,7). This matter is completely taken care of. Therefore a Christian has to take his lifestyle and attitude **after his conversion** very seriously. One day we will be judged by our works, more by our actions than our words, because they have an effect on our own eternity (1Cor 4,3-5/ Rom 12,1,2/ Rev 22,12). Paul also told the Corinthians that their **eternal reward** would

be affected and impaired when they **follow** false teachers and believed those false, carnal preachers (1Cor 4,3-5/ vgl. Rom 12,1.2/ Rev 22,12).

Paul wanted them to **know the truth about him**, and how those false Christians (often deceptive and corrupt) only sought their own advantage and loved to praise themselves (Mt 5,20;6,1/ Mk 7,6.7).

(2Cor 5.11-13) Paul forcefully protests against the charge that he is insincere. He sees his life as an apostle marked with the "**fear of the Lord**", which means he is well aware that he will have to appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive a reward.

(2Cor 5.13) At this point Paul writes as someone who has completely **devoted himself to the truth** (Joh 8,48/ Acts 26,22-24).

(2Cor 5.14) He thinks of **the love of Christ** to all believers, which he proved on the cross (Rom 5,6-8). **Jesus substitutional death out of pure love** for His children motivated Paul to serve Him (Gal 2,20/ Eph 3,19). Because all those who died for Christ or die in Him will receive the transferred blessing through Jesus' substitutional death on the cross for our sins (Rom 3,24-26;6,8). It says: »**One died for all, and therefore all died**« (2Cor 5,19-21/ Joh 10,11-16/ Acts 20,28).

(2Cor 5.15) Paul's defense **of his integrity** was to point out to the Corinthians that his old, self-oriented life was over and that all he wished from his whole heart was the life of a righteous. For all genuine Christians their death in Christ is not only death to sin, but also resurrection to a new life of righteousness (Rom 6,3.4.8.10/ Gal 2,19.20/ Col 3,3).

(2Cor 5.16) Since his conversion it was **his primary aim** to meet the spiritual needs of the people (Acts 17,16/ Rom 1,13-16; 9,1-3;10,1). Paul did not meet Jesus during His life on earth and he was not interested in people **according to the flesh**. He did not associate with people who were carnal-minded. **He no longer judged people according to** exterior, human or worldly measures (2Cor 10,3). Perhaps this is why he does not write much about Jesus the man, His virgin birth, ancestry or earthly ministry. He was more interested in the spiritual, risen and glorified Jesus.

(2Cor 5.17) If anyone is in Christ he has become a new creature. God, who made all things through Jesus (Joh 1.3), has restored his creation, which had fallen out of order due to sin (Col 1,15-20). Through Jesus man is again **part-taker** of the divine nature (2Petr 1,4) and is thus „**born again**“ (Joh 3,3/ Eph 2,1-3/ Tit 3,5/ 1Petr 1,23/ 1Joh 2,29;3,9;5,4/ Gal 6,15/ Eph 4,24). The Greek grammar tells us that this new creature (the new creation through the rebirth of the soul in the spirit, respectively through baptism by filling with the Holy Spirit) is a continuous, steady condition.

Paul called the time before conversion and baptism the "**old**" and the time after the "**new**". The characteristic of the "**new**" is that man is "**in Christ**" through surrender of his life to Christ in love and acknowledging Him as "**Lord**". The believer is a new creature.

The "**new covenant**" was already promised and its foundations laid in the Old Testament (Is 43,18-19; 65,17). The whole **work of salvation** in Jesus and through His Holy Spirit opens a new **dimension of life** to the believer (Is 48,3-9,18-19;42,6-9;44.2; 48,3,6-7). These new reality is a new „**order**“ (Phil 3,3-9/ Gal 6,16) which is initiated by God and the Christian only has to come into agreement. The Christian has **a new spiritual perception** and lives for the realities of eternity and not temporary things. **Man is made new** through the **Holy Spirit by obedience and faith** which produce fruits (Eph 2,10/ Jam 2,14-26).

(2Cor 5.18-21) The whole transformation comes from God. All aspects of conversion and the new life of the Christian in Christ are sovereignly executed by God. Sinners **cannot decide of themselves** to become part-takes of the new creation (Rom 5,10/ 1Cor 8,6;11,12/ Eph 2,1). It can only be accomplished through the **divine ministry of reconciliation**, the preaching of the gospel (1Cor 1,17). The „**reconciliation of humanity with God**“ is the main message and purpose of the whole revelation and ministry of Jesus (Joh 10,11.15;17,9/ Act 13,48;20,28/ Rom 8,32.33/ Eph 5,25). Whoever does not receive **the salvation work, will have to pay the price in eternity**.

Paul's offenders seem to blame him for not drawing enough attention to „**Jesus the Jew**“. They say he did not know Jesus according to the flesh. But for Paul it was not about **understanding Jesus according to Judaism**, because this characterised the old, separated humanity (Jews and Gentiles). Through Jesus all **race barriers** are abolished, Jews and all other nations have the same chance now.

The message **that God has reconciled people to Himself** is exactly what Paul preaches and it is distinct. This **terminology of reconciliation** contains numerous references to his experience on the road to Damascus. He used to be the enemy of Jesus and persecutor of the church, yet Jesus pursued him and reconciled him to Himself.

