

“Blessed Is God”

God - the Source of Grace and Peace

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2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 1:1-2

A Personal Greeting

- Second Corinthians is an intensely personal letter.
- In it the Apostle Paul shares his inner feelings in an attempt to **help his readers understand principles on which ministry and a walk with God must be based.** ^[1]
- Seeing the heart of one of the most effective ministers of all time helps us **establish a firm foundation for our personal service** to our Lord and Master.

You seem to imagine that I have no ups and downs, but just a level and lofty stretch of spiritual attainment with unbroken joy and equanimity. By no means! I am often perfectly wretched and everything appears most murky.”

- So wrote the man who was called in his day “The Greatest Preacher in the English-speaking World” - **Dr. John Henry Jowett.**
- He pastored leading churches, preached to huge congregations, and wrote books that were bestsellers.

“I am the subject of depressions of spirit so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I go to.”

- Those words were spoken in a sermon by **Charles Haddon Spurgeon** whose marvelous ministry in London made him perhaps the greatest preacher England ever produced.
 - **Discouragement is no respecter of persons.**
 - In fact, discouragement **seems to attack the successful far more than the unsuccessful**; for the higher we climb, the farther down we can fall.
 - When you think about it, this only makes sense, because our flesh, and Satan, the enemy of our souls **hates spiritual success more than anything else.**
 - We are not surprised then when we read that the great Apostle Paul was **“pressed out of measure”** and **“despaired even of life” (2 Cor. 1:8).**
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For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.

- Great as he was in character and ministry, **Paul was human just like the rest of us.**
- Paul could have escaped these burdens **except that he had a call** from God (**2 Cor. 1:1**) **and a concern** to help people.
- He had **founded** the church at Corinth and had ministered there for **a year and a half (Acts 18:1–18).**
- When serious problems arose in the church after his departure, he sent Timothy to deal with them (**1 Cor. 4:17**) and then wrote the letter that we call 1 Corinthians.
- Unfortunately, **matters grew worse** and Paul had to make a **“painful visit”** to Corinth to confront the troublemakers (**2 Cor. 2:1ff**).
- Still, no solution.
- He then wrote **“a severe letter”** which was delivered by his associate, Titus (**2 Cor. 2:4–9; 7:8–12**).
- We do not have this letter, though we know it was written from several sources.
- It appears that there are **at least two other letters** to the Church at Corinth that we do not have, at least that **are not reliable and are not a part of the Canon of the Bible.**
- After a great deal of distress, Paul finally met Titus and **got the good report that the problem had been solved.**
- It was **then that he wrote the letter we call 2 Corinthians.**

One of the Keys to the Letter

- One of the key words in this letter is **comfort or encouragement.**
- It is “ParaKalew, or its’ forms, and we’ll see it again and again.
- The Greek word means **“called to one’s side to help.”**
- The verb is used **eighteen times** in this letter, and the noun **eleven times.**
- In spite of all the trials he experienced, Paul was able (by the grace of God) to write a letter saturated with encouragement.

- **How was it** that Paul was able to gain victory when he was experiencing pressures and trials?
- It sounds like a trite and quaint is secret was *God*.
- When you find yourself discouraged and ready to quit, **get your attention off of yourself and focus it on God**.
- In this early part of this Epistle, and out of his own difficult experience, **Paul tells us how we can find encouragement in God**.
- Just as we open our letters today with the conventional “Dear John,” so Paul begins his letters in the way that was characteristic of the casual Greek letter of his day: A to B, greetings.
- However, the manner in which he elaborates this typical opening provides us with insight into his uppermost concerns at the time of writing.
- In 2 Corinthians Paul's concerns are **three in number**:
 1. **Attacks on and questions about his apostleship**
 2. **God's authority over and ownership of the Corinthian congregation and**
 3. **The church as the family of God**.
- He wants his readers to understand that **he indeed is an apostle appointed and sent** by Jesus Christ.
- **They are under God's authority and belong to the church** of God that is **both local and universal**^[2]
- In other words, one of the main points of the epistle in that of authority – transcendent authority.
- We as creatures are responsible to submit to God, to His Word AND to His messengers as the bring and proclaim His Word.

A Tricky Idea

- This is a **tricky idea in this day and age**.
- This is not **authority for authority's sake**.
- The idea of the authoritarian church who rules and shut up about it.
- It is not **tradition for tradition's sake**.

- The idea upholding the ways that things have been done for generations and generations, so it's good enough.
- It is not **age for oldness' sake**.
- The idea of the ancient church and all of those who went before can't all have been wrong...
- It is **submission for submission's sake**.
- The idea of the elders know better and you'll understand later on, after you learn or are initiated.

By the Same Token...

- We need to take care that we **do not completely flip over** in the opposite direction either...
- Authority, tradition, age and submission are **not evil in and of themselves**.
- **Modernism was distrustful** of those things – suspecting them of abuses (sometime – heck, many times, rightly).
- **Post-Modernism outright rejects them** and denies that truth is found in them at all.

An Essential Idea For Christians

- But Authority and submission are essential ideas for believers.
- Essential with regard to God of course.
- But also in regard to the church and to the church's leaders.
- Paul makes this point in 2 Corinthians, we all, ALL need to be subject to authority over us...and he will be very explicit as to the reason why.

The Address (1:1)

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,
To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all
Achaia: ³¹

- So, Paul's **foremost concern is his apostolic standing in the Corinthian community.**
- The very lack of elaboration in comparison with Paul's other letters highlights this at the start: **Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.**
- This is very important to understand.
- The **usual niceties are not present** indicating that Paul has **a sense of urgency and intensity** about what he wished to communicate to the Corinthians and that he wanted to get straight to the point.
- There is no **implication of anger or unpleasantness here**; it is **not that Paul is writing to chew them out or to angrily chastise them.**
- At the same time, we do need to recognize that there the urgency of the spiritual leader who **needs and wants to correct the follower.**
- This is **important to recognize.**

Worth Mentioning

- This in itself is **worth mentioning** as we begin.
- **How different** Paul is from many modern church leaders!
- Whereas modern church leaders often are **more concerned with keeping people coming** to church and with keeping them happy and contented so as to maintain the numbers that; to them; indicate success;
- **Paul shows no such concern.**
- It is true that Paul was not a Pastor, per se, but in reality, he was an Apostle of God!
- His charge was more than just a single local congregation, but of all of the churches.
- In fact, one of the substantive portions of this letter concerns what it is to be a part of the body of Christ and what that means!
- That he, out of the starting blocks here, **goes right to the meat of his letter, and calls them to the obedience** to God from which they had strayed.
- **This is a great lesson** that many in the modern church need to learn.
- Who sits in the pews and how many of them there are ought not be our chief concern as Pastors or as church members at large.

- **What ought to hold most sway** on our mind and influence our preaching most is the need for our people to submit to and obey God!
- Sadly, **this often missing in many congregations.**
- We also need to note that such an emphasis must come from the “top” down.
- That is, it must **begin in the pulpit!**
- I am not saying anything new, nothing that has not been said many times before this, but yet I cannot help but note that it seemingly **has not yet been heard!**
- Surely there are congregations that practice Church Discipline and are strong in doctrine and practice; but I fear that those congregations are **few in number and are dwindling quickly!**
- It seems that the idea that an church members behavior **is that persons own private business is becoming the norm**, the given point of view in most evangelical churches today.
- People do not like Church Discipline.
- They do not like to be confronted by sin.
- They will not stay in an environment where that takes place and where, conversely, **God’s demand for holiness is maintained.**

Strengthening Family Ties

- That being said, we ought to note that the normal first-century writer used this part of the letter (the initial part) **to strengthen family ties and friendships.**
- Paul is no different.
- The point here is not a bludgeon to enforce obedience to the Pastor or to the local Prophet.
- It is clear in this letter that Paul’s emphasis is on the family, from his references to
- Timothy **our** brother (v. 1),
- **Together** with all the saints (v. 1) and
- **Our** Father (v. 2)
- Using those terms, he seeks to reinforce **the idea of the church as the unified family of God**, a topic which he will address in later in the epistle.

By the Will of God

- As is common in Paul's epistles he refers to himself as an Apostle of Jesus Christ "**by the will of God**".
- Others have done a far better job discussing the meaning of the word Apostle than I can hope to do.
- We will only note that it is a quite **striking and important idea**.
- It views Christ as the Resurrected Lord of the universe, with **authority over all men such that He can send messengers, Apostles, with sufficient authority to command those churches in His absence**.
- As we have noted over the past two weeks, **it is a slave word**, viewing Christ as his Master, and himself as Christ's slave, locked into service **with all that this implied and demanded of him**.
- The phrase appears **7 out of the 17 letters** (1 & 2 Corinthians; Ephesians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Timothy; and Titus) attributed to Paul in our NT, **always in the first verse as a part of his "qualifications" to speak authoritatively to the reader**.
- In all but the reference in 1 Timothy he is an Apostle of Jesus Christ "**by the will of God**" with a minor difference in 1 Corinthians where is rendered "**through the will of God**" **with little substantive change in meaning**.
- The issue here is that of reminding the Corinthian readers that this Paul, with whom they are familiar, **is not just anyone, but rather, when speaking officially, in the teaching office, speaks with the authority of Jesus Christ Himself**.
- It is **not unusual** that Paul stresses his apostleship as he does so in most of his epistles, though **not always as the open words of the letter**.
- The **exceptions** are his epistles to the **Philippians, the Thessalonians, and Philemon**.
- Though almost certainly not the only reason, we might note that Paul says that he is an apostle **despite the fact that he could not meet both requirements for apostleship: being a disciple during Jesus' ministry and being a witness of his resurrection** (Acts 1:21–22).
- Yet Paul had met the resurrected Lord near Damascus (Acts 9:1–19; 22:6–16; 26:12–18), and
- Jesus called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles (I Tim. 2:7; II Tim. 1:11).

