

## December Answers

- 1) [December 1] Paul's **fourth** letter to the church at Corinth (called 2 Corinthians). Paul began by praising God for His **comfort** in all his afflictions, and he told the Corinthians that they shared with him in both the **suffering** and the comfort of Christ. This teaches us to patiently **endure** the sufferings that come our way, for God's comfort will enable us to be a blessing to **others** in their afflictions. Paul told the church what happened to him in Ephesus, and he encouraged them to pray for him. He did this to strengthen the ties between the Corinthians and himself, for he knew that we grow to **love** those for whom we pray. He then explained the **changes** he had made to his original travel plans (cf. 1 Cor 16:5–9). The effort he put into his explanation teaches us how important it is to maintain a reputation for **truthfulness** and dependability. Fickleness on our part can bring **reproach** on the name of Christ. He went on to urge the church to **forgive** the one who had "caused pain" (the individual who had rejected Paul's authority) and **comfort** him lest he be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. This teaches us the importance of **restoring** those who have sinned, for Satan will always try to take advantage of such situations.
- 2) [December 2] Paul continued by denouncing those who peddled God's word for **profit** (2 Cor 2:17). They relied on "letters of recommendation" to win over their followers, but Paul let the transformed **lives** of the Corinthians speak for him. They were a **living** testament to the glory of the **new** covenant through the ministry of the Spirit. This teaches us that we share in the ministry of **glory** which the old covenant foreshadowed, for the gospel we preach has the power to **free** those held captive by the ministry of death. Paul went on to say that his physical **afflictions** showed that "the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor 4:4, 7). This teaches us not to lose heart when we suffer for the gospel, for our "light **momentary** affliction" is preparing for us "an **eternal** weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Cor 4:17). Paul continued by reminding the Corinthians that the things which are seen are **transient**, while the things that are unseen are eternal. This teaches us to be of good courage, for to be absent from the body is to be **present** with God. Paul concluded this part of the letter by reminding the Corinthians that their bodies were the **temple** of the living God and this meant they should never yoke themselves unequally with unbelievers. Rather, they were to **cleanse** themselves "from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God" (2 Cor 7:1). This teaches us the importance of purity and **holiness** in our daily lives.
- 3) [December 3] Paul now addressed the issue of raising **funds** for the impoverished churches in Judea. Paul's comments here contain many principles on giving and good works. *First, the way Paul spoke to the Corinthians about completing their collection teaches us:* (1) Good works are acts of **grace**, and the desire to do them comes from the working of the **Spirit** in our lives. (2) God's will is for us to **complete** the good works which the Spirit has put in our hearts to do. Initial enthusiasm is not a substitute for **persistence** and determination. (3) An unfinished good work can call our love and sincerity into question, and it can also be an **embarrassment** to the cause of Christ. We must never allow **laziness** or **busyness** to keep us from completing these acts of grace. *Second, the reasons Paul gave for having a generous spirit teach us:* (1) The basis for giving is the **example** of Jesus Christ. (2) Being able to contribute to the needs of the saints is a **privilege**, for when we give to them, we're really giving to Jesus. (3) Our willingness to give **cheerfully** and enthusiastically is more important than the **amount** we're able to give. (4) We're free to give whatever we decide in our heart, but we should remember that "whoever sows bountifully will also **reap** bountifully" (2 Cor 9:6). *Finally, the comments Paul made on material blessings teach us:* (1) God gives financial resources to us, not so we can focus on pleasing ourselves, but so that we're able to give to **others**. (2) There will be times when we have an abundance and times when we're in **need**. When we have an abundance, we

should rejoice in the opportunity to **give** to those in need, and when we're in need, we should **welcome** the gifts of others who are blessed by giving to us. (3) The more we're generous toward others, the more God's **grace** will abound in our lives!