(2Cor 5.21) Jesus did not sin. He much more **became sin before God and for the people and was not merely a sacrifice.** Jesus in His fullness of being man and God became sin, there was a transfer / role reversal so that the sin of humanity could be abolished. Therefore the **whole world became sinless**, and God no longer counts the trespasses of the people. **Now sin is only** to not receive Jesus **as savior**, which means that somebody rejects and denies the reconciliation. Only for this reason people are lost (Joh 3,36; 6,29; 8,24; 11,25;16,9).

Chapter 6 – This chapter addresses the co-workers of God.

(2Cor 6.1-2) A typical question to co-workers is: „Should it all have been **in vain** ?“

False apostles **sneaked** into the church and preached a different gospel. They promoted themselves and tried to have got it made and flourish on behalf of other people. Paul had good reasons to believe that some Corinthians would follow their example (Gal 2,2/ Phil 2,16/ 1Thess 3,5). Paul challenges the Corinthians not to despise the grace of God by turning towards the legalistic **Judaism** (2Cor 3,12-16/ Gal 3,1-6). To do this would be to reject the grace of God or to have received it in vain.

(2Cor 6.3-13) We did not put stumbling blocks in your way. Paul was saying it more with regard to his **assignment** to the work of God than referring to his own person. Of course he was aware that to many the message of the cross would be a stumbling block **of which he would have to justify himself in worldly courtrooms.** But with the help of God he would endure it all patiently.

(2Cor 6.5) Paul lists 6 concrete sufferings he took on for his ministry. Paul refers to "**beatings**"; physical chastisement (2Cor 11,24/ Acts 16,22). He also mentions "**riots**" and **uproars**, which sometimes occurred after the preaching of Paul (Acts 13,50; 14,5.19; 16,19-20; 17,5-9.13;18,12-17;19,23-20,1).

He **lists 9 tests**, which he divides into **three groups**. They are followed by 9 character traits in the verses **6-7** and then 9 pairs of paradoxes in the verses **8-10**.

In 2Cor 11,22-27 the same sufferings are mentioned again. This time they are usually divided in **groups of 4**. He usually starts with **general difficulties**: tribulations, fears, needs or hindering circumstances. Then he mentions 3 specific ways of persecution that an apostle has to face over and over again: beatings, imprisonment, and being chased. In Phillipi he even had to endure all three (Act 16,19-23).

The third group describes **the burdens** he has to carry as part of his office. Paul has never been an enemy of hard work and effort, he even endures sleepless nights and times of fasting. These 9 tests are contrasted by **9 inner qualities** (2Cor 6.6-10).

The first 8 form **two groups of each 4**. Integrity refers to practical righteousness and knowledge refers to knowing people in a way that leads to sensitivity when dealing with them. Long-suffering literally means to suffer as long as possible with peace of mind and it is actually the ability to endure the trespasses and unrighteousness imposed by others without seeking revenge. Kindness is an act of love (Gal 5,22/ Eph 5,18).

(2Cor 6.14-16) This refers to **believers and unbelievers** ... Righteousness and unrighteousness ... **Light and darkness** ... **Christ and „Beliar“** ... - these are primarily theological matters. Paul is decided: A believer can only be equally yoked with a fellow Christian (Mt 11,29-30). And in order to practically explain it to the Corinthians, Paul formulates **five rhetorical questions** in which he reflects the difference between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan (Col 1,13).

The word **Beliar** is a term from the Old Testament referring to a **useless / lawless person** and was also used to refer to Satan. The term **Beliar** is only mentioned here in the bible. This name is perhaps derived from the Hebrew word "**belijja'al**" which means **ruin or futility**.

"**Unbelievers**" in 2Cor 6,14 are therefore **immoral people** within a church community as well as Gentiles who worship idols. Believers and unbelievers are **incompatible**. Paul uses a combination of quotes from the **Old Testament scriptures concerning the separation of the people of God** from the other people of the region (Is 52,11/ Ez 20,34.41).

(2Cor 6.16-18) What does the temple of God have in common with idols? But we are the temple of the living God (Lev 26,11-12/ Ez 37,27). The believer and the church are the temple of God (Is 52,11;43,6/ Ps 89,30-34/ Is 20,41/ 2Sam 7,14). Who belongs to God is set apart. Our **relation with God** requires a spiritual and emotional separation from our old, sinful **past** (such as traditions) and the present world system.

Through faith in Jesus and His work we have a different understanding of **the present**, because we are only here **for a temporary period of time**, where the old still applies, the new is already there but not yet fully revealed. But it is yet time to live a life reconciled with and justified by God. As a servant of God Paul uses **his spiritual armor to the fullest**. He uses the **inspired word of the spirit** as the ultimate weapon for attack and defense.

This is referring to the "**weapons of divine righteousness**", "weapons" (such as speech, etc.) that were given to us by Jesus and originated from God and are approved by Him (Rom 8,1). The full belonging to Christ can only be realised through weakness, which is the sign of the cross, and through the power of God.

