

**1209 Trial of Sorrow, fragrance, letter bringing death, Lord sets us free - 2Co(2)1–(3)18
(by Whirlwind)**

First, it mentions the trial of sorrow caused by the previous epistle, showing that although the earlier letter contained rebuke, it was motivated by love. Second, it discusses the fragrance of Christ, which has two distinct effects—the difference between life and death. Third, it addresses the fact that the Corinthian church served as Paul's letter of recommendation and the matter of "the letter kills," noting that "what God tells us through the Bible is consistent," as well as the different responsibilities of elders and overseers, and acknowledging that it is acceptable for a church to support only elders and deacons, with no other offices. Finally, the discussion addressed the glory of spiritual ministry and the Lord's work of setting people free, contrasting the former with ministries that lead to death, and emphasizing that true freedom can only be found in Jesus Christ. By looking at Paul's logic, it motivate us to refer a previous article talking about the logical deduction of God being the same as ours.

Please note that this article is an expansion of the topicwise Bible study held on Sunday (9/27/26). Unless otherwise specified, verses refer to those in NASB95. If this article refers previous articles, they can all be found on our website, '<https://a-christian-voice.com/>'; click on 'Understanding Spiritual Life'.

1. The trial of sorrow caused by my previous letter

"But I determined this for my own sake, that I would not come to you in sorrow again. For if I cause you sorrow, who then makes me glad but the one whom I made sorrowful? This is the very thing I wrote you, so that when I came, I would not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice; having confidence in you all that my joy would be the joy of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you. But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree—in order not to say too much—to all of you. Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes. Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia."(2 Corinthians 2:1-13)

Paul said, "But I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I did not come again to Corinth."(2 Corinthians 1:23) This passage makes it clear that Paul must reach a state free from sorrow in order to visit Corinth. His attitude when he first preached the gospel to the church in Corinth was: "I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the

power of God."(1 Corinthians 2:3-5) God indeed worked in them, making them "...enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge."(1 Corinthians 1:5) Seeing that they had accepted the gospel and observing what had taken place, he then explained the reason for having confidence in them, for "...all that my joy would be the joy of you all."(2 Corinthians 2:3) He then continued, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you."(2 Corinthians 2:4) Therefore, although his previous letter contained rebuke, it was motivated by love.

He suggests—not commands—that the one who caused grief "Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow."(2 Corinthians 2:6-7) His counsel is, "...to reaffirm your love for him."(2 Corinthians 2:8) "For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things."(2 Corinthians 2:9) But some people, even in the midst of love, stubbornly refuse to repent. That is why Jude says, "save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh."(Jude 1:23)

He also said, "But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes."(2 Corinthians 2:10-11) He indeed knew that "...the god of this world (Satan) has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, ..." (2 Corinthians 4:4)

When he said, "Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord."(2 Corinthians 2:12)—this refers to his second missionary journey, when "...passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas."(Acts 16:8) But he did not stay there, because at that time, "I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia."(2 Corinthians 2:13) If the Holy Spirit had truly wanted him to stay in Troas to preach, he would not have felt uneasy. Ultimately, "A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we were staying in this city for some days."(Acts 16:9-12) This is what is meant here: "...but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia."(2 Corinthians 2:13)

2. The fragrance of Christ

"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for

these things? For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God."(2 Corinthians 2:14-17)

From the very beginning, he "...thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place."(2 Corinthians 2:14) That fragrance brings life to believers and death to unbelievers. This is precisely what Jesus spoke of in the parable He told the chief priests and Pharisees (see Matthew 21:33-41). Why? Because He went on to say, "...“Did you never read in the Scriptures, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner stone; This came about from the Lord, And it is marvelous in our eyes’? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.”"(Matthew 21:42-44)

Peter also spoke similar words: "For this is contained in Scripture: “Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.” This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, “The stone which the builders rejected, This became the very corner stone,” and, “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense”; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed."(1 Peter 2:6-8) Truly, "...who is adequate for these things? For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God."(2 Corinthians 2:16-17) In Christ, one cannot sin by lying, just as the Scripture says, "No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him."(1 John 3:6) He speaks the truth.

Some might say, "This contradicts our experience—even Christians can sin!" That is true. Therefore, there is only one explanation: when one sins, one is no longer in Christ—one has slipped out of Christ! And sometimes one is not even aware of it, just like the church in Laodicea, which shut Jesus out without realizing it, while still thinking it had done many good works (cf. Revelation 3:14-20). Once we realize this, we should repent immediately, for "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."(1 John 1:9). In this way, we can return to Jesus Christ.

