

Sept. 22, 2002

"God Is Faithful"  
II Cor. 1

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. Within a year after Paul's first letter to the Corinthian believers, some in the group had been swayed by false teachers who stirred the members against the apostle. These "teachers" claimed that he was deceitful, proud, egotistical, unimpressive in appearance and oratory, dishonest (especially concerning money), and unqualified as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul sent Titus to Corinth to encourage the Corinthian believers to stand fast in the Good News as he (Paul) had delivered it to them. When Titus returned to Paul at Ephesus, the latter rejoiced when he learned that the Corinthians had, in fact, had a change of heart regarding Paul and the Gospel he had shared with them. Apparently a majority of the membership agreed to remain loyal to the apostle and his message. Much of this second letter expresses Paul's thanksgiving for their decision, and he further outlines his qualifications to confirm their decision. Without the context of this letter combined with the first, one could conclude that Paul was simply boasting about himself in Letter Two. He had ample reason to corroborate their right decision to choose him and his Gospel message. Very probably those "teachers" were either Judaizers, or ones who had been influenced by such. Also, his insistence that believers should conduct their lives according to the Lord's teachings could have been a burden for some believers who were being influenced by the debauchery and immorality so prevalent in wicked Corinth. Such reluctance was evident, for remember, Paul cited one of the believers was living (cohabiting) with his father's wife, I Cor. 5:1-3. Further, his admonition to the congregation concerning such behavior was explicit. That one should be excluded from the fellowship, because of the adverse, unGodly testimony which he was living, I Cor. 5:4-7. Note especially vs. 5 of this passage which states, " - - deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." When we examine (next week) Chapter Two of this letter (II Cor.), we will learn the outcome of the wayward man who was cohabiting with his father's wife, and, at the same time, professing to be a believer of Jesus Christ.

II. Paul begins this second letter to the Corinthians by confirming his apostleship for Jesus Christ as having been established by the will of God, the heavenly Father. He notes that Timothy was with him there in Ephesus and shared with the apostle the communication of this second letter to the Corinthian believers. His introduction makes clear that the letter was appropriate for all believers in the province of Achaia which was the entire peninsula where Athens was also located, vs. 1. His greeting asked that the people of Achaia be accorded the grace and peace "from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." He then characterized God as the Father of mercies, comfort and of our Lord Jesus Christ. God comforts believers, his spiritual children, in their times of trials and troubles so that those same children can comfort one another. We believers are associated with the Savior and therefore appreciate the troubles inherit in a world where sin causes so much pain, vss, 3-5. Just as we are comforted by Christ's love for us, even though

he suffered greatly while in the mortal flesh (Isa. 53:3-5), we are to comfort one another as believers in that same Suffering Servant. Our eternal hope lies not in the present world order, but in the promise of God through faith in his only Son, Jesus the Messiah (Savior). In vs. 8-11 Paul testifies to his own trials as he has served the Lord in Asia, our current Asia Minor and where all the churches addressed by John in Rev. Chaps. 1-3 were located, Rev. 1:11. Asia in the early New Covenant period consisted of roughly the western third of the Asia Minor peninsula. This Roman province was as rich as any portion of the Roman Empire. It had been a possession of Rome since BC 133. The trade and cross travels through this area was, no doubt, Paul's reason for spending so much time, during these early years of spreading the Gospel, in Ephesus. Remember that he gave as his reason for not visiting Corinth during a rather long period was that, "I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost for a great and effectual door is opened to me, and there are many adversaries," I Cor. 16:8-9. In vs. 8-11 of our current consideration Paul is referring to the Asian service and the problem he had experienced there. Through the remainder of Chapter One he again asks the Corinthians to understand the priority he has given to the Asian work.

III. In vs. 12 Paul states his position regarding how they relate to his priority of service. He hopes that they can understand his position. His reason for choosing his places and length of services in the various areas is, because he has been under the direct leadership of God's grace. He admits that his earlier plans were to come to Corinth, but even his promises as a human must take second place under God's direct leadership. In other words, any plans which Paul made were subject to correction and change by the Lord God. Only God is faithful to his own overall plan for his servants, and only God has the final and unchangeable "yes" or "no." Any appearance to mankind that God has changed is caused by the fallibility of people to carry out God's perfect will for them. God, of course, knew mankind's fallibility from the creation of the world. The relationship of mankind's imperfection and God's perfect holiness is perhaps best understood by noting God's Word at Heb. 8:7,10 in which God promised (Jer. 31:29-34) that a New Covenant would be made with mankind in which God would communicate directly with each believing person. This promise was later implemented through the Person of God's Holy Spirit and the merit of a sacrificed only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. A perfect, holy God could relate to any imperfect (sinful) person only by means of a perfect sacrifice, Heb. 9:12-15,24-28. Paul reminded the Corinthians that their hope and joy depended not upon his visiting or being with them, but upon God's faithfulness which was absolute and sealed by his very Holy Spirit. God's promises are not "yes" or "no," but are established by a resounding "yes." To that we are eligible only to say "AMEN." We are sealed with a steadfast down payment, the Holy Spirit of God, and God cannot lie, Heb. 6:18-20. God's messenger does not have control over a believer's spirit, but a believer's joy and hope is fixed by his or her faith in God's faithfulness to keep his promise through Jesus Christ, vs. 21-24. God is so merciful and loving!

Sept. 29, 2002

"Forgiveness, Comfort, And Love"  
II Cor. 2

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. Paul's sentiments which begin Chap. 2 are a continuation of the end of the previous chapter. His delay in returning to Corinth was to give time for those erring believers to admit their misbehaving according to God's will for them as believers, his children. For Paul to be with them knowing their fracture of God's will would have so saddened him that the sadness would have been infectious for the members. Vs. 1 indicates that the apostle had visited the group before under unpleasant circumstances. He determined not to repeat the occasion, for he feels that his encouragement can soothe their own spirits (especially of those not involved directly in the sinful activities). But who then would give Paul encouragement and a feeling of joy, vs. 2. Their feelings of satisfaction could not be thorough and complete without the whole group's knowing that they, as a spiritual family, were serving the Lord appropriately and without some members obviously serving Satan while claiming to be in good standing with God's people. Paul confesses that he had communicated with them (the first letter) with "much affliction and anguish," but, even so, his sorrow did not quench his undying love for them. Further, he wanted the Corinthians to know that he still loved them, vs. 4.

II. Beginning with vs. 5 the apostle addresses specifically the problem of immorality which he had noted in I Cor. 5. We should review the situation, at least briefly. One of the male members of the congregation was living as man and wife with his own father's wife. There are some questions which we can pose and which the Bible does not answer. In any case, the immoral situation was well known in Corinth, and Paul condemned the man's actions (not the man's spirit). The context of I Cor. 5 makes fairly obvious that those who were not believers did not practice such sexual immorality, incest, I Cor. 5:1. Paul's admonition to the congregation was that they withdraw fellowship from him. If believers are to demonstrate a genuine relationship with a holy God, through faith in Jesus Christ, their lifestyles should reflect God's will according to Jesus' teachings. Jesus said at John 14:22-29, "- - If a person love me, he (or she) will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our home with him. - -" In this same passage Jesus says that after he (Jesus) is gone, God will send a Comforter, Helper (Gk, paraclete) to teach believers the words (will) of Jesus. Further, we learn from God's Word at Eph. 4:30 that we, as believers, can indeed grieve (sadden) God's Spirit by not performing according to the Holy Spirit's leading. Remember last week we noted at II Cor. 1:21-22 the same idea.

III. Now in Chap. 2:5+ Paul lets us know that those who grieve God's Holy Spirit should also grieve a congregation of believers as well. The apostle says that his sadness was not without reservation, "but in part," vs. 5. Nor did Paul want the congregation to feel defeated, "be too severe." Now that the man had repented and changed his immoral practice (of living illicitly with his father's wife), his punishment was sufficient when the

congregation had expressed corporately their disapproval of his sinful action, vs. 6. The group should, following his confession and change of life, forgive him, comfort him, and, finally, reaffirm their love toward him, vss. 7-8. Why should the congregation accept him and return him to full fellowship status? Because he could otherwise be "swallowed up with overmuch sorrow," vs. 7. Paul revealed in vs. 9 why he had been so direct and abrupt in the former letter. He wanted to know whether the Corinthian congregation of believers would follow the leadership of God's Holy Spirit.