- But, and this was a very BIG but, unlike all of the other Apostles, there were **no apostolic or prophetic witnesses** to either of those events.
- He readily confesses that his appointment is **on the authority of Christ Jesus**, who commissioned Paul as his ambassador.
- That is, he was fully aware of the charge to be Jesus' spokesman and to represent him accurately and faithfully.
- Paul explains his apostleship from Christ Jesus with the phrase ***through the will of God***.
- Thus he emphasizes **the origin of his apostolic status**.
- Paul notes **elsewhere** that God
- Set him apart from birth,
- Called him in due time,
- Caused him to know Jesus, and
- Empowered him to preach Christ's gospel to the gentiles (Gal. 1:15; compare Jer. 1:5).

“Paul’s call to Christ, his call to be an apostle to the Gentiles as a slave of Christ, and his call to be a slave of those to whom God sent him were all one in purpose and all divine in origin.”

Announced at the Outset

- It is important to note that Paul announces his status **at the outset, so that when** in the course of his epistle he discusses the super-apostles and the false apostles (11:5, 13; 12:11, 12), the readers know that God through Christ called him to be an apostle.
- Whereas other men were commissioned by the church to serve as apostles, **Paul was commissioned by Jesus** through the will of God.
- It is for **precisely this purpose that Jesus appointed twelve men** to be his apostles.
- After Judas betrayed him and committed suicide, the apostles placed two names before the Lord and asked Jesus to choose one of these to fill the vacancy left by Judas.

- When the lot was cast, the apostles saw that **Jesus had named Matthias** to be added to their number (Acts 1:23–26).
- Jesus commissioned **no other people except Paul**.^[4]
- This was for, among other reasons, exactly this very reason.
- **Our Lord knew that His church would not be perfect and that they would need correction.**
- He established Apostles in the first century for **two reasons**:
- **First**, to establish the first generation of the church; and
- **Second**, write down His Word so that succeeding generations might have direction for their own pursuit of Godliness.

We've Moved Away...

- We have **moved almost entirely away from the concept of authority** in the modern church.
- In its' place we have put **the idea of autonomy and the concept that God speaks to us all equally**.
- That is **lunacy** and results in **chaos**, as we see.
- **In our quest for individualism and self-fulfillment (not to mention our rebellion against God and against the structures He has imposed on mankind) we almost instinctively dislike anyone, anyone at all having any authority over us.**
- **We echo the cry of the Jews** as the stood viewing Christ before Pilate; we will not have this man to reign over us!"
- It is **not so much that we as believers are consciously rejecting** the authority of God over **as it is that we are like the society around us**.
- **They reject the rulership of the God Who made them, and in many ways we do as well.**
- **Might this not be one of the chief reasons** that we are, as a church, in the condition that we are in?
- What condition might the Corinthian church have persisted **had they not heeded**, at least in part the authoritative position, and thus the authoritative instruction and guidance of the man whom God sent to them?

- Somehow we have gotten the idea that what the preacher tells us (by way of the Word of God, of course) is **optional** – we need to be very careful about that!
- Surely we **ought not just blindly to follow any man**, but then again, we ought just blindly wander on our own way either!

Timothy our brother

- In the introductory sentence of his first epistle to the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 1:1), Paul **adds the name of Sosthenes**, whom he calls “our brother.”
- There we receive no further information concerning Sosthenes, but here we know that Timothy had served the local church in Corinth (**Acts 18:5**).
- Some years later, **Paul dispatched him from Ephesus to Corinth** (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; compare Acts 19:22).
- **We infer that Timothy had returned** from his visit to the Corinthians and was now in Paul’s presence.
- The two words *our brother* (literally, **the brother, as in Brother Timothy**, or Timothy the brother)) **reveal the bond** that existed between Paul and Timothy and, apparently, also between the Corinthians and Timothy (**but see 1 Cor. 16:10–11**).
- By placing Timothy’s name in the first verse, Paul **meant to strengthen the relationship** between the addressees and his co-worker (**1 Thess. 3:2**).
- Paul had great respect for Timothy; he invited him to become his fellow helper (**Acts 16:1–3**) and sent him on several missions.
- But he **never regarded Timothy as a fellow apostle**, much less as a writer of Paul’s epistle.
- Rather, we assume that, on his return from Corinth, **Timothy provided Paul with information** about the local church.
- Thus we conclude that **the letter was written not by two authors**, Paul and Timothy, but only by Paul.^[5]
- **The components of Timothy’s name means “honoring God”** and, as is usual for the names of men in the Bible, is **remarkably descriptive** of the character of the man who bore it.
- Timothy, **though he got off to a bit of slow start**, was one who truly and greatly honored God in his life and in his ministry.
- His is a name that is readily recognized and known by all believers.

- Though he was **not one of the major characters in the Gospel accounts**, nor was he of the importance of Paul, he is **still a major figure in the New Testament**.

Paul's Use of "Our"

- It is interesting that **Paul refers to him as "our brother"**.
- The surprising part is not that he calls Timothy "brother", **but is the use of the word "our"**.
- Surprising might be too strong a word to use, but it is **significant**.
- What is notable about it is not that he considered Timothy his brother, **but that he tied the Corinthians, Timothy and himself together in the same group**.
- The Corinthians were **not the most obedient and doctrinally correct group in the world** as is made plain from the first letter Paul wrote.
- There is **good reason to think that they have grown spiritually** by the time that is writing this second epistle is in view.
- "Brother" is **not a word that Paul threw around easily**.
- It is **a very significant word**, when we really think about it.
- In our modern word we use the word **all too easily**.
- **It really is a theological word** and we **ought to be careful how we use it**, especially because **in the rest of the culture it is used indiscriminately enough that has no real meaning**.
- To call one "brother" is to **indicate that you see them as a fellow member of the body of Christ**.
- While **we ought to be generous in our treatment of professing Christians**, meaning that we ought allow the presumption of genuineness until and unless their fruits prove them otherwise.
- **Surely we ought to exercise some measure of care** and, for instance, keep novices out of places of authority.
- But we need to, I think, to see that we are **not overly cynical in our evaluation** of those who are professing Christ among us.
- Along the same line, **we need to be willing to allow the fruit of believers** to speak for their spiritual condition.

- I think one of the big issues here is that **many in the church are hypocrites here ourselves.**
- Their behavior is not consistent with what the Bible teaches, and thus they are loathe to hold anyone else to it!
- **But this is Word of the Lord and we need to obey it.**
- This is another area where our theology, our beliefs impact our practice.
- If we are lackadaisical and permissive in our own lives, then we will also be permissive in our view of others, lest we condemn ourselves...
- **But the Bible is clear...if a man does not conduct himself as a Christian, that is, if he is disobedient and/or rebellious to God and to God's revealed authority, then we need to be willing to agree with what the Scripture teaches, and begin, at least, to stop seeing them as brethren.**
- We've talked about this at length a number of times before and I hope we all remember that we are embracing **legalism in either soteriology or sanctification** here.
- But at the other end of the hall, we must also be just as **zealous to avoid libertinism.**

The Readers

...To the church of God which is at Corinth...

- **Corinth is distinguished**, both in this letter and in 1 Corinthians, **with the unique address to the "church of God"**.
- The singular is used which leads us to focus on this one church, in contrast to the more commonly found term that speaks of the greater church at large.
- This phrase **focuses attention on the unity of believers in the singular Corinthian locality.**
- In other words, Paul is drawing our attention to the fact that he is speaking, **not so much to the church at large (though what he will say is certainly applicable and binding upon to the larger church n general) as he is speaking to the specific body there at Corinth.**
- Once again we must note that **Paul is treating the Corinthians as fellow Christians** and speaks to them as fellow members of the family of God.

Divine Ownership

- **“Of God” emphasizes divine ownership** - an ownership that **differentiates the church from a culture and society that were centered on idolatry.**
- It also speaks of the fact that the Corinthians (as is true for all believers) were **not their own masters.**
- Paul **spoke with authority and was the emissary of God with authority to command and instruct God’s people.**
- But **ultimately God is the authority for His people.**
- In a **very real and absolute way God owns His church** and it is important for His church to know and understand that.
- It was common in Paul's day **to include others beyond the immediate readers** as independent witnesses of a letter's content and reception - somewhat like the function of our notary today.
- In the case of 2 Corinthians, **all the saints throughout Achaia are called on to verify Paul's claim of apostleship - a claim that has been challenged** from both inside and outside the Corinthian church and which, as we will see, Paul is at pains to defend throughout the letter.

