

2 Corinthians 1

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all his holy people throughout Achaia: 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. He most likely wrote the letter from Macedonia or Ephesus during his third missionary journey. Evidently, Timothy has caught up with Paul because he is included in the greeting. Paul does remind the church that he is an apostle but he points out that it may not be his choice but it is "by the will of God". Paul's letter is not just to the Corinthian church but he wants it reach believers all over the region of Achaia or Greece. In verse 2, Paul uses a common greeting for him. He greets them in the name of the Father and the Son.

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 5 For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. 6 If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. 7 And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

Sometimes we forget that we are not alone in our struggles in this world. We think that no one has ever experienced what we have had to go through. In these verses, Paul makes it clear that we are not alone. When we go through difficult times, we are to both gain comfort from God, the Father and Jesus. And when we are comforted then we are to comfort others. Verses 3 and 4 tell us that our comfort comes directly from God and Jesus. When I read these verses, my mind goes to 2 Samuel 7:18. When King David was troubled, he "went in and sat before the LORD, and he said: "Who am I, Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?"

King David was called "a man after God's own heart", not because he lived a perfect life but because he had a true personal relationship with God. When he was up, he praised God. When he was down, he sought the comfort of God. John 16:33 records that Jesus tells us that we will have trouble. "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Those that preach the prosperity gospel overlook this verse. If things are going amazingly well for you, maybe Satan doesn't need to attack you. Jesus says that we will have troubles in this life. But we are to be comforted because Jesus endured worse than anybody and He has overcome the world. Also He says that he will go through the troubles with us. In Matthew 28:10, Jesus tells us so, He says "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." God told us in Deuteronomy 31:6 (repeated in Hebrews 13:5) "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

I like the NLT version of verse 5. *“For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ.”* John recorded Jesus’ words in John 15:21 which says, *“They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.”* Paul knew suffering. Later in this letter, Paul lists some of the suffering that he had to endure. 2 Corinthians 11:23-28

John 14:26 tells that God sent the Holy Spirit to us as a “Comforter” (NKJV) or “Helper” (many other translations). One of the most asked questions today is “Why do bad things happen to good people?” Paul is saying, “Expect it, bad things will happen but know that you will be comforted.” In verse 5, Paul says “Where troubles abound then comfort abounds even more.” When comfort comes Paul tells us to share the comfort. Human nature is to have a pity party when things are going bad. Paul says expect the comfort to come.

In verse 6, he says that when troubles come and they will come, it is for our comfort and salvation. What? When we have troubles: First the salvation part. It should make us closer to God and rely on God through the troubles. Second, our experiences are a part of who we are and how we minister to others. In BSF, I had an ex-con in my group. He talked about going on a mission trip back into a prison. He could minister to the inmates as an insider. He could reach the inmates on a deeper level than those without that experience. I have often said “I am thankful that I am a believer because I don’t think that I could get through a funeral without the comfort and hope that I get from Jesus Christ, knowing that I will see them again.” Paul tells us in Verse 7 to share our sufferings and our comfort with others. It makes me think of the old adage, “Shared joy is a double joy; shared sorrow is half sorrow.”

8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. 10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, 11 as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

David Guzik says, “We don't know the exact nature of this trouble. It was probably either some type of persecution, or a physical affliction made worse by his missionary work. There are at least five suggestions for this trouble:

1. Fighting with "wild beasts" in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 15:32).
2. Suffering 39 stripes after being brought before a Jewish court (2 Corinthians 11:24).
3. The riot at Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41).
4. A particular persecution shortly before he left for Troas (Acts 20:19; 1 Corinthians 16:9).
5. A recurring physical malady.

Paul is clear on why some bad things happen. In verse 9, Paul says that it happened so that “*we might not rely on ourselves but on God.*” Whatever happened was bad enough that they could not fix the problem themselves. When I have problems, I tend to try to fix the easy stuff. God wants us to rely on Him for all of it, the easy and the difficult. We also tend to think that He is under the same constraints as we are. Paul points out that God can handle all of our problems because He even “*raises the dead*”. I have had circumstances in my life that I didn’t think that they could be fixed. God doesn’t have our human limitations. He can resolve any issue. Just pray.