True believers are not unequally yoked. For this reason God did not allow to yoke two different animals in Deuteronomy 22,8-11/ Lev 19,19). It is possible, however, that Paul is referring to his **offenders** which he called false apostles and led by Satan in 2Cor 11,13-15. Such **uncommon metaphor** must be understood in context with the whole content of this letter (2Cor 6,14-7,1).

Chapter 7

The apostle comes back to the relationship between him and the Corinthians which was established through the church plant. He tries to strengthen and renew the relationship by opening his heart to them and sharing how he felt concerning their condition. At the same time he makes effort to help heal the wounds he caused with his first letter (Verse 2-9). He rejoices to see **the fruit of godly sorrow** in them (Verses 10-16).

(2Cor 7.1) The promises of the Old Testament were quoted in 2Cor 6,16-18. He wanted to encourage the believers to act (Rom 12,1/ 2Pet 1,3). This also means that they had to purify themselves from idols and idol feasts, temple prostitution, sacrifices and worship traditions that were of false religion and false teachers, but also from carnal desires of the flesh etc, so that they could offer a pleasing sacrifice of self-denial unto God. When a believer strives to imitate Jesus / God, their faith can be "**perfected**" (2Cor 8,6 / Lev 20,26/ Mt 5,48/ Rom 8,29/ Phil 3,12-14/ 1Joh 3,2.3).

(2Cor 7.2) Paul mentions several aspects that justify his case: He did not treat anybody wrong or hurt them, caused them to sin or did them harm. In **2Cor 2,13** Paul tells how **his spirit** did not find rest and in **2Cor 7.5** he reports that **his flesh** found no rest. The explanation could be the **different situation in Macedonia compared to Troas:** **In Troas** there were **many open doors for Paul to preach** and the area seemed to **be friendly** so that he did not have to fear physical threats. In Macedonia Paul seemed to have endured **several physical threats** which caused him to fear – additional to the concerns about the situation with the church at Corinth and the well-being of Titus on his journey.

(2Cor 7.5-16) How Paul's joy was restored. The rapport which he interrupted in 2Cor 2,13 is continued here. Insight and repentance in the form of return to the truth, change of attitude etc had taken place. A disposition of comfort and contentment was restored.

(2Cor 7.8.9) He could rejoice again despite all that had happened. He had forgiven and also asked the church to forgive the one who had also caused the rebellion and to restore their relationship with him. **Repentance** (inner return) is always an **action**. It includes realization, regret, conclusion, change of mind, right thinking, speaking and acting etc. Then repentance is surely real.

(2Cor 7.12-16) Paul was the offended one, the one who was hurt, and he was also the one who communicates forgiveness to the offender. He could forgive him, which means that God would also forgive this person (Mt 5,24). Only according to this kind of repentance forgiveness and reconciliation of a relationship can take place. Otherwise our sins are forgiven **by God** but relationships are not restored and we would have inner peace with God but no outward / practical peace with people.

Chapter 8

In the following **chapters 8 and 9** Paul gently exhorts the Corinthians to give for the saints in Jerusalem. What we can find here is the most detailed **example in the New Testament concerning Christian giving**. The grace of God alone should be our motivation to give generously. He especially addressed **the churches in Macedonia** in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17,11). The province was impoverished after many wars and was exploited by the Roman occupation and industry. Even these suffering churches gave

selflessly. **This collection** for the poor in Judaea was an endeavor that was dear to Paul's heart because he had agreed on that with the other brethren (apostles) at the Apostolic Council (Gal 2,10). It seemed to be a free, **apparently one-time initiative with primary social aim**, which means it was really just to meet the needs of the impoverished Christians in Jerusalem. The **principle of the apostle** concerning the mutual material help between the churches **is compensation**. Surely the apostle Paul had taken this principle **from the first church**, so that nobody in the church would have to suffer need and that Christians should help each other (Acts 2,44).

The Corinthian church members gave out of **their overflow** of money and helped the financial **"lack"** of the Jerusalem church. Therefore they would receive an abundance of grace which would fill their own need for salvation. Mutual help is also an expression of compassionate **care for all members of the body of Christ** and is also in line with the godly role model. In a self-centered and egoistic world such a mutual service is **extraordinary for outsiders**.

In relation to the collection Paul speaks of a "grace of God". Honest, joyful giving is always a **"grace"** (2Cor 8,1), **that is initiated by God**. Generosity is a work of the Holy Spirit, on one hand it is a gift of God and on the other it is also the work of man. The exhortation regarding the collection started with the key word: **"grace"**, and ends with **"Thanks be to God"** (2Cor 9,15) because the Macedonian churches had donated more than Paul had expected. They gave **»generously«** towards God and others.