The Greeting (1:2)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁶¹

- Paul's greeting takes the form of **a common ancient Near Eastern blessing: “Grace” (or “mercy” in Jewish letters) and “peace.”**
- Normally at this point, the first-century writer would go on to wish his reader(s) good health--much as we say, “Hope all is going well.”
- While in the colloquial language of the time this may indeed have included **some reference to physical well-being**, there is **little to cause us to think** that there was any direct appeal to the hearer’s physical state of being.
- But this is not a personal letter, in the normal sense, **it is an Apostolic one...**
- Paul, **instead, directs attention to and specifies the source of good general health for the believer** - God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- It is this kind of Christian blessing that **he invariably uses to round off his opening greeting.**

- While we do not wish to be “metaphysical”, we ought to note that **it seems clear that in Paul’s mind spiritual health was central to the overall well being of the individuals in question, MORESO than their physical well being.**
- It is **not so much the Paul is claiming that physical well-being comes as a result of or flows out of spiritual understanding.**
- That is **far too Greek and idea and far too Gnostic** for Paul to endorse.
- It is simply that we, as believers **ought to recognize that our entire person’s health and welfare rests in the hands of an omnipotent and sovereign God.**
- This is not a matter of sowing and reaping, of planting and gathering.
- As we noted over the last two weeks, **this is a matter of the slave recognizing and acknowledging the reality of the slave/master relationship** in all of its fullness.

Not Objectionable to Believers

- This is **not objectionable to genuine believers**, but it does run contrary to the human manner of thinking.
- Men **want things to be under their own authority** and power and they wish their own will to be the linchpin upon which the affairs of their lives turn.
- **This is a “tell”, by the way**, for the theology of a teacher.
- Does the teacher place **the burden of the cause, the trigger of blessing** of something that you and I do, or is there **clear recognition and acknowledgment** that even this ability comes from His hand?
- Remember, no one is endorsing a lay down and let God approach to Christian living.
- But **Man-centered theology** is just that, it is man-centered and has more to do with what I do and then God responding than it does with the other way around!
- **Biblical theology** has more to do with God doing and my responding!
- When one comes to the Lord one begins a journey whose every turn teaches us that it is, in fact, **our God that stands at the helm of these larger matters in life (not to mention the smaller ones).**
- Paul seeks to remind us that all of our efforts at peace and security do not rest so much under our own control, **but are in the hands of God and are a function of His grace.**

- And we need to see and remember that from the beginning.

Ownership forms Foundation

- It is possible to see these wishes here in Paul's greeting in a **very general sense**, but we ought also acknowledge that **they at least form the basis for the specific discussion of God's grace and peace extended to His people that follows in the book.**
- For that is, indeed, one of the foundational issue to which the entire rest of the book speaks – **is it God or is me?**
- **Grace**, of course, speaks of good done one who does not deserve or earn that good, **particularly when speaking of a superior's treatment of an inferior.**
- God's grace is described in a number of ways in the Bible:
- Is described as:
- Great. (Ac 4:33),
- Sovereign. (Ro 5:21),
- Rich. (Eph 1:7; 2:7),
- Exceeding. (2Co 9:14),
- Manifold. (1Pe 4:10),
- All-sufficient. (2Co 12:9),
- All-abundant. (Ro 5:15,17,20), and
- Glorious. Eph 1:6.
- One could spend a sizable amount of time exploring and developing those ideas!
- In the preaching and teaching of the Gospel, **one would expect the bestowal of Grace.**
- That would seem to be **normal and expected.**
- Actually, there is a **"double" bestowal of grace here**, as the very ability to preach on the Apostle's part was a gift of God's grace to begin with.
- The Apostles, though they may have had some oratory capacity to begin with, **were singularly unsuited to preach effectually the Gospel of God.**

- Like all preachers, they could recite and enlarge upon the words, **but the ability to preach it in fashion as to bring spiritual results was (and still is!) a gift of God!**

“Great” Grace

- Dr. Luke speaks of the grace of God shed upon the disciples in the early preaching of the Gospel as **“great” in Acts 4:33:**

And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.^{[171](#)}

- “Great” is an adjective and speaks of **the measure of a thing.**
- It speaks of said measure as being **large, noticeably larger than one would expect.**
- It can be used of **number, size, even of intensity and effort,** etc.
- Surely it is demonstration of the “great grace” of God in **that any are saved.**
- He is gracious, **far and above that which might be expected** in that He deigns to spare any the judgment and condemnation of Hell.
- This is what Spurgeon had in mind when commenting on the surprising fact of the grace of God expended on men found in the phrase “Him that justifieth the ungodly” he said:

“I do not wonder that you are surprised; for with all my familiarity with the great grace of God, I never cease to wonder at it”.^{[181](#)}

- Matthew Henry commented:

The beauty of the Lord our God shone upon them, and all their performances: Great grace was upon them all, not only all the apostles, but all the believers, “charis megaleμ”—grace that had something great in it (magnificent and very extraordinary) was upon them all. 1. Christ poured out abundance of grace upon them, such as qualified them for great services, by enduing them with great power; it came upon them from on high, from above. 2. There were evident fruits of this grace in all they said and did, such as put an honor upon them, and recommended them to the favor of God, as being in his sight of great price. 3. Some think it includes the favor they were in with the people. Everyone saw a beauty and excellency in them, and respected them.^{[191](#)}

- It is not that the Apostles received grace in greater measure than was normal, **but that the very reception of grace was a great and wondrous thing!**

Sovereign Grace

- The Apostle Paul speaks of **“Sovereign” Grace in Romans 5:21**.

Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,²¹ so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.^[10]

- **“Sovereign” refers that which is consistent with and characteristic of a ruler.**
- Abstractly, it can speak of **something that is unique and singular.**
- What Paul is speaking of is **a grace that conquered death and now reigns in its place.**
- In the sin of Adam, death entered into the world.
- And we must note that Paul is here **speaking primarily of spiritual death, not merely physical death.**
- Were physical death in view, then we might conclude that once one is a believer, one would not suffer physical death, and yet that is plainly not the case.
- What is in view here is a grace that rules absolutely and “sovereignly”.
- **That is the idea of “reigning” here mentioned.**
- The point that Paul is seeking to make for us is that **just as sin and death once reign sovereignly and surely over all men because of their identification with Adam’s sin, so also now, in the case of believers, grace reigns.**
- It is interesting that **Paul does not say that life reigns, is it not?**
- When one thinks of sin and its penalty, one thinks of death and **it would seem logical that the antithesis to that would be life.**
- **Now, it is true that life is ours in Christ**, eternal life in all of its fullness and glory.
- But what Paul wants us to understand here is that **this is a triumph of God’s grace!**

Rich & Exceeding Grace

- In Ephesians 1:7 Paul speaks of the “**riches of His grace**”.
- In 2:7 he enlarges his idea by speaking of the “**exceeding riches of His grace**”.
- We might look at this in a couple ways.
- First, we might think of it in terms of **the “richness” of the grace of God**.
- God’s grace is **full and complete**.
- It is **full featured and full flavored** if we may.
- It is **not a simple, one-dimensional concept** but is **many faceted** in its meaning and significance.
- We might also think of it **in terms of amount or quantity to put it crassly**.
- Not so much that God has given us “a lot” of grace **so much as He has given us much in the giving of His grace**.
- There are **many benefits to grace**, many things that are ours now because we are children of God, and **many that was ours before, that thankfully, is no longer ours because of that self-same grace**.
- Similarly, we **might also think of this phrase in terms of duration**.
- His grace is rich in that it is **limitless**.
- MacArthur underscores this for us:

“Salvation, of course, is very much for the believer’s blessing, but it is even more for the purpose of eternally glorifying God for bestowing on believers His endless and limitless grace and kindness. The whole of heaven glorifies Him for what He has done in saving sinners (cf. 3:10; Rev. 7:10–12).”^[11]

- The grace of God shed abroad upon men is **a deep well, a plenteous table** at which His children partake.
- Just to note, the apostle Paul puts it:

“According to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7).

- Thank God, He did not say “out of His riches,” which would be like a millionaire giving \$1.00 in the offering plate, as it would be “out of” his riches.
- **“According to”** means **“in proportion to”**—and God’s proportionate provisions come without measure.^[12]
- Think of that for a moment!
- God has given us grace in proportion to or according to His riches!
- Now there is thought that will sustain for eternity!

Manifold Grace

- In **1 Peter 4:10** Peter speaks of the “manifold grace” of God.