IV. Vs. 10 introduces a very important principle concerning forgiveness of those who have, as God's children, sinned against God's Spirit. Paul says, in effect, that the local congregation is the entity which properly exercises discipline to those who contradict God's will in their moral choices. The apostle had given them his own opinion in Chap. 5 of I Cor., but he was not really sure how the group would react to his position. He knew that God's Spirit had led him to his view. However, he had no way to know whether the group would also be in accord with the Lord's leadership through his Spirit. If you forgive this repentant member, I will, of course, accept your position, not on my own authority to forgive. Vs. 10b states that Paul accepted the forgiveness, because he knew from the congregation's observation the sinning believer had met the condition to have been forgiven by "the person of Christ." The "bottom line" was not whether Paul or the congregation had forgiven him, as important as that forgiveness was, the most vital fact was that Paul knew that Christ had, in fact, forgiven the wayward one. And how could Paul be so sure? God's Word is consistent on this matter. Examine I John 1:8-2:5,12, "If we say that we have no sin (proneness to sin), we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If, however, we confess our sin [to God], he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That we sin as believers is made crystal clear in God's Word which states, (I John 2:1) "My little children [of God], these things write I unto you, that you sin not. And if you [any believing person] sin, we [believers] have an advocate (intercessor) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is the propitiation (one who appeases and makes favorable or atones) for our sins." And at I John 2:12, "I write unto you, God's children, because your sins are forgiven you for his (Jesus') name's sake." Paul was very aware of God the Father's forgiving nature through his Son, Jesus the Savior, and could, therefore, notify and assure the Corinthian believers that the man who had been living sinfully could be sure that the Lord had heard his confession to God and mended his lifestyle was now back in fellowship with both God and God's people, the ekklesia. We should be aware that there is a large segment of those who profess to be Christians in the world today who have been taught and believe that forgiveness comes from and through the corporate church. This arrangement gives that corporate body the control of forgiveness over its members which is, I believe, contrary to God's Word. It is true that at John 20:23 Jesus did tell the original apostles that they would know whose sins would be forgiven, but note that in the preceding vs. 22 such knowledge is related to their receiving the Holy Spirit. We are triumphant only in Christ, for we do not "peddle by trickery" the Word of God, but give [truth] directly from God, II Cor. 2:14,17.

Oct. 6, 2002

"The Spirit Giveth Life"  
II Cor. 3

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. At the end of Chap. 2 Paul gives all credit for a believer's triumph to faith in the power of Jesus Christ. At the beginning of Chap. 3 he gives attention to the part a witness plays in the salvation process. The apostle asks a couple of rhetorical questions in vs. 1. Does a witness to God's truth, in this case Paul himself as one especially chosen by God to communicate God's Word, need a letter of reference from someone other than God to vouch for his fidelity to the truth? Do I, Paul, need to lay again the foundation for spiritual salvation since I have already relayed the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth to you, Gal. 1:6-12. He said, "- - Need I, as some others do, need letters of commendation?" In vs. 2 he refers to having ones heart written upon, and states that their faith and manner of life shouts out that the message (Paul's) which changed their wills was positive evidence of the truth of Paul's witness. They had received God's Spirit who had himself written God's truth on their hearts (wills), Rom. 8:12-17. Believers, then, who follow Paul's letters (God's Word) written in their hearts (minds, wills) are following God's will, not because the communication is ink on paper. God's will (Spirit) is so much a part of the believers' personalities that they are new spiritual beings, II Cor. 5:17. Our new beings were created from above, and we now trust Christ and his relation to God the Father, John 10:22-30; II Cor. 3:4-5.

II. Beginning with vs. 6 Paul introduces and expands upon the contrast between God's Old Covenant and his New Covenant with mankind. Our message as believers in Jesus as Messiah (Savior) has to do with the difference between the first Covenant which was a set of rules set down in stone, and the second and last Covenant "of the Spirit [who] giveth life." To realize the profound difference one should keep in mind that "life" in this better Covenant is defined as "together with ones Creator" through faith in his only begotten Son, Christ Jesus, vs. 6. The Law was given to mankind through God's servant, Moses. But that Law ministered (dispensed) death to the hearers who attempted to please God by abiding by that Law. The concepts of the Law as codified, killed (spiritually) people even though that Law was glorious, because it expressed God's will for people. There is no doubt concerning the glory related to the Law, for Moses glowed with God's glory immediately after receiving it, Exod. 34:29-35. In the context of Scripture in which Moses received what Paul is referring to here, the Ten Commandments are intended. There is no fault with that Law even though it condemns mankind. The problem, then, is not with God who gave the Law, the Law, or with Moses through whom God channeled the Law, but with people's lack of will and therefore their inability to keep it. So what good was the Law to a people who could not live according to its demands? A sacrifice system was established to bridge the gap between God and mankind, but even that did not suffice. And what about today after Jesus has come and become God's agent for believers' spiritual rebirth? God's will for mankind as expressed in God's Law still shows individuals that they are sinners separated

from their loving heavenly Father, Psa. 19:7; Gal. 3:24-26. Vs. 7b states that the Old Covenant was known by God from the beginning to be an arrangement which would fade away, Heb. 8:7. What is the chief difference between the Old and New Covenants? Now if God's ministry of the Law was so glorious, how much more glorious is the Covenant during which God will live in his ekklesia, his people called out of all the earth to serve him in his Kingdom of God. God's Holy Spirit himself will dwell within each believer, a new phenomenon in God's relating with those who will believe his New Covenant in and through Jesus Christ, Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:14-16. The ministry of the New Covenant will testify to a perfect (complete) righteousness, for God has now provided the perfect Lamb for the needed sacrifice. Those who have faith in that Lamb, Jesus the Messiah, are covered by God's very own righteousness, Rom. 9:30-33. Throughout all time the factor that has pleased God has been faith in God's promise, not in ones own self-righteousness, Matt. 23:12; Rom. 10:3. The most succinct Bible contrast of the two Covenants is at Heb. 8:13, "In that he saith, A New Covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which is becoming obsolete and has become outdated is ready to vanish away."

III. In vs. 10 Paul, in comparing the two Covenants, states that when God replaced the first glorious Covenant with the ultimate in glory, he established faith not in the good Law but in his only Son. Our hope now is in the righteousness of that only Son, Jesus Christ, and we can be bold. Our boldness is not dependent upon our ability to keep the Law but upon our faith in God's own righteousness, in God's Lamb whom he furnished for the sins of all people who will trust him, Gen. 22:1-8, 11-13; John 1:29, 36; Heb. 9:12, 14-15, 22-28. Recall that Paul was a Hebrew by birth and a strict Pharisee. He had personally experienced what Moses underwent when God's glory gradually faded from his face after leaving God's presence on Mt. Sinai. In Paul's case, however, this glow of trusting the Law failed quickly on his journey to Damascus to imprison believers who trusted not the Law, but God's sacrificial Lamb, Christ Jesus. Paul is now testifying to the Corinthian believers in AD 58 that the veil which covered Moses' face has been done away with entirely, Matt. 27:50-51, in Christ, vs. 16. The Law was read regularly by the Israelites, but their wills were made dull in Paul's day (and still are). The Jews have still not accepted God the Father's righteousness through Jesus, God's Messiah. The Law is a veil over their hearts, vss. 14-15. Their refusal to trust Jesus is the reason they have not received the Holy Spirit of God. God's Holy Spirit will come and live with (personally direct a believer's life) an individual only if he or she yields to God's plan of spiritual salvation for eternal life in and through Christ Jesus. Just as the heavenly Father and Jesus are one and the same (Jesus is God who came in human flesh), so is the Lord Jesus one with the Holy Spirit, John 10:30; 14:36; II Cor. 3:17. "- - Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," John 8:36; vs. 17. We believers can boldly approach God and can, with unveiled faces as reflections of the Lord Jesus Christ whom we trust for eternal life, rejoice. We have been transformed from fear of the Law (intended to reflect God's glory, righteousness) to the ultimate glory of God's righteousness, faith in Christ Jesus who is our righteousness. Faith in Jesus alone can give eternal, spiritual life!

Oct. 13, 2002

"Temporal Versus Eternal"  
II Cor. 4

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. Chap. 4 continues (begins with "Therefore") Paul's testimony of those who bear witness to God's grace whereby he "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he (God) not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32) Our testimony, even as Paul's, gives us such motivation because of God's mercy, we do not lose heart or faint, vs. 1, 16, and see also Job 13:15-16, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him (God). - - He also shall be my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before him." The apostle in vs. 2 states that his testimony (God's Word) renounces crafty (hidden, shameful, ulterior, or adulterous) elements which do not reveal God's genuine position regarding his relating to his creation, mankind. The implication in vs. 2 is that some who claim to proclaim God's Word to be one thing really are combining its truth with error. The resulting amalgamation is not the Good News but is dishonest and is "handling the Word of God deceitfully." Such propagation of an improper, false "gospel" was in order to "commend themselves" rather than as Paul was doing, "renouncing such dishonesty." The true Gospel of God through his Son, Christ Jesus, is the ultimate expression of God's grace, and is so simple that a child can understand, Matt. 18:1-5. In fact, if it is hid, it is hid (veiled) from those who simply refuse to accept God's gracious, free offer of eternal life through his own righteousness in and through his only begotten Son Jesus Christ (are perishing), vs. 3. All of the propagators of this dishonest and false "gospel" are led by "the god of this world," (Matt. 12:31, "the prince (ruler) of this world"). These false teachers fulfill Isaiah's prophecy at Isa. 6:8-10; Matt. 13:14-15; John 3:36; Gal. 2:21; Jude 4. The substance of the argument against false teachers is that anything or any persons who put itself or themselves between an individual and Christ Jesus is blinded and cannot see the truth (God's Gospel), because Christ is the very image (true reflection) of God himself, vs. 4b. Nothing or no persons can rightfully claim to be God, for the only true way to see and know God the Father is through Jesus Christ himself, John 14:6-7.