- 4) [December 4] Paul now addressed the issue of the "**super**-apostles" that had infiltrated the congregation. Paul's reaction has much to teach us about spiritual maturity. First, Paul recognized that although he walked in the flesh, he waged war by the **Spirit** (2 Cor 10:3–4). Second, Paul did not evaluate himself or his ministry by **comparing** himself with others. Instead, he based his sense of self-worth and success on whether or not he had **obeyed** God. Third, Paul was more concerned about the spiritual welfare of the Corinthians than he was about his own **image**. He had deliberately shared the gospel with them free of charge so he could avoid being a **burden** to the church. Fourth, Paul did not hesitate to **expose** the so-called apostles as a threat to the Corinthians. Paul was **bold** in his confrontation of such men, and we must be quick to do the same. Fifth, Paul played the "**fool**" by telling the Corinthians of his religious heritage, his toils and hardships, and his many visions and revelations. He did this, not to exalt himself, but to show the Corinthians that he was indeed a true **apostle** of Jesus Christ. Sixth, Paul recognized his own tendency to become **conceited**, and he accepted God's "thorn in the flesh" as necessary for his soul (2 Cor 12:9). This teaches us to see our weaknesses as opportunities for God to display His power, "for when I am weak, then I am **strong**" (2 Cor 12:10).
- 5) [December 5] Paul's letter to Rome expressed his desire to visit the church and share in their ministry, and it sought their **support** for his future missionary work in **Spain**. Paul also wanted the Romans to understand the **gospel** which he preached, and he carefully explained God's plan to save both Jews and Gentiles alike through **faith** in Jesus Christ (Rom 1:16). He began by affirming that the Gentiles were justly condemned as sinners, for "although they knew God, they did not **honor** him as God or give **thanks** to him" (Rom 1:21). This teaches us that there are no "innocent" people in the world, for **everyone** becomes aware of God's existence. This means that man-made religions (which are forms of **idolatry**) are not the result of man's search for truth, but rather the result of man's **rejection** of God! Paul continued by saying that the Jews were also accountable for their sin, for there is no **partiality** with God. There were advantages and privileges to being a Jew, yes, but with those privileges came the **responsibility** to uphold and obey God's commands. This teaches us that we cannot rely on our church **attendance** or religious upbringing to make us right with God. Paul concluded this section with the statement: "Both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: '**None** is righteous, no, not one'" (Rom 3:9–10). If "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," how can we be justified and righteous before God? "Through faith in Jesus Christ...for...all...are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith" (Rom 3:22–25). Paul supported his claim by appealing to **Abraham**, that timeless example of salvation by grace through faith. Abraham was justified by **faith**, not works; by **grace**, not Law; by **divine** power, not human effort.
- 6) [December 6] Paul now explained the results of justification: **peace** and reconciliation with God. Our responsibility is to **nurture** the love God has given us by obeying His commands and **yielding** to the desires of the Spirit. Paul continued by addressing the question of whether **one** man could bring life to so many. Indeed, Jesus could, for just as Adam's **sin** brought condemnation and death to all men, so Jesus' **obedience** brought justification and life to all men (Rom 5:18). Paul next addressed the accusation that by emphasizing grace, he was encouraging a lifestyle of **sin**. "By no means! How can we who **died** to sin still live in it?" (Rom 6:1–2). This means we have both the **obligation** and the **ability** to live above sin. Paul went on to say, "My brothers, you also have died to the **law** through the body of Christ" (Rom 7:4). Paul explained that the law, which was "holy and righteous and good," could not, in itself, **justify** the sinner; it could only expose their sinful heart and **provoke**

them to more sin. In Christ there is no **condemnation**, for what the law could not do, the **Spirit** could. This means that we are free to walk, not after the **flesh**, but after the Holy Spirit. We know that God is working all things together for our good, that we might be **conformed** to the image of Jesus Christ.

