



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Class Series Notes

## Paul's Perseverance in Corinth

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### A History Lesson About Perseverance

- First Battle of Bull Run (Union) / First Manassas – July 21, 1861
- Near Manassas, Prince William County, VA, not far from D. C.
- Each side: engaged ca. 18,000 poorly trained and poorly led troops.
- Confederate victory, followed by disorganized Union retreat.
- Popular, almost legendary story: innumerable citizens from the North carrying picnic baskets followed the Union Army to watch what everyone thought would be a climactic battle to put to rest a short rebellion. In fact, most citizens were about five miles away in Centerville.
- Many sightseers *did* pack a lunch; but this was more a necessity than a frivolous lark. Centerville was some 25 miles from Washington, a seven-hour carriage ride one way.
- A report in the *London Times*, however, quoted a woman with opera glasses: "This is splendid, O my! Is not that first rate? I guess we will be in Richmond tomorrow. . . ."
- Ultimately, the curiosity-seekers did get caught in a stampede of *retreating* Union troops.
- Though the battle gave his nickname to Confederate General, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, both armies were sobered by the fierce fighting and many casualties and realized the war was going to be much longer and bloodier than either side had anticipated.
  - \* Largest and bloodiest battle in American history to that point.
  - \* Union: 460 killed, 1,124 wounded, 1,312 missing or captured.
  - \* Confederacy: 387 killed, 1,582 wounded, and 13 missing.
- The Northern public was shocked at the unexpected defeat when an easy victory was expected. On July 22, Lincoln signed a bill providing for the enlistment of another 500,000 men for up to three years of service.
- In the Confederacy, there was little public celebration, but a realization that despite their victory, the greater battles to inevitably come would mean greater losses for their side, too. Both sides would require *perseverance*.



<http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/images/bullrun1.jpg>

## A Big Idea in the New Testament

Verb - ὑπομένω, *hypomenō*

1. to stay in a place beyond an expected point of time; remain/stay (behind). (e.g. Acts 17:4).
2. to maintain a belief or course of action in the face of opposition, *stand one's ground, hold out, endure*. (e.g., 2 Tim. 2:10, 12; Rom. 8:24; 12:12; 1 Cor. 13:7).
3. to wait for with persistence, *wait for*.

Noun - ὑπομονή, *hypomonē*

1. the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty, *patience, endurance, fortitude, steadfastness, perseverance*. (e.g., Rom. 5:3f.; 15:4f.; 2 Cor. 6:4; 1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:4; 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim. 3:10; Tit. 2:2; 2 Cor. 12:12; Col. 1:11; 2 Thess. 3:5; Rom. 2:7; 2 Cor. 1:6; Rom. 8:25).
2. the act or state of patient waiting for someone or something, *expectation*. (e.g., 2 Thess. 3:5).<sup>1</sup>

Additional ideas.

1. Picture a 7th grader with a backpack!
2. Some notable passages outside Paul: Hebrews 10:32-12:17; James 1:4, 12; 5:11.

## Paul and God's Church at Corinth: A Brief Review

1. Snapshot of the city: "A newly created city, with a very mixed population of Italians, Greeks, Orientals, and adventurers from all parts, and without any aristocracy or old families, was likely to be democratic and impatient of control; and conversion to Christianity would not at once, if at all, put an end to this independent spirit."<sup>2</sup>
2. Founded by Paul on his second missionary journey, after his experiences in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens, sometime in 50-52 AD (Acts 18:1-17).<sup>3</sup>
3. Began correspondence during two-year stay in Ephesus (3rd journey; Acts 19:10; 1 Cor. 16:8).
4. A letter prior to 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:9 - "former letter"); no surprise - 1 Corinthians indicates the problems addressed there were not new. They centered on a mistaken view of spirituality and the influence of Greek philosophy, especially a Sophist emphasis on rhetoric and wisdom.
5. 1 Corinthians: division (chaps. 1-4; and later [see 11:18]); incest (prompting previous instructions to be reviewed - 5:1-13), litigation in the body (6:1-11), idolatrous fornication

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<sup>1</sup> Definitions are from Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Limited, 1986 impression), xv.