II. A true witness to God's truth does not elevate himself or herself, but Christ Jesus as Lord, vs. 5. The true witness is, in fact, a servant of the Lord, not one who is served by others, Matt. 20:25-28. As Paul put it in vs. 5, "For we proclaim not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord: and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." The plural pronouns used here, "we" and "ourselves," are not the royal plurals used by monarchs, but are plural because, at the beginning of this letter, Paul includes Timothy as a coauthor of the message being sent to the Corinthians. Now we know also that God's Holy Spirit was the actual Author since it is God's Word to us believers, but not to unbelievers, vs. 3. The same Creator God who "commanded light to shine out of darkness [made something out of nothing, Gen. 1:1-5], hath shined in our (believers') hearts (wills), to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face (person) of Jesus Christ." The apostle (God's Word) is saying that it requires the same creative

power to recreate a human spirit into his (God's) likeness as it did for God to create something (physical) from nothing, II Cor. 5:17. (See also John 6:35,39,41-47; Rom. 8:16-17.)

III. A big problem for us believers is that part of us which is temporary, the physical dwelling place (our bodies) of our spirits, spirits which have been remade (reborn from above) spiritually. We have eternal spirits in "earthen vessels," and we know from our experiences that "the excellency of the power (which recreated us) is of God, and not of us," vs. 7. In the flesh we are under pressure "on every side" but not destroyed (crushed) spiritually. We are at times perplexed (with the physical eventualities), but we do not permit life's uncertainties to create despair or hopelessness for us who have eternal life. Even when in this life we are persecuted and struck down, we know God's promise, to sustain us even through our separation from this world order (physical death) and beyond, is steadfast and sure, vss. 8-9. We know that our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom we trust, went through the severest of persecutions. God's promise is that if we trust and publicly display that trust before others, we will be protected from anything that would separate from God's love for us, Matt. 10:32-33; Rom. 8:35-39. As believers we are to subject our actions while in these temporary dwellings to the lordship of Jesus Christ so that our attitude and actions will be manifest (demonstrate) our trust in the Lord Jesus, vss. 10-11. Our lives are to be lived for others rather than selfishly, I Cor. 10:24; Phili. 2:3-8. Paul could have lived a selfish life but deliberately chose to spend his life dedicated to proclaiming God's Good News in Jesus Christ so that others could hear, believe, and thereby have life eternal. We, too, should live lives that testify to God's grace through his Son. Paul refers to such a life as one which has the "spirit of faith," vs. 13. In that verse he quotes Psa. 116:10, "I believed, and therefore have I spoken." We believers are likewise to speak (communicate) our belief to others. We understand that as God raised Jesus from physical death, "shall raise up us also by the same power," and we will, after that resurrection, be presented together with Paul and Timothy, vs. 14. In vs. 15 Paul states simply that sharing God's offer of his grace with all who will accept it, is worth all the sacrifice in personal time and effort, because all such activity will signify agreement with the praise and glory due God for his mercy through his Son, Christ Jesus.

IV. The chapter concludes with a repeat of vs. 1, that believers should not "become weary in well doing," Gal. 6:9-10; II Thes. 3:13. Paul's reasoning is that we are inevitably going to diminish physically and eventually die physically, I Cor. 15:22. This arrangement was brought about by mankind's choice of evil (Isa. 53:6), but God now has created a new covenant by sending his Son from heaven for all who will trust him for eternal life. Those who have that trust are renewed in their spirits every moment of their lives, "day by day", vs. 16. We believers should not be overly concerned about the problems and anxieties of this temporal period "while we look not at things which are seen. Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." The things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen (our faith in Jesus Christ) are eternal," vs. 18.



Oct. 27, 2002

"We Walk By Faith"  
II Cor. 5

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. Chap. 5 of II Corinthians is probably the best known passage in this second letter by most believers, for it is there where Paul (God's Word) makes an explicit connection of ones faith in God's love (John 3:16) with the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Vs. 1 states that, "For we know that if (when) this tabernacle (tent or temporary home) were (is) dissolved (destroyed), we have a building (permanent place where our spirits will continue to live) created by God (himself) not by hands (of earthly materials), John 2:13-21; Mark 14:58, "eternal in the heavens." While in the mortal flesh, we believers yearn and earnestly desire to swap our flesh-and-blood dwelling places for that eternal house waiting for us in heaven which God is preparing for us, John 14:1-3. Such was Paul's testimony at Phil. 1:21-24 and Peter's at II Pet. 1:13-14, but both noted that their service for the Lord was the restraining force which at that time caused them to want to remain in the flesh. Neither was suicidal even though both looked forward to being in Jesus' presence. Vss. 3 and 4 have raised questions in the minds of many Bible scholars as to whether "nakedness" as noted here has to do with the believer's state of being between mortal death and the resurrection when Jesus returns to earth in person. If this transitional period is what Paul is describing here, it is to my knowledge of Scripture, the only instance where the believer is said to be without living quarters (naked) between physical death and the resurrection, I Cor. 15:42,50-52; I Thes. 4:13-18. I believe that that is an improper interpretation of the passage and that upon leaving our tabernacles (mortal bodies) we believers go at once to be with our Lord in heaven, Luke 23:42-45. This chapter, I believe, simply confirms what Jesus proclaimed on the cross concerning the criminal who confessed Jesus to be Lord just before he (the criminal) died. Jesus said, "Truthfully I say to you, today shalt thou be with me in paradise." Now returning to II Cor. 5:3-8: it also concludes with the same fact that Jesus asserted on the cross. The "If" (conditional) proposition in vs. 3 raises the probable question which could occur to a believer regarding his state of being between mortal death and the resurrection. Vs. 4 further emphasizes the same concern (burden) of becoming "unclothed" rather than having their beings "swallowed up of life." But God himself has promised the continued well-being of his chosen ones, John 10:28-29; Rom. 8:38-39. He has done this by living in the person of his Holy Spirit within each believer's personality, vs. 5. The Holy Spirit's dwelling within is the guarantee (earnest, down payment, assurance) that God will do what is best for the trusters in his Son, Jesus Christ. "Therefore, we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the [physical] body, we are absent from the Lord: [this is true even though] we walk [while in the flesh] by faith, not by sight," vss. 6-7. Our assurance is based, then, completely upon our faith in God's promise through Christ Jesus, Eph. 2:4-10. Now in vs. 8 Paul (God's Word) reiterates the reason for a believer to be confident, "[even while in the flesh a believer] can be cheerful and happy knowing that God's sure promise is that after leaving this earthly home, he or she will be taken

to be [present] with the Lord in heaven [paradise]." This undeniable assurance gives us reason (motivation) to be constantly pleasing to the Lord, vs. 9.

II. We are to appear before Christ's judgment seat (throne) to be assessed for rewards according to ones behavior while in the flesh, vs. 10. The Bible is not definitive in describing this "reward judgment," but here Paul includes himself among those to undergo such a judgment. It is obvious that the "we" includes us also as believers, for only believers can be rewarded for service in God's kingdom under the lordship of Christ. Unbelievers have chosen otherwise. We believers are not to be judged for our sins for which Jesus was crucified, nor are we to be judged for sins for which we confess to God and ask him for forgiveness, John 3:17-18; I John 1:9. For what then are we to be judged? For exercising options as believers that do not promote God's kingdom on earth, sins which destroy a believer's witness to the lordship of Christ. I base this belief upon I Cor. 5:5 and II Cor. 2:6-10, as well as Matt. 6:14-15; 18:21-22,34-35. What are to be our rewards for serving God while in the flesh? Apart from the satisfaction of realizing that one is pleasing (praising) the merciful heavenly Father who has awarded an undeserving person eternal life in his presence through simple faith in his only begotten Son, Christ Jesus, need there be more? Vs. 11 calls our attention to the fact that our holy God can not be manipulated or misled. All of our motives "are made manifest (known) unto God," and Paul states that (because we are led of God's Holy Spirit), our consciences should likewise keep us informed about whether our actions and attitudes are pleasing to God, Gal. 5:16-18; Eph. 4:30. This leadership precludes the notion that we can please God by pleasing others with outward appearances. Paul implies that some are acting in such a way "and not in heart" (in reality before God), vs. 12. Paul admits that his determination to spread the Gospel could be interpreted as though he were not quite sensible. That determination also applied to his efforts to encourage other believers to grow in God's grace and reach maturity, vs. 13. Christ died for all, and therefore all need the Gospel and to believe it. After they believe, they should also "not live unto themselves" but share the Good News with others and live lives exemplifying the will of the Lord they confess. Before Paul's conversion (seeing God's light), he saw Jesus as just another human being, but as a believer he realized that he was wrong. When anyone accepts Jesus as the Christ (Savior), he or she becomes a new creation, and as a new creation in union with Christ, that believer has a completely new (another) orientation to what is worthwhile in life. This new being is the result of God's doing alone. He has made possible, through Christ, for anyone to be reconciled to himself. In fact, "God was in Christ to bring the world (eventually the whole world order will be transformed) back to himself, and through that new relationship ( a believer through belief in Jesus Christ with God the Father) God will not impute (assign blame for) their trespasses (sins) against them," vs. 19. What a glorious thing our heavenly Father has done for us as trusters in Jesus Christ! We are therefore ambassadors (authorized messengers) for Christ, and as God's representatives, we are to tell the world that "God hath made him to be sin (that which separates people from God and makes them dead spiritually) for us, who (Jesus) knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him," vs. 21.