- 7) [December 7] Paul lamented the fact that the majority of his own people, the **Jews**, were not saved. However, Israel's lack of faith did not mean that God's Word had failed, because the promise was to the Israel of **faith**, not **ethnic** Israel (Rom 9:6–7). This meant that **physical** descent did not equal participation in the promised blessing of salvation. Was this unjust? By no means! God is free to grant mercy as He chooses, and by granting mercy to **all** (Rom 11:32), God showed that participation in the promised blessing has nothing to do with **human** effort (Rom 9:16). That being said, we are accountable for our sin, for God created us as **free** agents, and we're responsible for our decisions (Rom 9:19–23). God provided access to the promised blessing by **faith** in Jesus Christ, not by **works** of the law (Rom 9:32). This is precisely where the Jews went wrong, for they sought to establish their own righteousness through **law-keeping** rather than seeking God's righteousness by faith. The law had a righteousness that led to life in the sense that those who kept the law avoided the **death** that was threatened to law-breakers, but it never offered **spiritual** life. Did Israel's unbelief mean that God had rejected His people? By no means! There is even now a **remnant** of believing Jews who participate in the promised blessing by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The Jews' rejection of Christ meant the **reconciliation** of the world to God (Rom 11:15). This implied that the Gentiles should not be **arrogant** of their inclusion in the olive tree of believing Israel, for even though unbelieving branches were **broken** off that they might be grafted in, they too would be cut off if they did not **continue** by faith in God's kindness.
- 8) [December 8] Paul called the Romans to live out in **practice** what was true of them in spirit, and his commands are the **calling** of our lives. First, and perhaps most important, we are called to **consecrate** ourselves to God (Rom 12:1). Before we were saved, we had nothing to offer God except our sin, but now that we have been washed in the cleansing blood of Christ, we can offer **ourselves** to God as **living, holy** sacrifices (cf. Lev 1:1–4; Num 3:9–13). This is an act of submission and **consecration**, and it means that we give up the right to have our own way and **surrender** unconditionally to God's will for our lives. Second, we are called to be **transformed** by "the renewal of our mind" (Rom 12:2). This means we must **soak** our minds in God's Word and allow the Spirit to conform our thinking to God's. We are called to use our spiritual gifts in humble **service** to the church, not thinking more highly of ourselves than we should, but working to **build** up our fellow believers. We are called to **submit** to the governing authorities, for all power and authority finds its source in **God**, and those that exist have been put there by Him. As long as man's authority does not contradict God's will (Acts 5:28–29), we must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of **conscience**. We are called to fulfill the law by **loving** others, for "love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom 13:10). We are called to **cast** off the works of darkness and **put** on the armor of light, not making **provision** for the flesh to gratify its desires, but putting on the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 9) [December 9] The last part of Romans reveals Paul's perspective on evangelism and discipleship, and it has significant insights for a biblical theology of **missions**. First, this passage teaches us that all missionary efforts are dependent on **God**, and the results must be recognized as the work of His **grace** (Rom 15:17–18). This means that while planning, preparation and resources are needed to accomplish the work of missions, the most important factor is the powerful, supernatural **work** of the Spirit. Second, the task of missions is the **priestly** privilege of ministering Christ to the nations (Rom 15:16). Third, missions must maintain a balance between the ultimate goal of establishing mature **churches** and the urgent need to **evangelize** those who have never heard the gospel (Rom

15:19–20). Paul’s approach to missions was to proclaim the gospel, establish a congregation of new converts, and then **disciple** those believers until they were **mature** enough to continue the cycle themselves. The ultimate goal of missions is to see maturing fellowships of believers who are themselves **reaching** out to make disciples. Finally, our churches must engage in **partnerships** of mutual benefit in order to advance the cause of Christ around the world. Paul stressed the need for partnership in missions, and as he looked to **Spain**, he knew he needed help from the church in Rome to accomplish his goal.

10) [December 10] Paul’s farewell speech to the Ephesian elders has much to teach us about spiritual **leadership**. When the elders came, Paul could have said, ‘Now be sure to remember all the things I taught you.’ Instead, he reminded them of how he had **lived** among them (Acts 20:18). This teaches us that the essence of leadership is setting the right **example** for others.

- Paul served God with **humility**.
- Paul faithfully **endured** persecution.
- Paul boldly **declared** “anything that was profitable” (Acts 20:20).
- Paul shared the gospel with both **Jews** and **Gentiles**.
- Paul followed the leadership of the **Spirit**.
- Paul refused to be **swayed** by the prevailing doctrinal winds of his day.
- Paul warned his congregation of the danger of **false** teachers.
- Paul did not **covet** material possessions.
- Paul **worked** hard to supply his own needs.