3. The church in Corinth is Paul's letter of recommendation and the letter kills

"Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you? You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants (G1249, deacon, minister, servant) of a new covenant, not of the letter (G1121) but of the Spirit (G4151); for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."(2 Corinthians 3:1-6)

Right from the start, he described the church in Corinth as Paul's letter of recommendation, saying, "being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." (2 Corinthians 3:3) He was their spiritual father, as the Scripture says, "For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel." (1 Corinthians 4:15) "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John 3:16-18) When it comes to salvation, there is no distinction between men and women; we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

"Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God." (2 Corinthians 3:4-5) "...God, who also made us adequate as servants (G1249, deacon, minister, servant) of a new covenant, not of the letter (G1121) but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (2 Corinthians 3:5-6) The word "letter" (G1121) appears 15 times in total; if you read all 15 instances, its meaning will become very clear. Let's now look at the passages that may require explanation. First, let's look at this passage: "But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit (G4151) and not in oldness of the letter (G1121)." (Romans 7:6) We know that this Greek word "G4151," when capitalized in English, refers to the Holy Spirit, and when lowercase, refers to the human spirit. Here it refers to the Holy Spirit, because the passage immediately follows by saying "not in oldness of the letter (G1121)." That new pattern can only be found in the Holy Spirit, not in our human spirit.

Another Scripture passage clearly refers to the written word: "See with what large letters (G1121) I am writing to you with my own hand." (Galatians 6:11) Consider another Scripture passage: "and that from childhood you have known the sacred (G2413, holy) writings (G1121, letter) which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." This refers to the written words of the Old Testament.

We must understand that "what God tells us through the Bible is consistent." What we are to discern from the Scriptures are His ways in the Bible, not His acts, just as the Scripture says, "He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel." (Psalm 103:7) For example, Jesus said, "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished." (Matthew 5:18) He was speaking of the true essence of keeping the Law, not the ceremonial aspects of the Law. To see this point, let us consider this: "And He said to them, 'What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.'" (Matthew 12:11-12) Was He concerned with observing the specific time of the Sabbath there? Instead, He fulfilled the true meaning of the Sabbath. He set an example by upholding the true essence of the Law.

Finally, let's look at the word "deacon" (G1249, deacon, minister, servant). In English, this word is translated differently in various contexts, just as it is in Chinese, so the best way to understand its meaning is to see what Jesus said. "Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him." (Matthew 20:20) "And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers." (Matthew 20:24) "But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant (G1249), and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave (G1401); just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25-28) Therefore, this word is used in the sense of serving others; that is to say, a deacon is to serve people within the church, rather than, like the offices of overseer and elder, bearing the responsibility of shepherding and managing the church.

Let's first look at the word "overseer" (G1985). According to Strong's Concordance, this word appears seven times. The duty of an overseer is to shepherd, as can be seen from this verse, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (G1985), to shepherd (G4165, feed) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." (Acts 20:28)

Let us now consider the duties of elders: "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd (G4165, feed) the flock of God among you, exercising oversight (G1983) not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:1-3) The word "oversee" (G1983) appears only twice; the other instance is: "See to it (G1983, looking diligently) that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled." (Hebrews 12:15) Therefore, elders are to shepherd and govern, and an overseer only shepherds.

So, are there some who only govern? When Paul speaks of spiritual gifts, he says, "or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads (G4291, rule), with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." (Romans 12:8) The word "rule (G4291)" appears only eight times; after reviewing these eight instances, its meaning becomes very clear, so I will say no more. The conclusion is that the church may appoint overseers to shepherd the flock and designate specific individuals to administer, but both must operate under the supervision of the elders, since the elders' responsibility is to shepherd and manage. Furthermore, there is more than one elder, as the Bible clearly states here and in another passage: "And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present." (Acts 21:18) If a church supports only elders and deacons, with no other offices, that is acceptable; however, if a congregation has neither elders nor deacons, then it clearly does not fall within the biblical definition of a church.

4. The glory of the spiritual ministry and the spirit of the Lord sets people free

"But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it. For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory.

Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech, and are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."(2 Corinthians 3:7-18)

The ministry of death, engraved on stone, refers to the following: "Now the LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction.""(Exodus 24:12) That ministry was originally one of death, "because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."(Romans 3:20) The account of the Israelites being unable to look directly at Moses' face because of the glory on it refers to the fact that "It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses' hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him."(Exodus 34:29) This glory gradually faded away (cf. Exodus 34:29-35).

By logical deduction, we can see that "how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?"(2 Corinthians 3:8). Regarding his reasoning, please examine the Scripture passages for yourself. The conclusion is: "For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory."(2 Corinthians 3:11) Paul's epistles are highly logical: "For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ."(Galatians 1:12) This is how God works, because Paul's logical reasoning aligns with God's—just as we discussed previously in "260828 The Bible says that our logical deduction is the same as God's—so where is the difference?"

He goes on to say, "Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech, and are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ."(2 Corinthians 3:12-14) In fact, it wasn't just in Paul's day that the veil had not been removed; even today, whenever the writings of Moses are read, the veil still remains over the hearts of most people. "but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away."(2 Corinthians 3:16)

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."(2 Corinthians 3:17) To obtain freedom, one must be in Jesus Christ; otherwise, it will be as this: "...I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not."(Romans 7:18) That is, there is no freedom from sin. Finally, it speaks of a truth: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."(2 Corinthians 3:17-18) Amen!