Nov. 3, 2002

"Fellowship Only With Believers"  
II Cor. 6

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. First, we should make clear that "fellowship" is not the same as "associating with." When a believer fellowships with another believer, he or she is enjoying companionship with someone who has the same values, interests, and goals. That we believers should associate or mix socially with unbelievers is made clear, with emphasis, at John 17:11-20; I John 5:18-20. If we do not associate with unbelievers, how are we to be an influence for and witness to those for whom Christ died? With the above short introduction to the chief theme of this chapter of Paul's second Corinthian letter, we will now examine the first section of the chapter. In vs. 1 Paul states that servants of the Lord work together as pastors, evangelists, teachers [and, at the outset, apostles], and, I believe, included today would be all believers who profess Jesus as Savior and Lord of life. Particular attention should be given to the prepositional phrase "with him" which could be interpreted to mean that we believing witnesses are working with God in the process of building the ekklesia. Actually, that phrase is not in the original Greek text and was supplied by the translators as is indicated by italics in the King James version. Paul stated in the preceding 5:20 that we believers are ambassadors (representatives) for Christ in the world. The last part of 6:1 repeats the apostle's solicitation of the Corinthian believers to be mindful of God's rich and free grace which they have received and now enjoy. He begs them not to waister their glorious positions as recipients of God's favor, "in vain." In vs. 2 he quotes God's Word in the first Covenant at Isa. 49:8 where God promised his people, the Jews, that there would be a time when God would, through them, bless all people of the earth through a new Covenant. Paul could have also quoted Isa. 42:6-10. The apostle is telling the believers at Corinth in 57-58 AD (and us in Tallahassee in our day) that we are living during God's "window of opportunity." The time is now when anyone can become a child of God (spiritually alive eternally) through accepting his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as Messiah, Savior. Now is the time acceptable to God, God's day of spiritual salvation. (See also John 9:4.) It is also in this period (age) that believers are not to be offensive (arrogant or belligerent) in their faith but humble, because our Lord, whose ambassadors we are, has set the example of humility, Phili. 2:8. We should live our lives so that our consciences are clear as we serve our Lord, "approving (commending) ourselves," vs. 4. We are to endure during times of afflictions while distressed, and even if we do not have basic necessities. If placed in prison, tortured, overworked, not getting enough sleep, or going without food, we, as believers and therefore servants of the Lord, are to live exemplary lives, be knowledgeable (keep a proper perspective of this temporary period in the flesh), be infinitely patient, be kind (We are still vulnerable humans.), be truly loving (not hypocritically), be guided by God's Word, God's power, and his Holy Spirit. Our armor is to be a dedication to do God's will in everything that we do, "on the right hand and on the left." As we do God's will, unbelievers will translate what is honorable in God's sight as dishonorable, goodness as evil, truth

as deception, spiritual mysteries as gobbledygook (Acts 2:12-14), one as dead even though spiritually alive forever, as punished by God but only suffering for his sake, as without joy but gloriously happy, as poor (according to worldly values) yet with the riches of heaven, as destitute yet lacking nothing of eternal value. Paul confesses to the Corinthian believers that he is relating his own position and experiences, and, in so doing, he is opening his very soul to their view, "our (believing servants of the Lord) mouth is open (I am telling it like it is.) unto you, our heart is enlarged (My most introspective thoughts are wide open for your inspection.). You are not without my most innermost sentiments so I hope that you will be likewise with me," vss. 11-13.

II. Paul bared his soul to the Corinthians as believers. He would not have been so frank with unbelievers, I believe. At vs. 14 and through the end of the chapter, the apostle emphasizes the importance of maintaining faithful lives in the midst of the large city, sinful Corinth. We have noted the immoral problems among those evil people and the influence those people were having on the believers in God's ekklesia. In I Cor. we learned that members were living in sexual immorality, suing one another in the pagan courts, socializing with unbelievers while they ate food dedicated to idols and thereby allied with idol worship, and some even believed that married living could, in and of itself, constitute immorality before God. For God's Word's contradiction of this position, see I Cor. 7:1-2. Paul, then, at the end of this chapter sought to increase the members of the local Corinthian congregation's loyalty to Jesus Christ and his teachings by emphasizing the need to fellowship together rather than with outsiders, unbelievers. Again, let's stress that Paul is not suggesting disassociating with those Corinthians who were not members of the group, but they were not to fellowship with them. Understanding the difference between associating with and fellowshipping with is crucial in knowing what God's Word is encouraging us believers to do in pleasing our Lord. A fellow is one who is allied with another in directions, purposes, and life's goals. The word "community" is akin to "fellowship," and so is "family." The idea is that a group of individuals hold (share) a core of common beliefs and live lifestyles according to those mutually accepted beliefs. We say that we are "in the world" but not "of the world" which expresses the proper idea of believers' separateness. We believers are God's dwelling, and we must take care not to invite into our beings contrary strangers who fight and oppose God's Holy Spirit's leading. Vs. 14 about being "unequally yoked" applies to practicing fellowship with unbelievers by believers. Some have applied this concept to married partners only, and while that application is a valid one, Paul (God's Word) is speaking, I believe, of all believers with all unbelievers for fellowship. In the experience of believers denominated Baptists in this country where all people are free to believe and publicly express and practice their beliefs without governmental interference, the Baptists of New Hampshire, in about the middle of the nineteenth century, compiled a local Church Covenant which many local Southern Baptist congregations use as a general guide for fellowship practice. I confess to having been influenced by this agreement as a youth. It is not a creed but is based upon Scripture and is spiritually motivated. It follows on the next page.



## + Church Covenant +

Having been led, as we believe by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour and, on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church, in knowledge, holiness, and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotions; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger; to abstain from the sale of, and use of, intoxicating drinks as a beverage; to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Saviour.

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and Christian courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the rules of our Saviour to secure it without delay.

We moreover engage that when we remove from this place we will, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

Nov. 10, 2002

"Confidence Restored"  
II Cor. 7

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. Please remember that in Chap. 5 of I Cor. Paul asked the Corinthian congregation to withdraw fellowship from a member who was cohabiting with his father's wife (his stepmother). This constituted an incestuous and adulterous relationship which gave the congregation a glaringly immoral reputation even among Corinthian unbelievers. According to II Cor. 2, at the request of the group, he stopped his immoral activity. Paul then told the congregation that they ought to forgive, comfort and extend their love again to the repentant believer, I Cor. 2:7-8. The wayward believer's and the congregation's confidence in God's will for them was restored. This action of the group was a big factor in Paul's second letter, Chaps. 2:7-8 and 7:9-11. At the end of Chap. 6 Paul had quoted a passage from Isaiah asking for God's people not to fellowship (association was accepted) with unbelievers (heathen), because they (Jews) are to be the Creator God's children, sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, 6:17-18. At the beginning of Chap. 7 Paul states, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit completing our holiness (separateness) as we live in awe (reverence) of God." Without doubt, God wants us believers to live Godly lives.

II. Because of the outcome of Paul's suggestions regarding the ungodly conduct of some believers in their congregation and their repenting of those sins, Paul can say that the favorable results indicate that he has "wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man," vs. 2. Neither has he personally taken advantage of the Corinthian congregation, because his heart lives or dies with their welfare, vs. 3. They were constantly in his thinking. Paul was so grateful for the congregation's repenting of their misdeeds and "cleaning up their act" that he was "filled with comfort" even though he was having a time of tribulation during the period before he could learn of their corrections. Beginning with vs. 5 the apostle relates how the news came to him. His first letter contained rather caustic accusations against their sinful activities. He had called them divided between different witnesses, Paul, Apollos, Cephas and Christ (I Cor. 1:10-17), "carnal, babes in Christ," I Cor. 3:1. His attention had been required up in Macedonia, and he had delayed writing this second letter until he had heard from Titus what the effects of the first letter would be. Titus reached Paul at Philippi and brought the good news that the Corinthian congregation had followed Paul's suggestion, and the guilty incestuous man had repented and had been received back into fellowship of the group. Titus had been longer in getting this good news to Paul, because the latter had left Ephesus and gone to Troas. While Titus was so long in coming, Paul debated whether he should have written the first letter at all. "For though I made you sorry with the letter, I do not repent (feel sorry), though I did repent, for I [had] perceived that the letter had made you sorry, though [as it turned out] it was but for a while." What Paul is saying, in effect, "Perhaps I should not have written such an abrupt letter after all, or maybe I really should have told them

in person." Paul loved them dearly, but above all he wanted them to please God. How happy he was when he learned that God had been in the entire episode and worked everything for his own glory. In retrospect Paul could say, "Now I rejoice," vs. 9. The remainder of the chapter is reiterating the apostle's great satisfaction in his having sent his admonitions, the Corinthian congregation's reaction to those admonitions, and how, with Titus' full explanation, he rejoiced in the outcome of it all. "I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things," vs. 16. He now knew that the Corinthian congregation was indeed following the leadership of God's Holy Spirit even as Paul was!