11) [December 11] When God sent Ananias to restore Paul’s sight, he told him that Paul was “a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and **kings** and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). The time had come for this to be fulfilled, and in the space of about two years, Paul shared the gospel with **Felix**, **Festus**, and **Herod** Agrippa II. Paul took full advantage of his situation, and he reasoned with Felix and Drusilla “about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment” (Acts 24:25). This teaches us several lessons. First, it reminds us that God desires “**all** people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). Second, it challenges us to be **bold** in our interaction with others. Paul was not hostile or offensive, but neither was he timid in preaching the gospel. Third, it teaches us the importance of **integrity**, for Paul refused to give Felix a **bribe**.

12) [December 12] There are several lessons we can learn from Paul’s long and dangerous voyage to **Rome**. First, Luke and Aristarchus showed their love and support for Paul by **going** with him on his journey. This teaches us that true friendship demonstrates itself by a willingness to **suffer** with those we love. Second, Paul took the initiative and **warned** the centurion, the captain and the owner of the ship not to leave Fair Havens. This teaches us that we have an obligation to look out for the **safety** of others and the **security** of their possessions. Third, God didn’t send an angel to Paul until all **hope** of being saved was abandoned (Acts 27:20). This teaches us that God often **waits** until all human effort has failed and nothing remains except complete dependence on Him. Fourth, Paul boldly **told** the entire ship about God’s promise, and he staked his life and reputation on the truth of God’s word. This shows us that true faith **believes** what God says and **trusts** His word no matter how difficult the situation. Fifth, Paul’s **calm** behavior in the face of imminent death testified to God’s faithfulness and gave his words a measure of authority. This teaches us that the best witness we have is how we **act** in desperate situations. Sixth, Paul patiently **endured** the hardship caused by others’ poor decisions, and he refused to feel **sorry** for himself, even when he was bitten by a viper! This teaches us to “share in suffering as a good **soldier** of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 2:3). Finally, Paul continued to seek **ministry** opportunities in spite of all he had been through. This teaches us that

opportunities to share the gospel abound for those who have the **eyes** to see them.

- 13) [December 13] Philippians is the first of what are known as the “**Prison Epistles**” (Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon), so named because they were written during Paul’s imprisonment in **Rome**. This letter has many insights on how to be a disciple of Jesus. First, Paul emphasized the need to **rejoice**. This teaches us that joy is both a **decision** and an **emotion**. As we **focus** our minds on what God is doing and choose to **praise** God in every situation, the Spirit produces within us a feeling of joy. Second, Paul highlighted the fact that his imprisonment had served to **advance** the gospel. This teaches us to **notice** and **rejoice** in how God is using the circumstances in our lives to spread the good news and make us more like Jesus. Third, Paul encouraged the church to let their **conduct** be worthy of the gospel of Christ (Phil 1:27). Rather than acting from selfish ambition and conceit, they were to **humble** themselves, considering **others** as more important. This teaches us to imitate the mindset and attitude of **Jesus**. Fourth, Paul warned against false **teachers**. The Jews who demanded circumcision and works of the law were quick to tout their **fleshly** credentials. Paul dismissed such claims and reminded the Philippians that he could boast of the same things, yet he counted them as **rubbish** “in order that I may know Christ” (Phil 3:8). This teaches us that the righteousness which really matters is the righteousness that depends on **faith**, for the ultimate credential is to **know** Christ and the power of His resurrection. Finally, Paul admonished the Philippians to be **content** in every situation. He revealed that the secret to obeying this command is found in the glorious truth: “I can do **all** things through him who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13). This teaches us to regard what God has given us to be **enough** and rest in the knowledge that He will supply our needs as He sees fit.
- 14) [December 14] In the first half of Ephesians, Paul shared what God is doing through the **Son** in the **Church** by the **Spirit**. Before the creation of the world, God sovereignly and graciously **chose** (elected) Jesus to be the one through whom the world would be saved (Eph 1:4). This teaches us that election is **Christocentric**, that is, election is realized and centered “**in** Christ.” God also **determined** (predestined) that all who repent of their sins and believe in Christ would be spiritually **united** with Him and **adopted** as sons (Eph 1:5). This teaches us that our election is both **corporate** and **conditional**. It is corporate in the sense that our status as elect comes only from being united by faith **with** Christ. We are elect because we are “**in Him**,” the elect One. It is conditional in the sense that our election is based on our **obedience** to God’s requirements of faith and repentance. This means that no one is predestined to be saved or lost. Rather, **all** men are called to believe in Christ (Matt 22:14) and those who “**continue** in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel” shall be saved (Col 1:22–23). Paul went on to say that everyone, whether **Jew** or **Gentile**, must place their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. When they do, they are **raised** from death to spiritual life and are made “**alive** together with Christ” (Eph 2:5). This teaches us that Christ’s body, the **church**, is made up of all those who are “**in** Christ.” This wonderful truth is the **mystery** of Christ, that “the Gentiles are fellow heirs, **members** of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph 3:6).
- 15) [December 15] Having reminded the Ephesians of their new identity in Christ, Paul now exhorted them to **walk** worthy of their high and holy calling. Once again, this reminds us that theology matters, for right **thinking** must come before right living. Paul began with a plea for love and **unity**. This teaches us that we must treat our brothers and sisters with **patience** and gentleness, **bearing** with them in love and humility. Paul went on to say that within the unity of the church, there is a diversity of **gifts**, and when they are exercised properly, the Spirit will lead the church to **maturity**. Notice that Paul said that the apostles and shepherds and teachers were given “to **equip** the saints for the **work** of the ministry” (Eph 4:12). This means that the work of the ministry is **my** responsibility. Paul then pointed out the impact that individual **holiness** has on the health and