(2Cor 8,3-8) Paul highlights 3 **aspects and concepts of giving**:

- There were free offerings out of their own possessions (personal means). They gave according to **their own measure** and not a fixed amount or percentage (Lk 6,3, / 1Cor 16,2)
- **They even gave »beyond their possessions«**. Such offerings are **sacrifices** (Mt 6.2-4). This giving is free and not forced or manipulated (2Cor 9,6/ Gen 4,2-4;8,20/ Exod 25,1,2;35,4.5.21.22;36,5-7/ Numb 18,12/ Deut 16,10.17/ 1Chr 29,9/ Pro 3,9.10;11,24/ Lk 19,1-8). The Macedonian churches had almost pressed Paul to **participate in the collection**. Free offerings are not **"Tithes"** (Lev 27,30). **"Tithes" belong to God**, offerings (alms) are for our fellow men.
- For the Macedonian Christians giving an offering was not a **duty**, but a **privilege** (2Cor 9,7), a grace given from God. It was a **"love offering"**. They offered themselves as a sacrifice and made themselves available for God so that He could minister to others (Rom 12,1,2/ 1Petr 2,5). This **love offering was a sign and expression** of godly fellowship and the unity of the people of God. **With the appeal to give Paul also wanted to test the sincerity of the love of the church.**

True, genuine giving is most of all a work of grace of the Holy Spirit, the power of God. It helps the believer to become a part-taker in the history of salvation by giving himself like Jesus gave Himself on the cross (Phil 2,5-11/ Joh 17,5). **Generosity to give** is part of the **devotion** for Jesus Christ, for God (2Cor 8,5), and the best **reaction to the devotion of Jesus Christ for us**.

(2Cor 8,9-10) An indication to eternity and the pre-existence of Jesus Christ. As the second person in the Trinity Christ is just as rich as God. All belongs to Him and He has all power, authority, sovereignty, glory, honor and majesty (Is 9,5/ Mi 5,1/ Joh 1,1;8,58;10,30;17,5/ Col 1,15-18;2,9/ Hebr 1,3) and yet he became poor. This refers to the incarnation of Christ (Joh 1,14/ Rom 1,3;8,3/ Gal 4,4/ Col 1,20/1Tim 3,16/ Hebr 2,7). He stripped Himself of His divine privileges and left His heavenly throne, became a man and died on the cross like a **criminal** (Phil 2,5-8). Through his **sacrifice and His poverty** the believers are now spiritually rich (Phil 2,5-8). They become rich through their salvation, forgiveness, joy and peace in their hearts (1Cor 1,4.5;3,22/ Eph 1,3/ 1Pt 1,3.4). They become co-heirs of Christ (Rom 8,17). The **riches of Christ** are not related to His life on earth but His divine existence before incarnation.

(2Cor 8,11) The Corinthians had to **finish the collection they started**. When we starts something we should also finish it, which is also a divine principle (Lk 9,62/ 1Cor 16,2).

They needed this reminder because perhaps they had stopped donating under the influence of the false teachers, the disagreements and tension.

(2Cor 8,12-15) They should give **readily- and freely**. When we give the true inner **heart attitude** is important and not the amount (2Cor 9,7/ Mk 12,41-44). The possession of the believer is the source of giving. Believers do not have to go into debt to give to others. They also should not exhaust themselves financially and become poor. God does not require us to fall into poverty. Christians should share their blessed abundance with those who have less (1Tim 6,16,18/ Exod 16,18). The collection in Corinth **was perhaps taken at least twice**, since Paul asks them to finish the collection.

(2Cor 8.16-24) The **deliverers and recipients of the collection** should be honest, reliable and **needy people**. Paul denies all claims against himself and also protects his co-workers. Even the delivery of the collection should be honorable and commendable to the **glory of God**. To avoid any negative assumptions Paul sent Titus and **two more brothers** as witnesses to Corinth. They were perhaps appointed by Paul but not by the **church of Corinth**. The two brothers of the faith were perhaps „missionaries“ from other local Macedonian churches. In this function they were assigned to a temporary ministry. It raises a few questions that Paul intentionally **does not mention the names** of those two brothers. They remain anonymous, even though the **second brother** is referred to as "eager" and "approved". The reference "our brother" suggests that he is a good co-worker of many years of Paul. It seems that this man was also very active in the spreading of the gospel.

Chapter 9

Here the focus is again on the **collections in Corinth**. The collections of the Corinthians had motivated **other churches** in Achaia to give. Achaia was a province of the Roman Empire and encompassed the regions Attika, Boeotia and Peloponnes, and also vast regions of today's Middle and South Greece. It still evolves around the completion of the collection. They **made preparations** to safely bring this "**offering**" to Jerusalem.

(2Cor 9.4) Paul wants to visit the church in Corinth to collect the offering.

(2Cor 9.5) The collection should be generous and not as a "gift of greed", but rather out of a pure and joyful heart (Ps 10,/ Eccl 5,9/ Mi 2,2/ Mk 7,22/ Rom 1,29/ 1Cor 5,11;6,9.10/ Eph 5,3-5/ 1Tim 6,10/ 2Petr 2,14).

(2Cor 9.7-8) "Give" what you have determined in your heart. The term »determined« literally translated is a New Testament term and refers to an **intentional, predestined plan of action** that is free and not reluctantly. It builds on the ancient biblical **principle of giving** (Exod 25,2).

(2Cor 9.9-11) Paul refers to scriptures from the O.T. (Ps 112,9;55.10/ Hos 10,12), to support his statement about the **principle of giving. God will give back to a righteous giver** and rewards him here on earth as well as in eternity. Paul believes that the measure of blessing one sows will also come back. The **offering is the seed** which then produces fruit which can be harvested. The sowing and reaping in "**abundance of blessing**" is contrasted by sowing and reaping sparingly.