III. I want to use the remainder of today's lesson to take this incident (forgiving a repentant and changed believer) and build upon it the question having to do with the relationship of spiritual salvation (becoming a child of God through faith in his Son Jesus Christ) with works (doing good things which please God). Specifically, we examine God's Word at James 2:14, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say (lip service) he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?" James at 2:21,23-26 names two Old Covenant people (Abram, Rahab) who, according to James, were justified by works and not by faith only. Note in James 1:1 that James sent this letter to believing Jews, and his emphasis is in their tradition. Peter was likewise a messenger to the believing Jews primarily and was careful not to appear to intimidate his fellow Jews. Note Paul's reaction to Peter's emphasis on works (keeping the Law) in the following texts: Acts 15:1-11,13-20; Gal. 1:6-24; 2:1-21. Further, Peter alludes to Paul's different emphasis at II Pet. 3:15-16. The difference in emphases is noted rather directly when one compares James' personages, Abraham and Rahab, at James 2:21,25 with Paul's (I believe Paul wrote Hebrews.) emphasis of the same two people, Abraham and Rahab, at Heb. 11:8-9,17-19,31. At I Thes. 1:3 Paul uses an expression "work of faith and labor of love" emphasizes his dependency upon faith as the threshold of becoming a believer, and then hinging the believer's good works on his or her love for Christ. I believe the best way to reconcile what appears to be a conflict, rather than simply a difference in emphases, is to refer back to Jesus' statement at John 15:1-17. Here Jesus says that he is the vine and believers are the branches. The object of his statement is that branches cannot bear fruit (serve him) unless they are living on (in) the vine (Jesus Christ) which (who) furnishes the nourishment and also determines the type of fruit produced. If you think this analogy through, you cannot be nor produce the right kind of fruit (a true, reborn from above, child of God) unless you are on (in, have faith in) the right vine (Jesus Christ). Paul would say that (to emphasize faith) there would be no true fruit without the trunk, but James would say that (to emphasize good works) if the branches do not produce the right fruit, it is therefore evident that those branches are not growing on the right trunk. In this valid illustration both emphases are fitting and true. Living faith (that which saved) is spiritually alive and productive in doing God's will. Paul and James are both revealing God's Word, of course, to us believers. Fret not, God knows the difference between lip service and truth, the tares and the wheat, Matt. 13:24-30; Matt.5:12; 16:27; I Cor. 3:8,11-16.

Nov. 17, 2002

"Legal Stewardship"  
Intro. II Cor. 8-9

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. From the very beginning of the establishing of his ekklesia by the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Holy Spirit has encouraged individual believers to express their love for what God has done for them by sharing their financial resources with others of the faith and with those who give full time to spreading the Good News message to those who have not heard. In fact, this and the next chapter are considered to be Paul's most explicit message on believer's stewardship. We discussed fellowship two weeks ago, and today and next Lord's Day we think about stewardship. Both words have the same suffix, "-ship," which is from the same word as "shape" and which means "things alike" or "in the same shape." One thinks of a group of people in a craft (a ship) on the ocean with each one at a given time dependent upon the craft for safety and for each to reach the same goal. We have an expression, "We are all in the same boat (ship)." Fellowship is akin to such a situation, and likewise, so are those engaged in stewardship together. The Bible tells us believers that we are all stewards (managers) of God's possessions (everything) which he entrusts to us. I have decided to approach the obligation and privilege of being, not only God's spiritual children through faith in Jesus Christ, but also managers of material possessions which he shares with us, by looking at such stewardship this week in the O.T and next week in the N.T.

II. Giving or dedicating gifts to God Almighty is first mentioned in Scripture when Abel and Cain both offered sacrifices to Jehovah God, Gen. 4:1-7. Cain as the older would have directed Abel's life had he done well (pleased God), but his offering was inferior to Abel's. Evidently Abel's offering was given in faith and Cain's was not, Heb. 11:4. The information would be nice, but we are not told explicitly about the differences in the gifts except that Abel's involved shedding blood (of animals), Cain's involved plant life, and that Abel's was given with faith in God. As mankind multiplied on the earth, giving to God out of gratitude for the Creator's protection and ample supply of material needs continued. Abraham conceived of an orderly method of returning for God's use a portion of God's blessings. In the Genesis account of Abraham's having overcome several kings (tribal chieftains) and then rescuing his nephew, Lot, from an enemy in the Sodom area, he (Abraham) gave the king of Salem (later Jerusalem) one-tenth (a tithe) of all the spoils taken from the kings defeated in battle. The king of Salem was Melchizedec, and the Bible states that he was "the priest of the most high God," and that he served Abram bread and wine, I Cor. 11:23-26. This mysterious Melchizedec is discussed in Heb. 5-10 as a priest of the Old Covenant whereas God the Father ordained his only begotten Son to be the sole priest of a New Covenant. That Son, Jesus Christ, is to be God's only priest forever, Heb. 10:1-25. On this point we shall embark next week, Lord willing.

III. Paul in his letter (God's Word) to the Galatian believers at 3:16-18 stated that the Covenant made with Abraham was based on Abraham's faith, not on the Law. This conclusion is obvious,



because Abraham believed God (had faith) and left Ur for the promised land 430 years before the Law was given to the Hebrews through Moses, Gal. 3:17. The patriarch's relationship with Jehovah God was established before he gave Melchizedec a tithe of his spoils of war. The tithe, then, as a formula for giving for God's purposes was established, by faith, long before the Law was given. However, the Law incorporated tithing as a proper portion of ones possessions to be given for God's purposes. The tithe was given in the Law for two purposes: one, for the physical support of the Levitical priests and God's feasts, etc., and, two, for caring for those with special needs, e.g., strangers (visitors), fatherless (orphans), and widows, Deut. 26:1-15. The Law states very clearly that tithing was to be done because of what God had done and was doing for the Hebrews, Deut. 26:16-19. Tithing had become an intricate part of God's Law which made God's people peculiar (special) in the earth. Not to keep the Law brought curses upon the individuals who spurned God's Law. The Levitical priests knew and admonished the other eleven tribes of the curses that would befall those who: made graven or molten images; treated ones parents with contempt; refused to honor anothers property rights; mistreated the physically handicapped; did not treat strangers, fatherless, or widows justly; did not honor his mother as his father's wife alone; related to beasts as sexual partners; had sexual relations with ones siblings or mother in law (or father in law); attacked his neighbor, even secretly; killed an innocent one for a bribe; and anyone who generally held the Law in contempt. The same priests then pronounced blessings upon all who would subscribe to and keep "the voice of the Lord thy God." The blessings included: prosperity for farmers and merchants; increase in children, crops, stock (cattle and sheep); safety in travel; power over their enemy neighbors (those who would do them harm from without); proficiency in their management abilities of all their affairs; a model position for all other peoples and nations; prosperity so abundant that other peoples will fear not to fashion their affairs after the same Laws of the Hebrews; and Israel will have so much wealth that borrowing will be unnecessary. All of these curses and blessings God promised the Israelites if they would abide by his Law, Deut. 27-28. Including in this Law was what we refer to as the Ten Commandments, Deut. 5:6-21.

IV. The above laws are only a portion of all the details of God's commandments in the Books of the Law, the Pentateuch. I have tried to indicate that God's desire for his people not only included tithing but also a host of choices which his people were to make to insure their being separate (holy) and acceptable to their Creator. The Law not only required a portion (a tithe) of ones possessions to be set aside for God's particular use in worshipping and praising him, but included laws also relating to food consumption, feasts, specific places which were to be considered holy unto God, treatment of slaves (Deut. 15:12-18), treatment of head of state (Deut. 17:14-20), provisions for the priestly group (Deut. 18:1-22), engaging in war (Deut. 20), individual property rights (Deut. 22:1-4), clothing (Deut. 22:5-12), marriage (Deut. 22:13-30), and many, many other admonitions. Note Jesus' words at Lk 11:42; John 7:19; 10:34; NEXT: "Volitional Stewardship," same II Cor. 8-9.