<sup>3</sup> We know the date from the reference to Gallio's proconsulship during Claudius's "twenty-sixth acclamation as imperator — a period known from other inscriptions to cover the first seven months of A. D. 52" (D. A. Carson & Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd Ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005], 447). A proconsul's term lasted a year and typically began July 1, meaning that Gallio was either in office in 51-52 or in 52-53. Since Paul was in Corinth for eighteen months (Acts 18:11), he must have arrived between early 50 and early 51.

(6:12-20), followed by questions about: marriage (7), eating meat from the idols (8:1-11:1), public conduct and assembly problems (11:2-14:40), Greek-influenced misconceptions about resurrection (15).

6. 1 Corinthians did not resolve the matter, so Paul went there, a “painful” visit (2 Cor. 2:1).
7. Back to Ephesus where he wrote what has been called a “severe letter” (2 Cor. 2:3-9; 7:8-12). 1 Corinthians? Unknown? (Some think 2 Cor. 10-13 may be it; doubtful.)
8. Improvement, so he wrote 2 Corinthians (2 Cor. 2:12-13; 7:5-7): review, gratitude, conclusion that the outcome made the ordeal worthwhile (he even brought up their giving! - chaps. 8-9).
9. Then 2 Corinthians 10-13, so defensive and sarcastic that some have proposed it must have been an earlier letter mistakenly tacked on to the end of the “original” 2 Corinthians (chaps. 1-9).
10. There is no manuscript or historical evidence that 1-9 and 10-13 were “pasted” together. A better proposal is this: Titus’s report that things *were* better led Paul to write 2 Corinthians 1-9, a process that took some time due to his work of ministry; before he finished / sent it, updated information came to him that things had grown worse again. So, he defended himself, and his service.

### Big Ideas in 2 Corinthians<sup>4</sup>

1. The main theme of 2 Corinthians: “the relationship between suffering and the power of the Spirit in Paul’s apostolic life, ministry, and message.”
2. Backdrop — critics in Corinth, perhaps outsiders, had apparently criticized Paul by:
  - a. Calling into question his motives in organizing a collection for believers in Judea (8:20-21; see 2:17; 12:14-18).
  - b. Questioning his personal courage (10:10-11; 11:21).
  - c. Arguing that Paul suffered too much to be a Spirit-filled apostle of the risen Christ.
3. Paul’s response:
  - a. His weakness as an apostle was actually the very means by which:
    - 1) believers were comforted (1:3-11).
    - 2) God in Christ was made known in the world (2:14-17; 4:7-12; 6:3-10).
  - b. Paul argued that:
    - 1) his sufferings actually embodied the cross of Christ;
    - 2) his endurance in the midst of adversity, with thanksgiving and contentment, showed the resurrection power of the Spirit (12:7-10).
4. In other words, his suffering as an apostle was in fact the means God used to reveal his glory (1:3-9; 4:11-18; 10:17-18; 12:9).
5. In practice, that meant that there was a close connection between the Corinthians’ acceptance of his apostleship and the genuineness of their faith. In his message, ministry, and manner of life Paul was imitating Christ’s “way of the cross” (see Luke 9:23-27, 57-62).

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<sup>4</sup> The following is outlined and adapted from the introduction to 2 Corinthians in *The ESV Study Bible*, English Standard Version® (ESV®) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2219.

## Big Ideas in 10-13

- Spiritual warfare: someone is out to get us (10:1-6; 11:3, 14-15).
- Humble confidence, comparing by the right standards (10:7-18).
- Paul's aim and strategy compared to his critics: imitating Jesus' suffering-to-glory example (11:1-12), unlike the "false apostles" (ψευδαπόστολοι, *pseudapostoloi*) (11:12-15).
- Humbled by his "thorn in the flesh"; power in weakness, a ministry that never took advantage of the Corinthians, but aimed to build them up (12:1-21).
- A call for self-examination: a time of reckoning was coming, but Paul's goal was their growth (13:1-10)

## Overview of 11:16-33

- "... so that I too may boast a little ... as a fool..." (vv. 16-17).
- "Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. . . ." (vv. 18-21a).
- Comparing credentials (vv. 21b-23).
- More labors . . . imprisonments . . . beatings . . . near death experiences (vv. 24-28).
- Weakness? Yes! That had shown God's power in his life from the beginning (11:29-33).