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.^[13]

- “Manifold” speaks of being **many faceted**.
- Literally it speaks of be of various colors, variegated or many sorts.
- This helps us in our understanding of the grace of God.
- The grace that God has been shed upon us **in many, many fashions and ways, some of which we are aware, and some of which we are not**.
- His grace is **not limited to one area or one fashion**, but is given in many and multiple fashion and toward a variety of ends.
- It accomplishes many things and serves many purposes.
- We also need to note that these multiple ways and purposes **are not limited to a single individual**.
- God manifests Himself by mans of His church and His grace is manifested in various and multiple fashions by that church.
- As we look around us, we need to take not of and glorify God for what He has and what He is doing in His body – the church!
- We need to be careful that the idea that God’s grace is manifest in manifold fashion **does not lead us to be incautious or careless** and acting without discernment in regard to what actual is a demonstration of His grace and what is not.

- **We are called to be discerning and to take care** for our own souls and for the souls which God has given us to care for and we ought to be very certain that we are exercising that care rightly.
- Not all that claims to be of God is actually of God!
- That being said, what a joy it is to look around us and see the manifold grace of God!
- **He does not show Himself only in our language**, our tradition or according to our preferences!
- **He has done many, many things for us and for others as well!**

All-Sufficient Grace

- Of course, the idea that God's grace is sufficient for every trial and difficulty in life **is something familiar, as a concept, to every believer.**
- Paul proclaims this truth later in this very book and we will study that when we get there.
- 2 Corinthians 12:9 is **a pillar of strength for the Christian experience.**

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. ^[14]

- The context here is trials and great difficulties **that persist** in our lives in spite of the fact that God could remove them.
- Note that in Paul's mind **the issue is not blind fate or chance, but the hand of God.**
- **He does not "blame" God** for their presence, **but** he does clearly see that **it is God Who controls whether they are there**, in his life, or not.
- This is the point.
- **God's grace is all-sufficient** – it can sustain and uphold no matter what the issue that faces us.
- This is, in my view, **an important idea.**

- The word translated **sufficient** is used **8 times in the NT** and translates as “be content” three times, “be sufficient” twice, “be enough” once, “suffice” once, and “content” once.
- Its essence is **to be possessed of unfailing strength, to be strong, to suffice, to be enough.**
- Note here that the strength that is possessed in **not our own, but rather is God’s.**
- This is what Paul goes on to say in the next part of the verse in 2 Corinthians 1.
- **God’s strength is sufficient** to defend and ward off any threat.
- **Therefore, we ought to be satisfied and contented** because it thus follows, **because of the goodness of God, than anything that remains in our lives is there, not because He could not prevent it, but because He desires it to be so.**
[\[15\]](#)
- This is precisely the point that Paul makes and that which we will discuss when we get to that point in our study of this Book.

All-Abundant Grace

- Further, the Scriptures declare that the God’s grace is “all-abundant”.
- Romans 5:15-21:

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. ¹⁶ And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. ¹⁷ For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.) ¹⁸ Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. ¹⁹ For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous. ²⁰ Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, ²¹ so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. [\[16\]](#)

- **Notice the “much mores”** in verses 15, 17 and 20.
- **In the same way** that death passed and reigned over all men because of Adam’s sin, **so also** life passes and reigns upon believers.
- But the comparison here is not so much one to one comparing the first and second Adam, **as it is comparing the efficacy (among other things) comparing the degree of effectiveness.**
- **Adam’s sin abounded in it effect on men; Christ’s sacrifice much more abounds to His people.**
- As profound as the effect of Adam’s sin and the presence of sin was upon the human race, **the effect and benefit of the grace of God is much more!**

Glorious Grace

- Paul., in Ephesians 1:6 speaks on God’s “glorious” grace.

...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. ¹⁷

- The idea here is that the praise goes to the glory of His grace.
- His grace is glorious, that is, **it brings Him worship and adoration!**
- This is **the entire point of salvation**, something sadly lost on most men today.
- God has **not set about to save men primarily for their benefit.**
- Salvation indeed does benefit them, and benefit them greatly, but that was **NOT the first purpose** in God’s mind for setting about to redeem men.
- That first purpose was **His own Glory and glorification of His own Name.**
- As difficult a thing as that is for us to grasp, **it is essential for us to understand**, lest we fall in grievous sin and twist salvation, as so many do today, into something that bears little resemblance to actual Biblical Christianity.
- And so Paul begins this letter by **reminding the Corinthians of the Mercy of God and the variety and abundance of blessing** that is theirs because of Gods’ mercy.
- His intention is to call to their mind **the full spectrum of the Grace of God and thereby, all of His character and power.**

- He moves then to remind them of **the foundation that the Peace of God provides for them in life.**
- We need to note that this is **not new teaching** to the Corinthians, but is a reminder for them of what Paul and others had taught them.

God as the Source of Peace

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ^[18]

- Trouble is **an inescapable reality** in this fallen, evil world.
- Eliphaz, one of Job's would-be counselors, declared,
- *"Man is born for trouble, as sparks fly upward"* (**Job 5:7**).
- With that sentiment Job, certainly no stranger to trouble, agreed:

"Man, who is born of woman, is short-lived and full of turmoil" (**Job 14:1**).

- Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, lamented,

"Why did I ever come forth from the womb to look on trouble and sorrow, so that my days have been spent in shame?" (**Jer. 20:18**).

- That life is filled with trouble, sorrow, pain, disappointment, disillusionment, and despair is the testimony of the rest of Scripture.
- It has been **a major occupation of the unredeemed world** to seek to hide or modify that truth.
- **They reject** sin, view man as basically good and they have **an optimistic view** of his future.
- There is **little wonder then**, that it is a major priority of the world to enjoy life and have a good time.
- I must confess that **I, as an individual, am a stranger to the kind of pain to which these great men of God are referring.**
- God has been extremely gracious to me and has **allowed me to live in relative ease and comfort**, with little trial and tribulation to sort out and with which to deal.
- However, I can certainly **understand, theoretically**, to what they are referring.

- Many in my experience **have had great trial and tribulation**, and others great sorrow.
- I think of a missionary couple I know of that has **suffered greatly at the hands of a hostile government and angry hearers** while they have preached the Gospel of God's grace in a land whose predominant religion is antagonistic.
- I can think of couple that have **lost children and spouses** suddenly and after watching a long term of suffering.
- I know of **children who have had to watch their parents each die** a slow and painful death before their eyes.
- Experientially, I know little of suffering, **but I see it all around me**.
- Adding to the pain of trouble is the disturbing reality that God sometimes seems distant and unconcerned.
- Job cried out despondently,

"Why do You hide Your face and consider me Your enemy?" (**Job 13:24**).

- The psalmist asked pensively,

"Why do You stand afar off, O Lord? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?" (**Ps. 10:1**).

- Speaking for Israel, the sons of Korah asked God,

"Why do You hide Your face and forget our affliction and our oppression?" (**Ps. 44:24**).

- The prophet Isaiah affirmed,

"Truly, You are a God who hides Himself, O God of Israel, Savior!" (**Isa. 45:15**).

- Even David, "a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14; cf. Acts 13:22) and "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Sam. 23:1), had moments of doubt and discouragement.

- In *Psalms 13:1* he asked despairingly,

"How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?"

-
- In *Psalm 22:1* he expressed his anguish in words echoed by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross:

“My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” (cf. **Matt. 27:46**).

- Many people today question **why bad things happen to good people**.
- Of course, we understand that **much of their confusion is due to the fact that they do not know God at all and thus have no resource of wisdom and comfort from which to draw**.
- **Nevertheless they cry and we are witness** to their cries of pain and anguish.
- **At the root of their cry is often the idea that they do not deserve such pain** or that their suffering is unwarranted and unjust.
- **They deserve better because, after all, they are basically good people** and have done nothing to deserve such treatment.
- But Scripture **rejects the underlying assumption** that people are truly good.
- The apostle Paul declared,

“There is none righteous, not even one” (Rom. 3:10; cf. Pss. 14:1–3; 53:1–3)

- because

“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23; cf. 1 Kings 8:46; Ps. 143:2; Prov. 20:9; Eccles. 7:20; Jer. 17:9).

- Consequently, because

“God is a just judge, [He] is angry with the wicked every day” (Ps. 7:11 NKJV).

- Bad things **happen to all people because they are sinners** who live in a fallen, sin-cursed world.^[19]
- This is **very difficult for believers to grasp and reconcile with our world view**, let alone the unredeemed!
- It would be **easy for us to jump to the conclusion that God, in salvation, has acted to spare us the results and pains of living in the world**.

- In fact, **there are many** teachers today who put forth this very premise and **by so doing, terribly harm their hearers**.
- Because believers are redeemed sinners who live in a fallen world, bad things even happen to them.
- In fact, God allows those things to happen **for several important reasons**.

First, God allows bad things to happen to His people to test the validity of their faith.

- According to Proverbs 17:3,

“The Lord tests hearts.”

- Second Chronicles 32:31 says,

“God left [Hezekiah] alone only to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart.”

- Centuries earlier Moses told Israel,

“The Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not” (Deut. 8:2).