(2Cor 9.12) Bringing an offering is a priestly ministry. You stand in the gap for someone materially. Paul looked at the collection for Jerusalem as a spiritual and godly endeavor that was primarily an offering to God to give him honor. It was far more than just meeting an earthly need of the „saints“. The offering also represented part-taking in the "**mission to the Jews**". Jerusalem was about to fall and the destruction in 70 AD was at hand. Thousands of pilgrims travelled there for the traditional Jewish feasts. There were still many Jews who lived there (Acts 2,1,5-11). This was a last **offer of mercy** to the city and the Jews, which was also demonstrated by the collection.

(2Cor 9.13-15) The collection offered an important opportunity to the Corinthians to examine the authenticity of their faith and prove it (Jam 1,22/ 1Joh 2,3.4). The **collection** was also a **strong confession** of their faith **towards the Jews** that they took the word of the apostle seriously (Gal 2,10) and that their conversion was real. Paul compares the **offering of the believer** with God's offering of His son Jesus Christ (Rom 8,32). Who truly believes freely participated in the collection. Living **faith** does not only consist of faith in the innocent, sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but also **a certain social attitude**, a sense of responsibility that grows from the pure, merciful and selfless love of Jesus.

Chapter 10

(2Cor 10-13) A typical **self-description of Paul**. In the ancient world marriage had a certain importance and only with understanding of this historical background we can understand Paul's statement. The ending of the letter should leave a positive impression of a **true apostle** as Paul wanted them to see him – with a glimpse of **power and weakness**. Therefore this chapter is more about his **character** than his charisma or ability to speak.

The **main concern** of Paul **was his identification with Christ** and it can be seen throughout this letter like a golden thread (Gal 2,20). He also wants to show them how "**weakness**" positively affects the practical life of a Christian. On one hand he confidently communicated measures of punishment (2Cor 10,1-6;12,19-13,6) so

that he appeared "**energetic**" (2Cor 10,7-11,15;12,11-18). And on the other hand he **admitted that he had indeed been weak in a certain way**. But the nature of this weakness should be considered a positive thing (2Cor 11,16,12,10;13,7-10). It really seems that Paul had left a rather unimpressive impact on them when he was there. Their impression of him had been weak. **The letters, however, seemed to have a more impressive appeal**. Unfortunately they had **misunderstood his patience and gentleness** and interpreted it as weakness. They even blamed him to be a coward and that he only appears courageous when he writes to them from afar (V. 10).

In this chapter we also see that Paul is in no way an apostle with a perfect track record. As an apostle he was questioned over and over again and experienced many setbacks during church plants and was also strongly opposed by demonic forces. In addition he also struggled with physical sickness. Therefore he proclaimed the grace and mercy of God.

The offender, whose disobedience had caused Paul to write the „letter of tears“(2Cor 2,5-8) is not mentioned anymore in chapters 10-13. It almost seems that these chapters form a separate letter or that Paul had been interrupted for a longer period of time in the writing process and now only wants to prepare the Corinthians for his upcoming visit (2Cor 1,15.16;2,1-3).

With a **sudden sharp tone** Paul addresses the **offenses** against his person and office once more. But this time he is not referring to the congregation but rather offenders from **the outside** who tried to capture the church for themselves. It is noticeable that the number of adversaries is larger than those of 2Kor 7,5-16 as it also can be seen in chapters 8 and 9. In **chapter 10** he comes back to his original theme. The authenticity and the subsequent authority of the apostolate would allow him to exercise judgment against all who questioned him, after he had restored the obedience of those who were ready to hear (Verse 1-11). Paul made it clear that he did not **live according to the flesh** but only has a fleshly body. This only makes him one with the carnal nature of all men who are bound to their **physical bodies**. He characterises **his life and walk as a battle**. The comparison of the life of a Christian with a battle **is a usual terminology of the New Testament** (vergl.Eph 6,10-18/ 1Tim 1,18/ 2Tim 2,3.4;4,7).

But a follower of Jesus does not hold material / visible weapons in his hand but fights with spiritual (invisible) weapons. What exactly those weapons are is not further explained but he says that they are **mighty**. The purpose of these weapons is the destruction of **strongholds**“ (Eph 6,13-17/1Thess 5,8/ 1Cor 1,18-2-16/ 2Cor 6,7).

Nowhere does the New Testament encourage believers to attack demons or Satan (Jud 9), but rather to battle fallacy with truth, to face the evil and wrong of the enemy with the goodness and truth of God. Our spiritual battle (Joh 17,17/ Hebr 4,12) is against conclusions, thoughts, imaginations, assumption, points of views, philosophies and false religion. It's in the **idealistic theological strongholds** where worldly people hide from God and the gospel in their stubbornness, pride and ignorance (1Cor 3,20). This metaphor was easy to understand for the Corinthians, since **Corinth was situated on a hill and had a stronghold in the south of the city** as most ancient cities did. The term "**stronghold**" refers to thoughts, opinions, attitudes and dispositions.