Nov. 24 2002

"Volitional Stewardship"  
II Cor. 8-9

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. Last week we discussed the original flat tax in the history of mankind, the tithe, which was originated in and through our father of faith, Abraham, Rom. 4:1-2,9,16-25; Gal. 3:16-26,29. Note especially in these passages that plainly in Gal. 3:16 God's promise was made to Abraham through his seed, Jesus Christ, Heb. 11:39-40. Basic, then, to understanding pleasing God our spiritual Father in matters of the stewardship of possessions we should begin and rest finally upon Jesus' teachings on the subject. At Matt. 23:23 Jesus speaks of tithing by the Jewish religious leaders as a curse upon them, because they were meticulous in paying tithes even of small herbs used for food. In this statement about tithing he says, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint, anise and cummin, and have omitted (neglected) the weightier aspects of the law, judgment (justice), mercy, and faith: these (more important provisions of the Law) ye ought to have done, and not to leave the other undone." As we would say, "You are being hypocritical, because the tithing you do and emphasize in your teachings and acts as are required under the Law, are not to excuse you from meeting all of the Law's requirements," Jam. 2:10. Further, regarding stewardship of possessions, when Jesus was commending a certain widow at Mk 12:41-44, he did not mention tithing or other reference to the Law. Rather, he boasted of her sincerity and willingness to share, for God's purposes, her entire assets out of a spirit of volitional compassion. This point Paul makes precisely at II Cor. 8:8. In summary of Jesus' position on individual giving, I do not believe that he appealed to or based a proper system of giving by believers upon the legal prescription of tithing. His own specific reference to tithing by the scribes and Pharisees was given in a negative context, i.e., Jewish religious leaders were claiming to show their love of God by keeping the tithing portion of the Law when, in fact, Jesus called them hypocrites instead. Recall also that God's Word at John 1:17-18 states, "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." This deviation by Jesus from tithing as a basis of believers' stewardship is also emphasized at Lk 18:18-27. The one whom we have come to refer to as the "rich young ruler" could have been told by Jesus that to please God he should have been tithing, or, then and there given a tithe of his goods to the poor or the synagogue, and that this act would have made him qualified to enter the kingdom of God. He had, in his opinion, kept the commandments all his life. Jesus did not disagree with the young man, but did fault his stewardship and ask him to sell all that he had and become a follower (have faith in) the Lord. The young man refused (became very sorrowful), and Jesus expressed the control that material possessions can hold over even a very religious person. Speaking of this same human weakness Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold (be loyal) to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (riches)," Matt. 6:24. Obviously, Jesus is talking about

worshiping material possessions instead of God.

II. Now we come to Paul's "Sermon of Stewardship" in II Cor. 8-9. First, we must recognize that the specific collection which Paul was requesting from the Corinthian believers was for the poor believers in Jerusalem, Acts 15:25; Rom. 15:25-28; I Cor. 16:1-4. I believe it to be very interesting that not once in these discussions concerning raising and collecting offerings for God's work is the practice of tithing mentioned. The only mention of proportionate giving is in I Cor. 16:2, "Upon the first day of the week (the Lord's Day, Sunday) let every one of you lay (something aside) by him in store (in a safe place), as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings (collections) when I come." Since the collections were to go to aid the poor believers in Jerusalem, we would characterize such offerings as beneficent help for financially stressed (poor) fellow believers. I believe that this collection was an expression of love by primarily Gentile believers for Jewish believers over a long distance. Paul was, under God's direction, establishing a very vital position during the early ekklesia period: All of God's spiritual children through faith in God's Messiah (Saviour), Jesus, are in one spiritual family, whether Jews, Gentiles, men, women, Asians, Europeans, etc., Gal. 3:28-29. Stewardship in God's family during the entire period when God is calling out his ekklesia means much more than building houses for worship, supporting staffs to serve local congregations, maintaining headquarters facilities for denominational leaders along with staffs there, etc. If all this fellowship stewardship does not express love for Jesus Christ and his spiritual family, the results are only monuments to human vanity. Stewardship in God's activities is a very serious challenge for believers. One of the most spectacular passages in the Bible, for me, is the Holy Spirit's leadership regarding believers' stewardship at Acts 5:1-11. A couple, Ananias and Sapphira his wife, were inspired by an act of stewardship by Barnabas in donating a sum to the Jerusalem congregation. He (Barnabas) sold his property (land) and gave it all for the support of the local group. Ananias and Sapphira likewise sold a piece of land and gave only a portion of the money to the congregational leaders. However, they lied by saying that they had donated the entire purchase price. The results of their lying were that Ananias lied to congregational leaders first and fell down dead. He was buried immediately. Three hours later Sapphira, not knowing what had happened to her husband, was asked by Peter whether they had been truthful about giving the total purchase price of the property. She said that they had told the truth. She fell down dead also, and the men took her body and buried her in the plot by her husband. "And great fear came upon as many as heard these things," Acts 5:11. Their deaths were the result of having lied to the Holy Spirit about their stewardship. A believer's stewardship is a serious concern of God. According to Jesus' words (I repeat) at Matt. 6:24, "Ye cannot serve God and riches." Having faith in the Lord assures a believer that his or her needs will be met, Matt. 6:33. When we manage (are stewards of) our material affairs properly, as the Holy Spirit leads, God is supporting both the substance and managerial ability. At II Cor. 8:8 Paul said that he spoke "not by commandment" (tithing?), but as he had seen the Holy Spirit's leading in others (the Macedonians). Do not give sparingly but volitionally (not of necessity or grudgingly), because God loves a joyful giver, II Cor. 9:6-7. Following the Spirit's leadership must be constant and consistent.

Dec. 8, 2002

"Opposition To Simple Belief"  
II Cor. 10

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. Beginning with Chap. 10 and on through the remainder of this second letter, Paul gives considerable attention to those who oppose his simple Gospel message. His opposition was exercised primarily on the basis of what is learned in the university course Philosophy 101 as ad hominem (to the man) argument. In practice the strength of such a position appeals to a person's feelings or prejudices rather than to his or her intellectual ability. In God's Word at Isa. 1:18 when Isaiah was being commissioned by God as a prophet, the Lord told Isaiah, "Come let us reason together, saith the Lord, 'though your sins be as scarlet, they shall [affirmation] be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'" In this, God's vision to Isaiah, the Lord appealed to mankind's intellect which God created with humanity and which God reserved for the pinnacle of his creation, humankind. Intellectual ability was a part of mankind's image and likeness of the Creator. This ad hominem argument was also used by the Jewish leaders in presenting our Lord to the Roman authorities for the death sentence, Acts 2:22-23,36; 3:13-17. Pilate at Mk 15:9-15 realized that the Jews were only seeking to get rid of Jesus rather than for any real criminal action (humanly speaking) which Jesus had done. "But Jesus answered nothing: so that Pilate marvelled," Mk 15:3-5, Isa. 53:7-10. Jesus was characterized by "meekness and gentleness" as Paul notes in vs. 1. This characterization is preceded by (II Cor. 9:14-15) the apostle's prayer for the Corinthian's having received the "exceeding grace of God" demonstrated by God's having spiritually saved them and guaranteed them, eternal life in God's presence. "Thanks be unto God for his indescribable gift."

II. Paul was very pleased to identify with his (and our) Lord Jesus Christ. His opponents were telling the Corinthians that this fellow Paul has you people fooled. He really is trying to gain materially from you. He is nothing special but walks "according to the flesh" like everybody else, vs. 2. In vss. 4-5 Paul states that he is not even fighting earthly battles, "of the flesh," but he is fighting God's spiritual battles with eternal consequences. He is fighting by and through God's strength spiritual "strong holds," casting down imagined arguments and every humanly important thing. His conclusion at the end of vs. 5 is that believers should "bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." Remember that Jesus said, "If a person love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our home with him [in the person of God's Holy Spirit]," John 14:23. Paul was said by his critics to be less than handsome and statuesque as one would be if favored by God. This view reminds one of Isa. 53:2 where the promised Messiah (Savior) would not appear according to the world's standards, i.e., pleasant in outward appearance. "For he shall grow up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no stately form nor splendor; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty (appearance) that we should desire him." I do not believe that this means that Jesus was ugly physically, but that he was not what the Jews or the other people of the world

expect in a hero, a typical corrector of the world's ills. Jesus also said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly (gentle and humble) in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls, for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light," Matt. 11:29-30. Further, Jesus told Peter just before Jesus was crucified to put his (Peter's) sword away, for that (force) was not the proper way for people to conduct their affairs, John 18:10-11. In other words, from the very beginning of mankind's creation God has not forced his will upon anyone. God wants to be accepted in the will (freely) of every person. In the last chapter of God's Word exercising of ones free will for God is paramount, "And let him that heareth say, Come - - - And whosoever will (desires), let him take the water of life freely," Rev. 22:17. Man's way is to buy a gun or enlist an armed force and force his own way upon others, but Jesus said, "Blessed (happy) are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth," Matt. 5:5. The kingdom of God is now being formed of those who have faith in Jesus Christ as God's Savior (the ekklesia), and the culmination of all of human history will see the establishment of God's kingdom over which all the earth will be under Jesus' kingship.