- Peter wrote,

In this [salvation] you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ([1 Peter 1:6–7](#))

- It is important to understand **that those tests are not for God’s sake, because the omniscient God knows every person’s heart**.
 - They are **not “to see” what the tested one will do**.
 - Instead, **they reveal to those tested whether their faith is real**.
 - **No trial, no matter how severe, can destroy genuine saving faith, because the saved**
-

“... endures to the end” (Matt. 24:13).

Jobs Example

- Job, **the most faithful man of his time**, went through almost inconceivable suffering.
- He lost **his wealth**, all of **his children** were killed, and **he was stricken** with a painful, debilitating disease.
- Worse, **those closest to him turned against him**; his wife foolishly urged him to
- *“curse God and die!”* (Job 2:9),
- While **his friends’ inept counsel** finally drove him to exclaim in exasperation,
- *“Sorry comforters are you all.... How then will you vainly comfort me, for your answers remain full of falsehood?”* (Job 16:2; 21:34).
- Most disconcerting of all, though Job knew of no major sin in his life, and **this made God seemed to be his implacable enemy**.
- In **Job 19:6–11**, he cried out in despair and confusion,

Know then that God has wronged me and has closed His net around me. Behold, I cry, “Violence!” but I get no answer; I shout for help, but there is no justice. He has walled up my way so that I cannot pass, and He has put darkness on my paths. He has stripped my honor from me and removed the crown from my head. He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone; and He has uprooted my hope like a tree. He has also kindled His anger against me and considered me as His enemy.

- Desperately seeking sympathy from his friends, Job pleaded with them,
-
- “Pity me, pity me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has struck me” (Job 19:21).
-
- The pain and agony in his life is **clearly and plainly exquisite and profound**.
 - We **dare not minimize** it or argue that there was no struggle on Job’s part.
 - He **did not simply dismiss all of his troubles and think godly thoughts**.

- It was **not an easy battle** for him to direct his mind and think in the fashion that he knew to be true, **rather than** in the fashion that all around him, from circumstances to friends and family were directing.
- **Yet, amazingly, is what he did!**
- Despite his misery, suffering, and despair caused by Satan's violent assaults (cf. Job 1:6–12; 2:1–7), **Job's faith in God remained intact.**
- In **Job 13:15** he confidently declared,

“Though He slay me, I will hope in Him.”

- Confronted by God's glorious, majestic holiness, **Job expressed genuine repentance for having doubted Him:**

I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. “Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?” Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. “Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.” I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes. (**Job 42:2–6**)

Habakkuks Example

- The prophet Habakkuk **also faced a dilemma that tested his faith.**
- Distressed by the **rampant sin in Israel**, he cried out to God,

How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and You will not hear? I cry out to You, “Violence!” Yet You do not save. Why do You make me see iniquity, and cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; strife exists and contention arises. Therefore the law is ignored and justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore justice comes out perverted. (**Hab. 1:2–4**)

- **To his dismay, God's answer was the opposite of what he had hoped for.**
 - Instead of bringing a spiritual revival in Israel, **God was going to bring devastating judgment on the nation.**
 - Even more perplexing, **He chose to use a godless, pagan nation** as the instrument of that judgment:
-

Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days—You would not believe if you were told. For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous people who march throughout the earth to seize dwelling places which are not theirs. They are dreaded and feared; their justice and authority originate with themselves. Their horses are swifter than leopards and keener than wolves in the evening. Their horsemen come galloping, their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swooping down to devour. All of them come for violence. Their horde of faces moves forward. They collect captives like sand. They mock at kings and rulers are a laughing matter to them. They laugh at every fortress and heap up rubble to capture it. Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on. But they will be held guilty, they whose strength is their god. (**Hab. 1:5–11**)

- Yet despite his confusion over a worse nation being the instrument of Israel's judgment, **Habakkuk's faith endured**.
- Though the dilemma did not change, **he expressed his continued trust in God's faithfulness, justice, and holiness:**

Are You not from everlasting, O Lord, my God, my Holy One? We will not die. You, O Lord, have appointed them to judge; and You, O Rock, have established them to correct. Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can not look on wickedness with favor. Why do You look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they? (**Hab. 1:12–13**)

- Those whose faith is genuine **will pass the tests God allows in their lives**, bringing them assurance, confidence, and hope.

Most Would Fail

- I cannot help but think that many, if not most in the “church” today **would fail this test**.
- **Instead of** recognizing and acknowledging the hand and purpose of God, I believe that **many would struggle to find another way** to make it come out the way that their preconceived ideas indicated that it ought to come out.

After all, I'm a good person and I've been good, why would God cause/allow me this kind of suffering? Isn't it God's will that I prosper and do well?

Second, God allows bad things to happen to His people to wean them from the world.

- Trials **strip away** the worldly resources that believers trust in, **leaving them completely dependent on divine resources.**
- **They do this by teaching us** that they are deceptive and that they truly cannot meet our need or do what they promise they will do.

Human Resource or Divine Power

- Before He fed the five thousand

“Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, said to Philip, ‘Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?’ “ (John 6:5).

- Philip and the other disciples immediately took inventory, and the results were not promising:

“Philip answered Him, ‘Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little.’ One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him, ‘There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?’ “ (John 6:7–9).

- But Philip and the others missed the point:

“This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do” (John 6:6).

- Jesus used this incident to show the disciples the **futility of trusting in human resources.**

Third, God allows bad things to happen to His people to call them to their heavenly hope.

- To the Romans Paul wrote,

“We also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint” (**Rom. 5:3–5**).

- The point that we, as believers, so often miss (because we have been seduced by the dark side – the philosophy of the world) is that **life after the fall was not intended to be pleasant – in fact – the opposite is true!**

- Oh, surely, God did create men for His own glory and to enjoy Him forever, **but in this present age**, sin has wracked and ruined that purpose and brought God's judgment on men and on creation.
- As a result of the curse, **life is designed to be unpleasant and painful**.
- There is **no way around that**.
- To be sure, this does **not mean that life is intended to be agonizing each and every day**...it is not as if men are being tortured.
- What we are saying is that **the curse of God is real** and that it cannot but be that this has **consequences and effects** in the real world experience of men and women.
- **This is why**, I believe, that life is often a burden and unfulfilling.
- **This is why men are seeking more and more and more!**
- The sad truth is that what **they are seeking is not available** from the source at which they are seeking it!
- Those who hope for heaven will never be disappointed in this life, and **suffering is the first step in producing that hope**.
- Paul **expressed his heavenly hope** when he wrote to the Corinthians,

“Momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:17–18).

- The greater the burden of trials that believers bear in this life, **the sweeter their hope of heaven becomes**.
- This is because trials, the natural experience of the just results of the curse of God on creation, **disabuse believers of any shred of the illusion that happiness, real happiness can be had here and now**.

A Large Part of the Problem

- **This is a part of the problem, isn't it?**
- It is a side effect of our being **so worldly minded**.
- Because we are focused on this world and this life, the cares of that world and life can overwhelm us.

- If our affections are truly set on heaven, then we will **value it more and here less!**

Fourth, God allows bad things to happen to His people to reveal to them what they really love.

- This **continues the thought** above, doesn't it?
- Not only does it reveal to us **where our hope lies**, but **also where our affections lie**.
- Many believers are **pretty much as infatuated with the things of the world as unbelievers are**.
- Not necessarily the "evil" things of the world, **but the stuff that all men love**.
- Things that **bring pleasure and satisfaction** to the flesh and to our hearts and minds as men.
- The idea here is that trials are not only corrective, but they are instructive and revealing to us.
- The Bible tells us that these things are not what are truly desirable, necessary as some of them are. If we have been born again by God's Spirit, this truth will become increasingly evident to us. We will learn that the Word of God is true and our own desires and cravings are false. We will come to see that the Scripture's declarations of what is right and needful are correct and that our own perceptions are unreliable and even harmful and detrimental to spiritual living.
- Those who seek the proven character that suffering produces (Rom. 5:3–4), and to be fellow sufferers with the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 5:41; 1 Peter 4:13), will gladly endure trials. But those who focus on worldly things will react with anger, confusion, and despair when trials strip them away. It is in the godly endurance of and Christlike response to such sufferings that character is developed. It is as we deny ourselves that we grow as believers.
- In speaking about suffering, it is important to remember at this point that we are not talking about self-flagellation or really any physical humiliation at all. What is in view here is the crucifixion and denial of self, in all of its forms. Many medieval "holy men" sought to develop themselves spiritually by doing things that were physically harmful and painful. This is definitely NOT what is in mind here. Suffering, in the normal course of life, and our godly response to it develops solid character.
- The way Abraham faced the severe trial involving his son Isaac revealed his love for God. Genesis 22:1–2 says,