A "**stronghold** „ serves the protection and defense of a city so that it cannot be overtaken. Paul assumes that **through the preaching of the gospel all strongholds must come down**. This would also apply to the strategy in battle in the literal meaning. If a stronghold is besieged and isolated by attackers, they will have to surrender and give up their defenses. The mighty **spiritual strongholds** in which the armies of hell are hiding, can only be brought down by **spiritual weapons** in the hand of devoted Christians. In **the case of the Corinthians** this is referring to misled Christians, who have grounded their wisdom in human understanding. Human understanding instead of real belonging to Christ and to follow Him in all weakness and humility. Under the **banner of the cross** Paul's weaknesses and suffering **turn into** power and strength. Through the **mighty work of Christ** in him he speaks of co-winning and co-triumph with Jesus. Therefore thinking that is aligned with Christ is "**spiritual strength**“to Paul and the only power that enables people to serve and suffer on behalf of the gospel.

(**2Cor 10,7-16**) Paul did not abuse his apostolic authority or relied on his personal strength, which would never suffice. He also did not **meet the expectations of his offenders** and did not accommodate them. He rather ignored them and did not pay them much mind.

He showed them **how presumptuous** they were, with their "**self-recommendations**" and said: If someone wants to measure himself against him, he should apply the **right measurement** (Messrute/Maßstab) (2Cor 10,12-18;11,21-29).

He lived and worked **as an apostle / messenger** only by instruction and guidance from God. He showed

them that **their standards were carnal** and **not spiritual**. These "**certain people**" should only compare and measure themselves against themselves. The incomplete and partly difficult **sentence construction** in verse 13 to 16, as well as the structure of 2nd Corinthians Chapters 10 to 13 perhaps reveals that the apostle was still **emotionally charged**. Paul repeats that he is only **bound to the assignment of Christ**, who is the only source for human glory.

To **glory in himself** apart from his calling is out of question for him. When Paul fulfills his **divine assignment** with **all effort** and under great **personal sacrifice**, then it is only his duty before God. In all of this Paul only **glories in the cross and the Lord**. Paul also points out that **he did not receive the authority to establish** the church in Corinth and **not to destroy it**. His authority only referred to the church development and therefore the enforcement and spreading of the gospel. Paul also calls on **the judgment** of the Corinthian church members and a certain "**person**". This must refer to somebody who also thought of himself as a Christian. Paul did not state whether this person truly belongs to Christ or not, because only the Corinthians and the **anonymous person** could judge by their own impressions and **power of judgment**. Paul only emphasized that he himself surely belongs to Christ.

Chapter 11

Paul continues with his evidence and arguments against the false teachers to justify himself, even though he must have felt **it's ridiculous, childish and primitive**, because it was below his dignity. But he had to do it to confront the false teachers and expose them. Therefore he also asks the Corinthians to forgive him for that and to bear with him. In the end of the chapter he explains what the source of his glory truly is (Verses 30-33).

(2Cor 11,1) To boast before people, **however, is still a pathetic display** (1Cor 3,21). but Paul felt the urge to do so. So that the Corinthians would not misunderstand him, he wrote: „Not for my own good do I judge the attitude of my opponents and mention my own accomplishments. I only do it because I love this church and want to **please them**.“ (2Cor 12,11). His love for them was so deep that he even became a fool for them.

(2Cor 11,2-4) **Just like a father he wants to present a pure virgin to the Lord**. (Rev 19,7). Paul was ministering in the position of a bridesman (comp. Gen 29,23/ Judg 14,20/ Joh 3,29). He pursued and strived for them and was even jealous for them (comp. Ex. 20,5;34,14/ Deut 4,24;5,9;6,15;32,16.21/ Jos 24,19/ Ps 78,58/ Hez 39,25/ Nah 1,2). Paul compared the danger which the church in Corinth was facing with the **temptation of Eve by Satan**. He feared that just like Eve the Corinthians would be prey to the lies of Satan and become wicked in their thinking. The tragic result would be the loss of their precious **devotion to Christ** to the erroneous doctrine of the false apostles (reference to Gen 3). The false apostles came into the church from the outside just like Satan entered the garden Eden from the outside. Perhaps they were Jews from Palestine (V. 22/ Acts 6,1), who wanted to bring the Corinthians under submission to the church of Jerusalem. In a certain way they were Judaists who tried to impress **Jewish customs** unto them. They preached a "**different Jesus**" ... and had a "**different spirit**" ... and preached a "**different gospel**". In spite of their attacks against Paul, Paul did not look at it being a matter of personal importance but rather of **doctrinal importance**. Since they distorted the true gospel Paul judged them hard (Gal 1,6-9).

(2Cor 11,5-12) **Paul does not feel inferior to the other 12 apostles at all** (1Cor 15,7-9). He did not allow the false teachers to discriminate him in any way. He knows who he is and what is capable of (Act 22,3/ 1Cor 2,6-11/ Eph 3,1-5/ Gal 1,12).