III. The apostle was convinced that God's way and will for mankind was not being practiced by the earth's population in general. Further, before the end, mankind's being fooled would be increased, II Thess. 2:2-12. In Gal. 1:4 Paul states that Jesus died to deliver us believers "from this present evil world (age) according to the will of God [who is] our Father." (See also Jam. 4:4 and I John 2:15-17.) The apostle was, in Chap. 10, defending his position on spiritual reality against those who would judge him on normal, worldly values, but see what Jesus said at Matt. 20:25-28 about forcing others to conform to their own position by worldly (Gentile) methods rather by example through serving others. The Corinthian believers were being told that Paul was being forceful in his letters (Remember that these letters were and are God's Word.), but appeared and sounded weak in person. Those who opposed Paul's simple presentation of God's Gospel made the Gospel sophisticated and complicated. Paul simply "glorified in the Lord," not in his own ability, vs. 17. Self-glory (self-righteousness) is not to be the goal of a believer, but "whom the Lord commendeth," vs. 18. Paul could have been more authoritative had he stressed God's justice, but he (Paul) made his appeal on the basis of God's compassion, Christ's gentleness. The apostle was right to present, of course, the Gospel with this emphasis, because God's justice had already been met by Christ's becoming sin for us. "For he [God] hath made him [Jesus Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him," II Cor. 5:21. The simplicity of the Good News of God in Jesus Christ is that the most valuable possession any human can have is eternal life through faith in God's only Savior, his only begotten Son. No one can earn that condition (be spiritually salvaged), for it comes only through God's free grace, his unmerited favor, Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:4-10. Paul could have made a poor appearance and given a poor presentation in the minds of some, but his message was and is pure gold, so pure that it can be used to pave the very streets of God's heaven, Rev. 21:21.

Dec. 15, 2002

"The Finality of the Gospel"  
II Cor. 11

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. Truly it would be difficult to overemphasize the importance of God's communication to us in this Chap. 11 of Paul's second letter to the believers at Corinth. Some Bible students assign Paul's personality as haughty, proud, overly circumspect, sexist, and even spiritually aristocratic. However, this portion of the letter demonstrates Paul's personal modesty, for he, in realizing that eternal, unadulterated truth was being proclaimed through him, was careful to make clear "the wretched man that he was! who shall deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord," Rom. 7:24-25. Vs. 1 is soliciting from the Corinthians the reality that though he was a mortal human being, his simple message of faith in Christ should nonetheless be accepted as the whole and complete promise of God. The apostle was jealous about those who would discredit the simplicity of the Good News of God through Christ. His jealousy was a "Godly jealousy," for he had "espoused them to one husband" ready to be presented as a "pure virgin" unto Christ, vs. 2; Rev. 21:1-4. In vss. 3, 13-15 Paul weaves into his thoughts (from God) the part Satan plays in continually seeking to distract believers from the truth of God through Jesus his Savior. As Satan deceived Eve in God's paradise, Eden, so does he attempt to "corrupt the minds of believers," corrupted "from the simplicity that is in Christ," vs. 3. It is important for us to note that Satan had captured the minds and imaginations of some who were presenting themselves as God's apostles, but who were, in fact, representing Satan himself rather than God Almighty. Simply put, these representatives of Satan are "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel (Don't be surprised!); for Satan himself can transform himself into an angel (messenger) of light (truth). Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers (servants) also be transformed as ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works (deception)," vss. 13-15. We have noted before in this class that there are good and bad angels. That truth is based upon Jesus' statement at Matt. 25:41 where the Lord said that hell is "prepared for the devil and his angels." The deception is earmarked by those who claim and act as though they are God's apostles, i.e., that they speak for and are representatives of God when they are really serving Satan and his rebellion against our heavenly Father. We should remember that Satan tried desperately to influence our Lord himself at the beginning of his special service period, Matt. 4:1-11. We should again note that this deception (of which Paul speaks in II Cor. 11) began during the apostolic period (when God's Word was being given and codified in writing), and his Word states that the deception would continue until the culmination of the ekklesia period, II Thess. 2:7; Jude 4,17-18; Rev. 2:2. There have been no apostles of God following what we refer to as the Apostolic Period during which God was codifying his Word, I believe. But there are those who claim to be God's apostles as God's special representatives on the earth and who claim to speak God's Word with the same authority as the Bible itself. Beware!

II. In vs. 4 the apostle (God's Word) says, "For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we (Paul and the other true apostles) have not proclaimed, or if you receive another spirit, which you have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might bear with him." Paul is at this point being facetious as he chides the Corinthian believers about even considering that Christ is not the same yesterday, and today, and forever, Heb.13:7-9. Paul is saying, in effect, "My apostleship is authentic and my message is not to be transcended by any other "apostle" even though he takes your money as though his message were correct and mine wrong, in need of change or is incomplete. It is true that I did not charge you but lived with the support from other congregations in Macedonia. However, because you did not financially support me does not mean that I do not love you genuinely. God knows my position to be upright and true. My lack of personal attention to you there in Corinth has been caused by God's priority in my efforts in Achaia. Do not let my absence deter you from the simple Gospel which you first heard from me and which others (these false "apostles") are trying to usurp by changing. If I appear to be a fool (sound foolish), let me, through personal testimony, prove that which has happened as God has directed me. Since you have put up with these false "apostles," let me sincerely tell you what they are trying to do to you. They have brought you again into religious bondage (put you under the Law's requirements), have devoured (captivated) you (with teachings outside God's generous grace), have taken your money, have exalted themselves above everyone else - including Paul, and have even slapped your faces (the height of Jewish humiliation - see Lk 22:64; Acts 23:1-5), vs. 20. If these false "apostles" are approaching you with such boldness, I will likewise present my credentials (I speak foolishly - as one seeking base, human fame.), vs. 21. Are they Hebrews (Jews)? So am I! Are they members of the Israelite nation? So am I! Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I! Are they servants of Christ? I am a better servant (again I speak foolishly). I have labored with greater results, have suffered more beatings (more than I can remember), have been imprisoned more frequently, and have been very afraid of being killed more often. Five times have the Jews beaten me with the maximum thirty-nine strikes, three times beaten with rods, once stoned, three times shipwrecked, and spent twenty-four hours in the sea water. I have traveled extensively by sea and on land in danger of robbers, Jews, Gentiles, and those who claimed to be believers, [but obviously were misled]! Those who would brag about their humility are no meeker than I, for if I need to glory, it would be because of my suffering in order to spread God's Good News in and through Jesus, my Lord. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ knows the truth of my testimony." Lastly, Paul relates how he escaped from Damascus just following his new found faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. There the Jewish authorities tried to capture him, and he escaped through a window in the wall around the city of Damascus. The Jews apparently did not take lightly his acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, and enlisted the civil authorities to try to capture him. Paul practiced on this occasion what we call "civil disobedience."

Dec. 22, 2002

"To Heaven And Return"  
II Cor. 12-13

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

In vs. 1 Paul sets the stage for a revelation which God had afforded him that was still vivid in his memory some fourteen years after it occurred. Remember in the last two lessons we noted that the apostle was reluctantly and modestly promoting his own position, because his opponents (false "apostles") were announcing Paul's message to be too simple and lacking in finality, i.e., his Gospel message needed "fleshing out" and more sophistication, II Cor. 11:3. Something as far reaching and important as pleasing God for eternal life must require ones earning at least part of the goal. Jesus' part only provided the beginning of spiritual salvation, and after accepting him, a believer must earn the rest of the package, II Cor. 11:19-20. Now in Chap. 12 Paul expresses what is perhaps his most vital spiritual experience apart from his Damascus Road acceptance of Jesus as God's Messiah, Savior of believers' spirits. In both of those experiences Paul had physical difficulties. On the Damascus Road he was blinded and went into Damascus led by a helper to the house of one Ananias who aided Paul in receiving his sight and immersed him, Acts 9:17-18. In the portion of God's Word which we are considering today, Paul tells of a physical setback which apparently affected his activities for the remainder of his physical life. In vs. 2 he recalls the incident which had happened some fourteen years previously. At that time Paul and Barnabas entered Iconium during the former's second missions journey, and they were literally chased out of town. In the nearby towns of Lystra and Derbe, where in Lystra the apostle was used of God to heal a man who had not walked since birth. The man leaped to his feet, and the people believed Paul and Barnabas to be gods, Mercury and Jupiter. The local priests of Jupiter aroused the local citizenry, and Jews from Antioch and Iconium stoned Paul so badly that he was left for dead along the road outside Lystra. They dragged him farther away from the city and supposed that they had ended this leader of this awful "false sect" of Judaism. After the persecutors had left him for dead and returned to the city, some believers came to bury him (stood about him), but "he rose up, came back to the city, and left the next day with Barnabas," Acts 14:6-20.