"God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to

the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.’ “

- Abraham must have been shocked at this seemingly incomprehensible command. Isaac was the son he had longed for for decades. Then, when Abraham was old and his wife past her childbearing years, the unbelievable announcement came that they were to have a son (Gen. 18:10, 14). So incredible was the news that their long-cherished hopes were to be realized that both Abraham (Gen. 17:17) and Sarah (Gen. 18:12) initially greeted it with laughter. Further, Isaac was the son of the covenant, through whom Abraham’s descendants were to come (Gen. 17:19; 21:12; Rom. 9:7).
 - All of God’s promises and Abraham’s hopes were bound up in Isaac. Yet when God commanded him to slay Isaac as a sacrifice, Abraham was ready to obey. God stopped him, then spared Isaac and provided another sacrifice. Abraham’s willingness proved that he loved God above all else, even more than his own son. And he also believed in God’s promise that through Isaac the nation would come—he believed that if he killed him, God would raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11:17–19).
 - One of the big ideas here is that Abraham was willing to at in obedience to what God had said even though it contradicted what his perception was of how God was acting, the point being that he obeyed what God had actually said, not he thought and had interpreted God as meaning. We read what God has said and we apply it to our lives. This is unavoidable. Because our lives are complex, and because the Word does not directly, in so many words, address many issues, we get a perception of what God wants and how He will accomplish what He is doing in His purpose for us. This is entirely natural and, I would argue, necessary because of that very complexity of life. Otherwise we would be paralyzed and extremely limited in our ability to accomplish things and interact with the world.
 - Abraham, this text tells us, had an understanding of the world around him because of what God had said to him. Yet, when God spoke again, he was willing to obey and do what God told him because first, he was submissive to what God said, even at the expense of his understanding of what God was seeking to accomplish. Though the two commands that God gave seemed to him to be contradictory and destructive to God’s revealed purpose, he obeyed because God was God. He didn’t impose his own wisdom and understanding on the situation to work out a solution.
 - Second, as much as Abraham loved Isaac, the son he had been promised and for which he had waited for so long, he loved God more and importantly, he looked to heaven more than he looked to fleshly and material things. His high view of God and His power caused to reckon that God would work a way to see that both of His commands worked out in harmony.
 - Fifth, God allows bad things to happen to His people to teach them obedience. The psalmist acknowledged,
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“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.... It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes” (Ps. 119:67, 71).

- I believe this is an area that believers, particularly in our culture, fall down badly in. We are not the obedient servants we think ourselves to be. For some of the reasons mentioned above, in the case of Abraham, and others, we often “modify” our obedience to suit our own perceptions, preferences and desires. God often allows bad things to happen to us to teach us what obedience really is. We think ourselves obeying Him, we, in reality, we are not and God’s lack of blessing on us, startles us and causes us to look once again at the Word of God and reevaluate our standing to it.
- The painful sting of affliction reminds believers that sin has consequences. God uses trials to bring believers to obedience and holiness, as the writer of Hebrews reveals:

You have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov’d by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.” It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. ([Heb. 12:5–11](#))

- **Sixth, God allows bad things to happen to His people so He can reveal His compassion to them.** Believers’ suffering allows Him the opportunity to display His loving-kindness, which, David declared, is better than anything else in life: *“Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise You”* (Ps. 63:3). Believers never know God more intimately than when He comforts them in their suffering. Isaiah exults, *“Shout for joy, O heavens! And rejoice, O earth! Break forth into joyful shouting, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted His people and will have compassion on His afflicted”* (Isa. 49:13; cf. 51:12; 52:9; 66:13). This revelation of God’s compassion enhances worship.
- As believers who know and understand the Word, we understand that the pain of life is because of sin’s presence in the world and because of our frailty and weakness. As God intervenes and delivers us, or enables to undergo that suffering in a gracious and Christ-like fashion, we see His goodness and His compassion and grow!
- **Seventh, God allows bad things to happen to His people to strengthen them for greater usefulness.** This is another aspect of the didactic value of

suffering. The more believers are tested and refined by trials, the more effective their service will be. The kind of on-the-job training that the suffering offers yields character modification and teaches skills and abilities that cannot be learned easily in any other fashion.

“Consider it all joy, my brethren,” wrote James, “when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2–4).

- Finally, God allows bad things to happen to His people to enable them to comfort others in their trials.
- This is the human idea of being able to relate to another’s pain, except that in the training that God gives via suffering, we are enabled to offer something to people in the midst of their suffering that actually makes a real difference!
- All the world has to offer are platitudes and surface comforts. They can help make people feel better for a time, but there is little that a human counselor can do to actually relieve suffering and “make it better”. The believer who has undergone suffering can not only offer the truth of the Word of God’s claims regarding God’s compassion, etc. (no small offering!) but can also offer the assurance that God does, indeed, follow through on His promises and He does indeed “make it better” in a real and definite fashion. God does not leave men to suffer, but stands with them and upholds them by His word and His Spirit.
- Jesus said to Peter,

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31–32).

- After enduring his own trial and experiencing God’s comfort, Peter would be able to help others. As we will learn later in this chapter, Paul’s opening emphasis to the Corinthians is that God “*comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God*” (1:4).^[20]

God our Father

- God as a source of peace would be a typical Jewish thought. Our Father, however, brings Paul’s greeting into the sphere of the familial--the exact way Jesus taught his disciples to address God in prayer.
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⁹In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. ¹⁰Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. ¹³And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. ^[21]

- What Jesus means here is not only that we have privilege to appeal to God, the supreme authority in the universe into Whose presence no sinful being, no being that does not measure up to His exact and inviolable standard can enter; but we do, not as subjects, begging favor, but as family, as sons and daughters who already have favor! There is no question as to whether or not we have access to God or if He will hear our request. We are His family and He loves us. Because we are in Christ, there is no longer any sin barrier that bars us from His presence or prevents Him from acting on our behalf. While we need to recognize that our familial relationship with the Father and with the Lord Jesus Christ is no guarantee of “getting what we ask for” it is important to note both the predisposition of favor His part, and the compassion He bears toward His own children.

Note the Implied Access to God...

- Another issue that is here is that this blessedness of access to God is one of the great “benefits” of living as a believer. In our day and age we tend to measure worth and benefit by a tangible bottom line. That is, we tend to think in terms of reaping a sure and certain benefit that we can take to the bank. Certainly, we do necessarily think of this in monetary terms (though there are some in the professing church that would be so bold as to do so) but we are definitely tangibly minded when think in these areas.
- In so doing, we miss one of the greatest “benefits” that salvation brings. We all appreciate and are impressed by people of stature. Most are given a sense of joy and pleasure by being able see and meet someone the admire. How much more ought we be impressed and filled with joy and wonder at the truth that we have access, freely and without reservation to the presence of the very God the universe!
- In Jesus’ day, before one could enter into the presence of an oriental monarch, an intermediary introduced them and guaranteed their genuineness (*cf.* Barnabas, Acts 9:27–28). The OT portrait of God as King (Ps. 47:7) posed to NT writers the problem of the sinner’s access into his presence. That sinner, indeed no one, has an independent right of personal approach. As a believer, one who has embraced the Gospel and received the gift of salvation, one obtains introduction through Christ (Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:18; 3:12; 1 Pet. 3:18), whose death removes the barriers of hostility (Eph. 2:16), and enables them to draw near with confidence to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). ^[22] Once that introduction has been made, that is, once one is truly a believer, that right of access is secured and is an established fact. We are placed within His family and thus have access to His presence. Thus, after genuine salvation, access to God is that positive, friendly relationship with the Father in which

we have confidence that we are pleasing and acceptable to Him. Jesus is the “new and living way” (Heb. 10:20) who gives us access to God.^[23]

- Though none of us would purposely downplay or denigrate the significance of this access, we are all frequently guilty of neglecting or forgetting the great privilege that this involves. The very issue of sin with God has as its effect that we are excluded from the presence of God. All of the things that the Bible teaches are the results of sin presence and God’s judgment upon it can be said to be a manifestation of this very idea – sinners are expelled from or prohibited from the presence of our Holy Father in Heaven. Thus the truth that we gain access to God as believers ought to be a thrilling and breathtaking idea to us!
- Though the word is not actually used in the verse, a mention of the meaning of the word used in the Scripture to speak of access to God might be helpful to us at this point. Access is the translation of the Greek word *prosagoge* (προσαγωγή), a word made up of the verb *agō* (ἄγω) which means “to go,” and the preposition *pros* (πρός) which means “toward, facing.” The word is used in Rom. 5:2, Eph. 2:18, 3:12. In the early NT age the word was used in the technical sense of “a landing stage.” It is thought that it was used as a nautical term of the approach of a ship to a haven or harbor where it could land. Thus the total idea in the word would be access into and rest in a haven or harbor. In the case of Rom. 5:2, God’s grace is there pictured as a haven for the soul. The tense of the surrounding form in passage is often the perfect tense in Greek. Thus the words “have access” speak of a permanent haven for the soul.
- To make application theologically, the verb *prosagō* (προσαγωγή), which is the base of the word translated “access,” means, in its intransitive use, “approach, a drawing near.” Thus our word speaks not only of a haven of rest and security, but of a drawing near to God. The word *prosagō* (προσαγωγή) means also “to bring into the presence of,” thus “to present, to introduce.” It is our blessed Lord who Himself brings believing sinners into the presence of God, who presents and introduces them.
- The word was used in classical Greek especially of access to a king’s presence. The French word *entree* is an excellent translation of *prosagoge* (προσαγωγή). Our Lord brings believers by virtue of His precious blood, not only into the presence of God the Father, but into His unlimited favor and His infinite grace. The verb *prosagō* (προσαγωγή) is used in I Peter 3:18 in the expression, “that He might bring us to God.” The translation could read, “...that He might provide for you an *entree* into the presence of God.” The second, not the first person is found in the best texts.^[24]
- What greater blessing do we thus have? Because of the imputed righteousness of God we have “entrée”, access in to the presence of He, Who, prior to this, had been forbidding and inaccessible. The Scripture has much to say about this access:^[25]
- It is of God. Ps 65:4.