## Let's Talk About Perseverance

1. Read the list of Paul's labors, imprisonments, beatings, and near-death experiences (11:23-29). At what points do Paul's trials interact with our experiences as servants in 21st century American culture?

- a. We may have experienced some similar things (e.g., sleepless nights, some dangers of some sort), but were they for the sake of the gospel (as in Paul's case) or just inconveniences of life?
- b. Probably the one thing we most identify with is *anxiety* (μέριμνα, *merimna*) (v. 28).

2. But, what are we anxious about?

- a. Both Jesus (Matt. 6:25-34) and Paul (Phil. 4:6-13) taught that God's people should not be anxious (μεριμνάω, *merimnaō*).
- b. Was Paul inconsistent in 2 Corinthians 11:28? I would answer, "No."

- 1) Both Jesus (life's necessities) and Paul (unity and learning to be content with what we have) were speaking to the issue of learning to trust God for things He will provide.
- 2) Paul's anxiety for the churches — their well-being, faithfulness, growth — was actually a specific example of "striv[ing] first for the kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33; NRSV); in other words, Paul trusted God to provide the stuff of life (see Phil. 4:11) as he tended to kingdom business.<sup>5</sup>



Consider the places (and miles!) of Paul's travels

<sup>5</sup> Notice that Paul was anxious about the spiritual well-being of the churches. Sometimes, there are things at church about which we are anxious (e.g., why was *that* color chosen for the carpet?) which sidetrack us from kingdom business.

3. We can learn from the thistles.<sup>6</sup>
  - a. Remember Jesus' parable of the sower (see Luke 8:4-15): the third soil welcomed and was capable of growing good seed, different from both the hard and rocky soils. The problem was that the thistles blocked the sunlight, took over the nourishment the roots should have gotten, and eventually smothered the good plants.
    - 1) "Some seed fell in among thistles, and the thistles grew up with it and choked it. . . . That which fell among thistles represents those who hear, but their further growth is choked by *cares*<sup>7</sup> and wealth and the pleasures of life,<sup>8</sup> and they bring nothing to maturity" (Luke 8:7, 14; NEB).
    - 2) A number of passages challenge the idolatry of "stuff" (see Col. 3:5 - "greed, which is idolatry" - NIV), warning that being overly concerned for things (that are good in and of themselves) can crowd out spiritual concerns.
      - a) "For all that is in the world — the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life (*bios*) — is not from the Father but is from the world" (1 John 2:16).
      - b) "But when he [a ruler] had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich" (Luke 18:23).
4. Does our "stuff-anxiety" (*bios*) adversely affect our perseverance? How might a Paul-like anxiety over the church help our perseverance? How would we get there? [My answer: by living the way of the cross, as Paul did.]
5. The saying in the text box to the right challenges us to a better way.

*A man wrote to his girlfriend, "Susie, I love you so much. I would climb the highest mountain, cross the driest desert, sail the most tempestuous seas. See you Sunday if it doesn't rain."*

*Jimmy Haile, "Are You Committed?"  
www.sermoncentral.com, accessed July 21, 2014*

*Church of Christ at Snellville  
July 27, 2016*

<sup>6</sup> "Thistles" (ἄκανθα, *akantha*; "thorn-plant" - Bauer) is a better translation for what Jesus was talking about than "thorns." Several varieties grew in Palestine. Some were edible, some were attractive, and some grew to 6-7 feet in height. All were capable of crowding out good seed. See Gloria E. M. Suess, "Enemies of the Harvest," *Jerusalem Perspective* 53 (1997), 18-23.

<sup>7</sup> "Cares" (μέριμνα, *merimna*) is the same word translated "anxiety / anxious" in 2 Cor. 11:28; Matt. 6:25-34; Phil. 4:6-13.

<sup>8</sup> "Life" here modifies "cares" and "wealth," not just "pleasures." It translates the Greek word βίος (*bios*), not the word ζωή (*zōē*), typically used in conjunction with the word "eternal or abundant life" (see John 10:10; Rom. 6:23). It is used 135 times in the New Testament; *bios* appears only 10 times. There is some overlapping between the two words, but *zōē* has to do more with the quality of existence while *bios* has to do more with the things (or "stuff") that make up one's *zōē* (see Bauer, *Lexicon*, "bios").