II. How long Paul lay there on the outskirts of Lystra before his believing friends came to him, we are not told. It is very reasonable to believe that the experience which the apostle reveals here in Chap. 12 of II Cor. occurred at that time. Normally he would not have related this marvelous experience had he not thought that these false apostles' false criticism needed abrupt and emphatic reminders that God was directing his life. Ordinarily Paul would not have considered it to be "profitable for him to boast about this special vision and revelation of the Lord," vs. 1. Then he outlines what happened, I believe, to him there outside Lystra fourteen years before. Whether he remained in his body or not, he could not tell, but he was sure that God knew and was in control of the situation. The apostle was caught up to the "third heaven." Further, he was carried into paradise where he heard and saw that which is inexpressible in human terms and which he felt compelled



(was not permitted) to withhold from others. Paul goes on to say, in effect, "I could boast about this experience, but really this and other blessings I have received have been the results of my weakness and what some would classify as terrible misfortunes," vs. 5. "If I claimed that my ability to escape death were from my own valor and ingenuity, people would see in me characteristics which belong only to my Lord Jesus Christ," vs. 6. Immediately following his relating this Lystra experience, Paul refers to what he calls his "thorn in the flesh," vs. 7. It is not unreasonable to relate being stoned to death (as was supposed by the stone throwers) to believing that Paul's physical well being was marred permanently. Could he have been mauled about the face with damage to his eyes, nose, and mouth? If so, this damage could have adversely affected his ability to see, to speak clearly, or his normal facial appearance, Gal. 4:12-15. At any rate, whatever the "thorn in the flesh" was, Paul had fervently requested God three times to remove the disadvantages from him. The Lord refused and told him, "'My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made complete (perfect) in [your] weakness.' Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. I take pleasure in infirmities - - for when I am weak, then am I strong [through Christ]," vs. 9-10.

III. As modest as Paul was attempting to be in presenting his credentials (testimony) concerning his qualifications as an apostle, he feels it necessary to state that "in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing [to these false apostles]. Truly the signs (evidence) of an apostle were demonstrated in your presence: perseverance, miracles, wonders (Acts 15:12) and mighty deeds (Acts 14:8-10; 16:16-18; 19:11-12; 20:6-12; 28:1-10) have all been performed [through God's power]." Apostles were commissioned and empowered by God to heal, raise the dead and to speak languages which they could not otherwise speak (without God's special gift). As an apostolic missionary, Paul was required to speak Latin, Greek and Hebrew as well as dozens of dialects spoken in the areas where he proclaimed the Gospel. In fact, Paul's linguistic abilities were used extensively by God in recording God's Holy Word for the generations following the apostolic period. In vs. 13 the apostle again mentions the fact that he, during his eighteen months of service at Corinth, did not receive food and lodging from the congregation. Evidently the Corinthians felt badly that he had not asked them for support as he had at other locations, at Philippi for example. Neither did Paul nor any of his associates ask the Corinthians for support, and he now says that he is coming back for a third visit and will not expect help then either. He states that his chief concern was the spirits of the congregational members, not their finances. As Paul put it, "for children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children," vs. 14b. He wanted so much for the Corinthian congregation to be lovers of Jesus Christ and to express that love by keeping the Lord's teachings, John 14:23. Not one of us today can testify that he or she has suffered for our faith as was required of Paul, God's apostle, but we can strive to live as the Lord Jesus taught and be thankful that we serve a loving, merciful and forgiving Lord.

Dec. 22, 2002

"Examine Youselves"  
II Cor. 12-13

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. In this last chapter of his second letter to the Corinthian believers the apostle Paul introduces a quote from Deut. 19:15 where Moses relates God's laws to Israel just before they were to enter the Promised Land. The disputes or bad deportment among the members of the Corinthian congregation was to be examined in the presence of God's especially commissioned apostle, Paul. Decisions were to be made about corrections on his next visit. Those members who had sinned were not only responsible for the adverse effects upon the congregation's witness in Corinth, but also the entire group was wrong for not having corrected the errors, vs. 2. Paul here issues a forewarning to the congregation that his third visit will be a time of "catch up" for tying up the immoral "loose ends" which were outstanding. A time for an inspection was soon coming. In giving consideration for proper preparation for this time of evaluation of their "faith maturation," the apostle admonished them to review his teachings of Jesus to them during his eighteen months with them just following his founding the ekklesia at Corinth. Paul's appeal to them was not to his own strength but his message, the truth in Jesus Christ, vs. 3. God in Jesus Christ had exposed himself to the creatures of his creation as weak and helpless. The Potter had been willing to permit the clay, mankind, to take the physical life of his only begotten Son and by crucifying him in a most dastardly manner publicly. Paul then identifies the truth of the message which he had delivered to them originally and by which, believing, they had become followers of God's Holy Spirit and children of God. As the apostle put it: "You Corinthian members of God's ekklesia, the bride of Christ, are such because of my witness to you. If I am a weak, false apostle [as some claim me to be], then your faith is resting on a false foundation (message). But remember that Christ Jesus also gave every appearance of being weak (smitten of God, Isa. 53:3-4) before the Heavenly Father resurrected him to life anew, John 1:10-11; Acts 2:22-24, 29-33. This resurrection by God Almighty is absolute and conclusive proof that Jesus was not weak as many supposed. Your (Corinthians') spiritual rebirth from above (by God) is decisive proof that my message to you gives credence to my having been commissioned and sent by God as an apostle to speak for God to you," vss. 3-4.

II. In vs. 5 Paul tells the Corinthian believers to, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, even though you may appear to be disqualified?" The verse designations here make it easy to take this quote out of context. Paul's (God's) communication to the Corinthians (and us) is that their (our) being true believers certifies Paul's apostleship as noted in I above and to us that Paul's writing is the very Word of God. In fact, we need only God's Word to assure us that we are God's children with eternal life through our faith in his only Son, Christ Jesus. The clause, "except ye be reprobates" ending vs. 5 is properly translated, "unless you don't stand the test." But in vs. 6 he assures them that they do stand the test, because Paul's word is

God's Word. Therefore, "we are not reprobates." Only some of the believers who were not behaving like God's children "may seem to be disqualified," end of vs. 7. One of the congregational members had been cohabiting with his father's wife. Others were claiming allegiance to Paul, Apollos, Peter or Christ rather than being unified around their faith in Jesus Christ alone. Recall that in Chap. 2 the man who had been living with his stepmother against God's will repented, changed his life style accordingly and was accepted back into the fellowship of the congregation with the apostle Paul's blessing and approval after he began "faithing" properly again, II Cor. 2:6-10. The man never ceased being God's child, but for a time he was not behaving as a child of God should, I Cor. 5:1-5,13. It is proper for us believers to "examine ourselves" periodically to test our lives whether our testimonies are properly reflecting our relationship with our Lord as given in God's Word. Are we following the leading of God's Holy Spirit? In vs. 7 Paul admitted that he had prayed to God that the Corinthian believers would grow strong and live spiritually mature lives, not to garner praise for himself (Paul) as one who had first introduced them to God's love in Christ, but that the members would demonstrate honestly that they were God's obedient children. They should live holy lives even though they seemed to be disqualified, at times, to be true believers (appeared to be reprobates), vs. 7b. It is impossible for one to deny the truth. We cannot deny what God has promised those who have placed their trust for eternal life upon Christ Jesus, "For we can do nothing against the truth," vs. 8.

III. Paul repeats his earlier statement that he rejoices in his own weakness realizing that, even though he himself appears weak, their acceptance of his message (God's Word) can enable them to grow in God's grace until they are mature (perfect, complete), vs. 9. It is for this very purpose that Paul has written this letter to them in his absence. He feared that in person (weak in appearance and oratory skills) he would appear to be judgmental in exercising his prerogatives as one commissioned by God, an apostle. The Lord wanted Paul to edify (encourage) the Corinthian congregation so that they would mature, not be destroyed (discouraged) through humiliation vs. 10. (See also Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21.) Finally, Paul closes the letter with his usual admonitions to those who had come to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. "Farewell. Be perfect (complete, mature), be of good comfort [Do not be fearful, because your glorious future is as firm and sure as the promises of God through Jesus Christ.], be of one mind [Do not consider anyone of you or any group of you to be committed to any being other than God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.], live in peace [Your spirits are safe, 'And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep (guard) your hearts and minds (emotions and thoughts) through Christ Jesus,' Philip. 4:7.], and the God of love and peace shall be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss." This last admonition was in accord with the then current display of close, familial affection. It demonstrated that the members looked upon each other as members of a spiritual family. Paul wanted so much this feeling of love and oneness among the members of the local congregation, because that is what their Heavenly Father wanted even as he does ours today. Today our manner of expressing the same love and oneness is the "right hand of a believer's fellowship."