- It is by Christ. John 10:7,9; 14:6; Rom 5:2; Eph 2:13; 3:12; Heb 7:9,25; 10:19; 1 Pet 3:18.
- It is by the Holy Spirit. Eph 2:18.
- It is obtained by grace through faith. Acts 14:27; Rom 5:2; Eph 3:12; Heb 11:6.
- It follows upon reconciliation to God. Col 1:21,22.
- It is enjoyed, in this life, in prayer. Deut 4:7; Matt 6:6; 1 Pet 1:17.
- We accomplish it in his temple. Ps 15:1; 27:4; 43:3; 65:4.
- It is necessary in order to obtain mercy and grace. Heb 4:16.
- It is a privilege of saints. Deut 4:7; Ps 15:1; 23:6; 24:3,4.
- Saints have it with confidence. Eph 3:12; Heb 4:16; 10:19,20.
- It is promised granted and guaranteed only to repenting sinners. Hos 14:2; Joel 2:12.
- God's saints are to earnestly seek it. Ps 27:4; 42:1,2; 43:3; 84:1,2.
- Even the wicked are commanded to seek. Is 55:6; James 4:8.
- We are to urge others to seek it. Is 2:3; Jer 31:6.
- The great promises of the Word are connected with it. Ps 145:18; Is 55:3; Matt 6:6; James 4:8.
- Even the idea of blessedness connected with it. Ps 16:11; 65:4; 73:28.
- It was typified by the Priest's entry in the midst of the incense cloud. Lev 16:12-15; Heb 10:19-22.
- It was prefigures by Moses. Ex 24:2; 34:4-7.
- Another key idea here is one of authority and power. Not in a overbearing sense, but a reassuring sense. We have peace because God is our Father, and He has the power and the authority both to give us peace and to ensure that that peace actually is realized! Human agents and earthly authorities often profess and promise peace, but often have trouble delivering on their promises. This is for a variety of reasons, but one of those reasons is that any human power lacks both the authority and the power to make such claims! It is a glorious thing that God assuredly does not. There is no higher authority nor is there any stronger power.
- I feel constrained to mention here that the main idea in this passage (and in others like it) is not temporal peace, but spiritual peace. Grace and peace come from God the Father because He is the offended party (because of sin). As the

supreme and ruling authority He has the final say in the disposition of every human's case. Believers, because they stand in the righteousness of Christ, stand before a God Who is completely satisfied concerning their offense. They stand in grace and in peace which comes from their God and Father.

- There is a great deal of resistance to thinking of God as Father In our day. Mostly, this comes from what we would call the "liberal" end of the professing Christian camp. Much also comes from the evangelical side who seem to think that referring to God as Father is sexist and demeaning to women. There is also a portion of the so-called Christian community that insists that we much appeal to both the male and female aspects of God and thus "balance" and achieve spiritual union with the goddess. For people who actually believe the Bible to be the Word of God, there is little need to address such claims in this context. Such objections are clearly rooted, not in the text of the Bible itself, but in the presuppositions that are brought to the table before the text is actually consulted. Though it is certainly true that many object to the idea of God as Father, Bible believers ought to see it as just another example of the natural offensiveness of the Bible. God's Word offends many who are not willing to submit to it, but rather wish to twist and reshape it, re-imagining it as one of the modern terms goes, to suit what they already think.
- But we ought to note that while God is our Father, Jesus is not here spoken of as "our brother" but, rather, the Lord. Kyrios is placed first for emphasis. Grace and peace come from the Lord Jesus Christ. The concept of God as Father of the church and Jesus as her Lord captures two key distinctives of the Christian faith. Ultimately the Church is an institution that is human run. Certainly, it rests in human hands on the surface, but it is truly and actually God's church and must be seen in that light. This is not only a great statement of blessing and glory, but one of responsibility as well. God rules over the church, not men and Christ is its Lord. They are not passive observers, hoping that things go well.
- Note also that Paul again here draws our attention to the truth God is "our" Father. While it is not our intention to think this idea through in all of its Biblical implications (that would take far too much time!), we do want to consider a couple ideas that are pertinent to this passage. First of all, this is a continuation of the family theme that Paul has established. He is about to launch on a wonderful discussion of the comfort that God provides for His children. The central idea that is lurking behind that discussion is that of a sovereign and powerful, omniscient and omnipotent God whose concern for us is not just that of King for subject, but one of Father for child.
- The concept of God as our Father is some basic and so fundamental to the Christian experience that we don't even really give it much thought. It is not that we are consciously ignoring or making light of it, but rather that it is comfortable given that is always there and always something we can rely and depend upon.
- I was watching a few specials over the Memorial Day weekend and one of the most touching was one about the children of men and women killed in Iraq and the effect of their father's (or mother's) death on their lives. There was little physical effect, but the mental and emotional effect was heartbreaking. Something that was

supposed to be bedrock in their young lives had been torn away from them and they clearly had no idea how to sort that out. The counsel they received from their families and grief counselors though very well-meant was, by what I heard, inadequate because it gave them no real hope and no real understanding of why such things happen.

- God is our heavenly Father and there will never be a time when He will be taken from us (because no one is strong enough to do that!). There is never a time when He will leave us or forsake us. This assurance, along with the assurance of His power and authority, lies at the root of the counsel and teaching that Paul will give us regarding trials and dealing the hard thing of life. Unless and until we understand this we will never truly understand what the Word of God has to say in this area.

GOD IS OUR FATHER

- “Father” is probably the most common term we use in prayer, and rightly so, for that is the pattern Jesus set. Prayer should always begin with the recognition that God is our Father, the One who gave us life and who loves, cares for, provides for, and protects us.
- This also sets up for us a difficult and politically incorrect truth. The fact that God is *our* Father means that only believers in Christ are children in His family. Admittedly Malachi wrote, “*Do we not all have one Father? Has not one God created us?*” (*Mal. 2:10*) and Paul did say to the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill, “*As even some of your poets have said, ‘For we also are His offspring’*” (*Acts 17:28*). But Scripture makes it perfectly clear that God is the father of unbelievers only in creation. He is the Father of believers in a unique way that they do not share. In fact, it would be best for us to turn that around and say that God is the Father of believers in such a fashion that the unredeemed do not share nearly even most of those ways!
- Spiritually, unbelievers have another father. In His severest condemnation of the Jewish leaders who opposed Him, Jesus said, “*You are of your father the devil*” (*John 8:44*). 1 John 3 clearly characterizes two families: the children of God and the children of the devil. The former do not continue to commit sin; the latter do. The Apostle Paul made a clear distinction between the children of light and the children of darkness (*Eph. 5:8*).
- The problem before the world is not merely that we all have the same Father and just call Him different names. There is simply not just one spiritual family of mankind under one universal fatherhood of God. 2 Peter 1:4 says that only those who believe have been made “*partakers of the divine nature.*” It is only to those who receive Him that Jesus gives “*the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name*” (*John 1:12*). Thus we can go to God as His beloved children.

The Jewish Perspective of God

- It is helpful to remember that whereas “our Father” declares a wonderful intimacy between God and His children, most of the world in Jesus’ day worshiped gods who were characterized as distant and fearsome. Sadly, that even eventually became the Jewish perspective of God. Because of their continual disobedience to God throughout the centuries, including tolerating pagan gods, the Jews severed any true relationship they had with God as their Father. To them He had become little more than a relic of the past, a remote being who once called and guided their ancestors.
- But those faithful Jews, both in our Lord’s time and before, knew God as their Father. Isaiah saw Him that way. To deal with the nation’s sinfulness, he prayed,

Thou wast angry, for we sinned, we continued in them a long time; and shall we be saved? For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. And there is no one who calls on Thy name, who arouses himself to take hold of Thee; for Thou hast hidden Thy face from us, and hast delivered us into the power of our iniquities. But now, O Lord, Thou art our Father (Isa. 64:5–8).

- Isaiah reminded them of the comforting reality that God was their Father, and that He would take care of them. I believe that we as a society, in our day and age, have also gotten so far away from any realistic spiritual foundation that we also have begun to see God as someone distant and remote that cannot really and meaningfully be interacted with.
- The Jews in the Old Testament saw five basic elements that encompassed the Fatherhood of God.