The false apostles attacked Paul, because he preached for free and did not accept any money from the Corinthians (1Cor 9,1-15), but provided for himself (Act 18,1-3). They claimed such an attitude is below the dignity of an apostle: With sarcastic irony Paul asks his offenders: „How can it **be sin** to let go of ones right for support?“ **It is not clear** why Paul refused to accept the **support he was due** from the Corinthians (1Cor 9,15). Maybe some suspected that his motives were to make an impression with a larger collection for the church Jerusalem (2Cor 12,16-18). The false apostles, however, only wanted to gain as much profit as possible from their ministry.

(2Cor 11,13-15) **Paul clearly says who he thinks the false apostles are**: messengers of Satan and his herolds in disguise (Lk 22,53/ Act 26,18/ Eph 6,12/ Col 1,13). He was not ready to sacrifice the truth on behalf of unity (1Tim 4,12/ 2Pt 2,1-17/ Jud 8-13). He told them what kind of ending **thes self-commended servants of righteousness** would have to face (Rom 3,8/ 1Cor 3,17/ Phil 3,19/ 2Thess 2,8/ 2Petr 2,1.3.17/ Jud 4.13).

(2Cor 11,16-33) **Pauls' suffering as a servant of Christ**. A life for the mission of Jesus includes suffering

(2Cor 4,8-12;6,4-10). In all of his other letter Paul does not tell them so much of his suffering but rather of the grace and work of God. **When he presents his case** he focuses on the true gospel, its purity and precious souls. All of this he endured freely to bring the salvation of Jesus Christ to all who would accept him (Act 9,23.29;14,5.19.20;16,22.23;17,5;21,30-32;27).

Chapter 12

The Christian in **his highest and lowest condition**. Paul speaks about his spiritual experiences. We can see clearly that the higher revelation is not evidence of his own abilities. **Flesh remains flesh** and God has to oppose him to keep him humble. Therefore he also has a **"thorn in the flesh"**, so that he would not become prideful of his revelation.

The **"thorn in the flesh"** can mean many things: inner, carnal tribulations, external persecution by enemies or diseases. But it could also refer to the rebellion against him – maybe God wanted him to experience how painful the persecution is that he used to practice against the Christians without mercy. According Gal 4,13-15 Paul had a serious physical handicap, such as vision disorders In 2Tim 4,13 the apostle requests **parchment**. The reason is that writings on parchment **are easier to read** than that on other materials. We also know that he **turned blind** when Jesus revealed Himself and later he dictated his letters and only signed them in large handwriting (Gal 6,11/ 2Thess 3,17/1Cor 16,21-2/ Col 4,18/ Rom16,17-20).

(2Cor 12.1-7) Reluctantly Paul continues to commend himself, even if it is not quite helpful. He even states it is **foolishness**. But he had **no other choice** because the Corinthians were so excited about the visions and revelations of the false apostles (2Cor 12.11). Paul saw himself **compelled** to earn the **respect of the Corinthians**. He wanted to show them that he is not only equal but even superior. Therefore he boasts of his weaknesses and other things beyond that and apologises at the same time. He focused on the revelations of the Lord he experienced. Appearances and revelation seemed to be a big thing for the Corinthians (1Cor 14). The apostle Paul knew well that he can easily compete, even though his boasting **is perhaps in vain**. It does not serve the preaching of the gospel or the church developmtn and also not the unfolding of the power of God in his weakness. Even though Paul rejects self-praise he was yet compelled to do it. In the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians he does it **within the framework of identification with God and Christ**, in the second with the indication **that self-praise is permitted** when it is referring to **ones own weakness**. In light of the situation Paul praises himself even more in the second epistle than in the last.

The Book of Acts reports about **6 revelations** Paul had (Acts 9,12; 16,9.10; 18,9; 22,17.18; 23,11;27,23.24), and also in his letters he refers to several revelations he experienced (Gal 1,12;2,2/ Eph 3,3). **The revelations Paul had also came at a price**. The price was the infamous **"thorn in the flesh"**, the „**angel of Satan**“ who tormented Paul regularly. Paul should continue to rely on **the grace of God which is sufficient**. The God of the bible does not need to demonstrate His greatness, omnipotence and glory. The **power of the God of the bible** is revealed in His grace towards human weakness. God does not work where there is violence. God works where weakness is a threat and where suffering is present, where sickness and death threaten to triumph.

„His power is mighty in those who are weak.“ This is the great promise that Paul heard from God. Weakness is not an ideal but rather an **every-day experience**, not popular and yet it cannot be avoided. But God works powerfully in those who are weak (2Cor 12, 9-10).

After that the apostle explains **his commission as an apostle** again (2Cor 12,11-19). Eventually he mentions **his fear** that his presence with them would bring them **discipline and humiliation** because of the bad condition of several church members (2Cor 12, 20-21). For the first time he reports about an event that happened **14 years** ago. He speaks about his **conversion** on the road to Damascus (Acts 9,1-9;22,6-11;26,12-18). But also his **"near death experience"**, where he was taken to Paradise outside of his physical body. In this chapter he speaks of the **"man in Christ"**, who was raptured to go on this heavenly journey.