growth of the church. The church **depends** on our consistent obedience to God's Word in order to succeed. Above all, we must **yield** each day to the desires of the Holy Spirit. Rather than being "drunk with wine," we are to be under the Spirit's **influence**, allowing Him to guide and control all we do and say (Eph 5:18). As we walk in the light, the Spirit will lead us to **submit** "to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:21). Paul concluded by saying, "Finally, be **strong** in the Lord and in the strength of his might" (Eph 6:10). This teaches us that the battles we face are ultimately **spiritual** battles.

- 16) [December 16] In his letter to the Colossians, Paul declared the truth which would guard them from heresy and motivate them to persevere in the faith: the **supremacy** and **sufficiency** of Jesus Christ (Col 1:15–20). First, Paul emphasized Christ's supremacy over creation, saying that Jesus is "the **firstborn** of all creation" (Col 1:15). We usually associate the term firstborn with birth, as in the first child born (cf. Luke 2:7), but it can also denote priority in **time** or supremacy in **rank**. Jesus was **before** "all creation" in time, and He is **over** "all creation" in authority. Paul was **not** saying that Jesus is the first created being, but rather that Jesus is supreme over all things as Creator, for "all things were created **through** him and for him" (Col 1:16). Second, Paul declared Christ's sufficiency in **redemption**, saying that "through him," God was pleased to **reconcile** "all things" to Himself, "making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col 1:20). *The truth of the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ refutes false teaching.* In Christ, the "whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col 2:9). This refutes any system of thought which denies either the **humanity** or the **deity** of Christ. In Christ, we received a spiritual circumcision by participating in His death and resurrection (Col 2:11–12). This refutes those who insist on **adding** law-keeping to faith in Jesus. In Christ, we died to the world and its fallen ideas and values (Col 2:20–22). This refutes those who demand **asceticism** (false humility, severe self-discipline) and the **worship** of angels. *The truth of the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ also motivates us to live a holy life.* In Christ, we have been raised to heavenly places. This motivates us to **set** our minds on things above, not on things on earth. In Christ, we died and our life is hidden with Christ in God. This motivates us to put to **death** the deeds of the flesh. In Christ, we have been raised to newness of life. This motivates us to put on a "compassionate heart, **kindness**, humility, meekness and patience" (Col 3:12). Our **union** with Christ is the basis of everything we are spiritually, and if we **abide** in Him, He will empower us to live a holy and righteous life.