As Father of the Nation

- First Chronicles 29:10 gives God the title: “*Lord God of Israel our Father.*” That refers to Him as Father of the nation. He is the progenitor of the family, the one without whom there would be no family! He is the reason we are here at all!

As a Father Who Is Near

- A father is closer than an uncle or a cousin or a friend or a neighbor. Psalm 68, while using dramatic language to refer to the grandeur of God’s power, simply says that God is “*a father of the fatherless*” (v. 5). This nearness of God is wonderful and valuable asset to us as we seek to make sense of a sin-sick world.

As a Gracious Father

- A father is forgiving, tenderhearted, merciful, and gracious to His children, which is very true of God: “*Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him*” (Ps. 103:13). Because the sacrifice of

Christ and His imputed righteousness has removed the offense of sin, we are the apple of God's eye and He, in a very real way, dotes on us as His children!

As a Guiding Father

- A father leads his children and gives them wisdom and instruction. That was also true of God's relationship to Israel. He said of them, *"With weeping they shall come, and by supplication I will lead them; I will make them walk by streams of waters, on a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel"* (Jer. 31:9). There is nothing in which we might need counsel and direction in which God is not both willing and able to act as a guide for us as we seek to walk through it in a godly and Biblical fashion.

As a Father Who Requires Obedience

- Because God was their Father, the people were required to obey Him. Deuteronomy 32:6 reiterates that: *"Do you thus repay the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? Is not He your Father who has bought you?"*

The Biblical Perspective of God

- When Jesus arrived on the scene, He reintroduced His Jewish audience to God as a loving, beneficent Father to those who know, love, and obey Him. In the Sermon on the Mount, He taught them that the Father takes care of the needs of His children:

Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! (Matt. 7:7–11)

- Jesus reaffirmed to them what their Scripture taught and what faithful, godly Jews had always believed: God is the Father in heaven to those who trust in Him.
- Interestingly, in all His prayers, Jesus used the title *Father*, **except** when He was on the cross bearing the sin of the world and was forsaken by God (Matt. 27:46). Though the text of Matthew 6:9 uses the Greek word *Patēr*, Jesus likely used the Aramaic word *Abba* since that is the language He and the majority of Palestinian Jews commonly spoke. Since *Abba* is sort of the equivalent to our term "Daddy," Jesus would have used it to emphasize the personal and intimate relationship God has with His children. We need to be careful here that we do not read 20th century ideas into this however. There is no irreverence or disrespect in this term.

- To be able to approach God in prayer as our loving Heavenly Father implies several things:

It Dispels Fear

- Missionaries report that, because so many individuals live in fear of their gods, one of the greatest gifts Christianity ever brings to primitive societies is the certainty that God is a loving, caring Father. The invented false gods of false religions are typically characterized as vengeful and jealous, and their worshipers must take desperate measures to appease them. But knowing that the true God is our Father dispels all such fear.

It Encourages Hope

- In the midst of a hostile world that's falling apart, God is our Father, and He'll take care of our future. If an earthly father will spare no effort to help and protect his children, how much more will our Heavenly Father love, protect, and help us (Matt. 7:11).

It Removes Loneliness

- Even if we are rejected and abandoned by family, friends, or even fellow believers, we know that our Heavenly Father will never leave us (Heb. 13:5). To drive away loneliness, God's presence is all a believer ever needs.

- Paul Tournier, a Christian physician, wrote in his *Doctor's Case Book*,

There was one patient of mine, the youngest daughter in a large family which the father found it difficult to support. One day she heard her father mutter despairingly, referring to her, "We could well have done without that one." That is precisely what God can never say. He is a loving Father to every one of His children (cited in William Barclay, *The Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer for Every Man* [New York: Harper & Row, 1963], 172).

It Defeats Selfishness

- Not one singular pronoun is used in Jesus' pattern for prayer, and it begins "our Father" because we all are fellow children with the rest of the household of God. Our prayers should embrace the entire community of the faithful. Remember that Ephesians 6:18 says we are to pray for "all the saints." We are to pray holding up to God what is best for all, not just for one.

It Provides Resources

- God is "our Father, who [is] in heaven." All the resources of heaven are available to us when we trust God as our heavenly Supplier. He "has blessed us with every

spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). Commentator Arthur Pink writes,

- If God is in heaven then prayer needs to be a thing of the heart and not of the lips, for no physical voice on earth can rend the skies, but sighs and groans will reach the ears of God. If we are to pray to God in heaven, then our souls must be detached from all the earth. If we pray to God in heaven, then faith must wing our petitions (*An Exposition on the Sermon on the Mount* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950], 161).
- Whatever you seek, whether it's peace, fellowship, knowledge, victory, or boldness, God has an abundant supply in the heavenlies. We need only ask our Father for it.

It Demands Obedience

- If Jesus, as God's true Son, came down from heaven not to do His own will but His Father's (John 6:38), how much more are we, as adopted children, to do only His will. Obedience to God is one of the supreme marks of our relationship to Him as children.
- Yet in His grace, God loves and cares for His children even when they are disobedient. The story Jesus told in Luke 15 would be better titled the Parable of the Loving Father rather than the Prodigal Son. The father in the story represents our Heavenly Father, who can forgive and rejoice over both a self-righteous son who remains moral and upright and a rebellious son who becomes dissolute, wanders away, but then returns.
- When you begin your prayers by calling on “Our Father, who art in heaven,” you indicate your eagerness to go to Him as a child, knowing He loves you. And you'll find that He is eager to lend His ear, His power, and His eternal blessing to the requests of His children if it serves them best and further reveals His purpose and glory.^[26]

A Family Obligation

- There is also the idea of obligation here as well. The expression *God our Father* implies that the readers of this epistle are his children. They are members of God's family through Jesus Christ; they owe him faithful allegiance and perfect obedience because he is their Lord. From the Father and his Son, every member of the household of faith receives the blessings of grace and peace.^[27]
- We need to exercise care in that we do not begin to think of this obligation in a legalistic sense. By this I mean that it is terribly dangerous and, in fact, downright blasphemous when we begin to think that our own acts and machinations somehow earn or secure the blessing of God as a result. Sadly, there are many who have fallen into thinking of their spiritual life as if it was just such an exercise in give and take with God. We do certainly have an obligation to God, but that obligation is that

of a good son or daughter, who loves and is loved by his or her Father. The obligation is real, but is not one of compulsion or one that is driven by force or guilt.

- The sense of force or guilt equates with legalism. If we do it because we have no choice, then we are not obeying and seeking Him out of love and devotion, but rather out of necessity and legal obligation. Don't get me wrong, obedience is obedience and that is always better than disobedience. But such obedience is not the character of obedience that God desires from His children. The prodigal's brother submitted to and obeyed his father, but there was nothing that would be characterized by most believers as healthy and pleasing to God in that obedience. In fact, that obedience broke down at the end of the matter, didn't it?

The Sum of the Matter

- So Paul in these opening verses seeks to highlight both his apostolic and his family relationship to the Corinthians by calling on the witness of the broader community of Achaian believers and pointing to the filial bonds he and the Corinthians share and the obligation that they all had to seek and to understand and obey the Father in heaven. This is not an easy thing for one to do. Often, the two ideas, family and authority, are kept apart in our thinking and in our practice.
- By making this most personal of letters "public," Paul holds the Corinthians accountable to the church at large. It is an interesting approach to the unique problem that the Corinthians had. He is seeking to establish that he is both their friend, a member of their family, as well as one who spoke to them with the authority of God. This is a delicate balance for Paul to maintain. It is, I might add, a balance that all who are both family members and believers share. It is all too common for us to allow our love for our families to cloud and to interfere with our obligations and necessities to them as fellow believers. Paul, though not a physical family member of these Corinthians is a good pattern for us to consider and to emulate in these matters.
- Friendship always breeds some form of contempt as the saying goes. While friendship is conducive to many very good things, dealing authoritatively with one another was and is not one of them. Paul is not taking an easy road here. It is a road that road, here that we as church leaders are called to travel as well. We are not to lord our authority over the church, but rather to act as friends, authoritative friends, but friends none-the-less.

^[1] Richards, L., & L. O. Richards. *The Teacher's Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1987.

^[2] Kistemaker, S. J., & W. Hendriksen. *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001. Page 36.

- ^[3] *The New King James Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, c1982. 2 Co 1:1.
- ^[4] Kistemaker, S. J., & W. Hendriksen. *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001. Page 38.
- ^[5] Kistemaker, S. J., & W. Hendriksen. *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001. Page 38.
- ^[6] *The New King James Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, c1982. 2 Co 1:2.
- ^[7] *The New King James Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, c1982. Ac 4:33.
- ^[8] Spurgeon, C. H. *All of Grace : An Earnest Word With Those Who Are Seeking Salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ*. electronic ed. Springdale PA: Whitaker House, 1983; Published in electronic form by Christian Classics Foundation, 1996.
- ^[9] Henry, M. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991. Ac 4:32.
- ^[10] *The New King James Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, c1982. Ro 5:20.
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