Paul uses the language of mystical religion (Isia 6,1/ Ez1,26-28/ Dan 7,9-10) and the **"unspeakable"** words must **not be revealed to those who are not inaugurated**. Paul as a theologian was both: a mystic and a dogmatist. Paul, his co-workers and followers had been fasting, received visions, spoke in tongues, etc. the whole **apostolic ministry** of Paul, however, was not built on (2Cor 12,6,7) **his revelations**, but rather his **experiences of weakness**. Paul explains that the Corinthians would be very impressed with his supernatural encounters and revelations, but this would then distract them from the **cross of Christ and salvation**.

In Gal 1,11-17 he speaks of a deep religious experience that was foundational for his apostolic ministry, but his ministry was not only based on an esoteric (supernatural) experience, but **divine calling** even in the womb of his mother and in the grace of God (Gal 1,15). Paul wanted to prevent that they would look at him as an ecstatic or wonder man, because what mattered most to him was personal discipleship and the preaching of the gospel, which was the will of God (2Cor 12,7). Everything that Paul **brings up in his favor** points to the power of God (2Cor 12,12), which then makes way to glorious miracles and power (Act 2,22.43/ Hebr 2,4). **Paul is only different** from the other 12 apostles, because he provided for himself (2Cor 12,13-14,16) and did not want to be a burden to anyone.

Chapter 13

He ensures that, for the third time, he is planning to visit them and examine them without sparing (Verses 1-2). He concludes the questions about his ministry by the fact which must cause the Corinthians to feel embarrassed. In the whole letter Paul **examines himself very thoroughly**. Now he challenges the Corinthians to also **examine themselves**. Often Paul asked for the **positioning of the believers as the justified** – are they Christians or not? In this case it is rather about **practical sanctification**: Do they display that they are believers (1Cor 16,13) and that Christ dwells in them by being obedient to His will?

To **pass this test means** to do what is right. Not to pass it is equal to disobedience, which causes God to be angry. But he hopes that the Corinthians would not be **rejected** by God. In his whole life and ministry for God Paul had recognized that outside of **God's will and God's truth** he is and was not able to do anything.

(**2Cor 13,11**) **Paul's last appeal** is a call to unity: "Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, **be of one mind**, live in peace." But this unity can only be maintained when they **fully depend on God**, Who wants to give them love and peace.

This love should then be demonstrated in a **holy kiss**. A **manner of greeting** at that time (Mt 26,49/ Lk 7,45). For Christians this kiss also expresses **brotherly love and unity** (Rom 16,16/ 1Cor 16,20/ 1Thess 5,26; 1Petr 5,14). This greeting must not be confused or compared with a „**hello kiss**“ of worldly nature. It should be inspired by the work of the divine Holy Spirit. It is a symbolic act that expresses the **affection of all church members** among each other and also the unity of the single churches but also beyond that, among all churches of Christ. This "holy kiss" **is not only for certain people** who must be greeted with special honor, but rather emphasizes the **equality of all Christians**. **The greetings** Paul sends are rather general. **"All God's people send their greetings"**.

Paul turned this situation around for himself. Instead of presuming they could judge the authenticity of his apostolate, he rather challenged them to examine the authenticity **of their own faith** (Jam 2,14-26). **He pointed** how contradictory it is that the Corinthians believe their own faith is real and at the same time question his authority. The church members at Corinth had lost their way and did not seem to be able to assess their own condition **without exhortation** by an outsider to change their attitude. Paul mentions the essential aspects of **ideal church fellowship**: **Unity and peace**. In the background there is the image of the church as the **body of Christ in which all Christians form a unity**. Within this unity each Christian has a certain function, being a certain member, while *all* members are necessary and to be respected. The church members should share their joy and suffering (1Cor 12,12-26). It should be added that the God of love and peace was **not automatically** among the Corinthians. We can rather experience it among those people who are like Him in character. Because our God is the God of love and peace.

The final words of the letter are dedicated to see past **the present condition** of the church and to **the perfect condition**. To accomplish that two things are necessary: Firstly the Corinthians have to **live it out** and secondly **God's gracious help** is needed, for without it all human toil is in vain.

Test questions

1. What kind of people form the church of Jesus?
2. Which motives did the apostle Paul reveal?
3. What was Paul's goal to accomplish with this letter?
4. Why did Paul explain in detail why he was not able to visit them?
5. Why is 2nd Corinthians a letter of reconciliation?
6. Why did Paul speak so much of afflictions?
7. Why had the apostle Paul been so deeply hurt?
8. What was Paul's comfort?
9. Who are the New Testament Christians?

10. What are the essential differences between the old and new covenant?
11. What did Paul have to suffer in his ministry for Jesus?
12. From where did the apostle Paul receive his strength?
13. Why did Paul collect intensively for the Christians in Judaea?
14. Where had Paul been collecting money?
15. What was Paul's point of view on temporary suffering?
16. What could have been his „thorn in the flesh“?
17. Why did God not remove the thorn?
18. How did the first Christians greet each other?
19. What did Paul call the Corinthians to?
20. What is the "new creation"?
21. Why are the Christians supposed to separate ourselves from the world?
22. What are the main points of 2nd Corinthians that Paul communicates?

Please send the answers to pastor@matutis.de

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May prayers are with you.

Pastor Joh.W.Matutis

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