If you think, I messed up again. Paul says that if we set our hope on God then “He will continue to deliver us.” There are no limits to the number of times that He will help us. Paul says in verse 11 that it is through your prayers that you can help others. Sometimes we say, “I’ll pray for you.” I see numerous Facebook posts that have “PRAYERS” in the comment section. Do you take praying for others seriously? Do you actually pray in earnest when you promise to do so? God answers prayer. Here Paul tells us so. They were able to escape whatever was happening because “*God has graciously answered so many prayers for our safety.*”

Remember from our study of Revelation, what does God do with our prayers? Revelation 5:8 tells us, “*And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people.*” If God values our prayers that much and those that we are praying for value our prayers then why would not pray for them.

12 Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God’s grace. 13 For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, 14 as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.

“Paul's delay had apparently called his sincerity into doubt. Paul wanted the Corinthians to remember his integrity, and to accept his good intentions toward them, in spite of this delay.”
Holman New Testament Commentary - 1 & 2 Corinthians

Paul says that if our conscience is clear then we can know we acted the way that we are suppose to. What is the difference between a conscience and the Holy Spirit? In 1 Corinthians 2:11-13, Paul tells us that conscience is part of the spirit of man which is subject to the sin in our lives. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of God living inside of us which has a renewing influence on our conscience.

The conscience of a believer like Paul is different than that of a nonbeliever. So when Paul speaks about him having a clear conscience, he has also passed it through the Holy Spirit. At the end of verse 12, Paul says *“We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God’s grace.”* Paul feels confident that what he has said, done and written was his best with the help of the Holy Spirit. In verse 13, that his writing was straightforward (NLT) with no hidden meanings and even if they don’t understand at this time everything that he has written then when Christ returns it will all make sense. Not only will it make sense, they will be proud of everything that Paul had taught them. Pride or boasting are not the same terms that we think in a worldly way. Paul is not talking about “look at me”. He is talking about it in a “Praise God we made it!” way.

15 Because I was confident of this, I wanted to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. 16 I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. 17 Was I fickle when I intended to do this? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say both “Yes, yes” and “No, no”?

When Paul went to Corinth the first time, he had trouble with the Jews. So much that when he left the synagogue, *“he shook out his clothes in protest (Acts 18:5).”* Just as in Galatia, the Jews attacked Paul. Their motto must have been, “If you can’t win the argument, then slander your opponent.”

Throughout his missionary journeys, Paul was under attack by Jews and Gentiles because he claimed to be an apostle of Christ. The depth of his knowledge about the Law would have been unmatched. In Acts 22:3, Paul tells us that *“he was” a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.”* It is doubtful that a Jew could argue the Law with him and win. In 1 Corinthians 16:5, Paul told the Corinthians that he would visit them on his way back through. It appears in these verses that plans have changed. In your life when you plan something, does it always happen as planned. It doesn’t in my life. These verses fit me very well. When I make plans to do something, I speak before I check the calendar. I have the best of intentions in my planning but end up double booking appointments. Here Paul has changed his plans. It doesn’t mean that he lied or had bad motives. Things just changed.

In verse 17, I like how the NLT says it, *“You may be asking why I changed my plan. Do you think I make my plans carelessly? Do you think I am like people of the world who say “Yes” when they really mean “No”?”* Paul wants them to realize that he takes changing his plans seriously. He tells them that he is not “fickle”. One definition of fickle is “likely to change your opinion or your feelings suddenly and without a good reason.”

18 But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes” and “No.” 19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silas and Timothy—was not “Yes” and “No,” but in him it has always been “Yes.” 20 For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.

As I said earlier, it is human nature to cast doubt on the person, if you cannot cast doubt on what the person is saying. Someone in the Corinthian church is attacking Paul and his ministry team for changing their plans. They might be saying, “Look he lied about coming through Corinth, what else is he lying about. Maybe what he has said about Jesus is not true.” In verse 18, Paul says, “I say what I mean and mean what I say!” His “yes” means yes and his “no” means no. Paul’s use of “yes” and “no” can be confusing. To me, the world uses slippery “yes” and “no’s”. People tell you what you want to hear, not what they really think. Just a month ago we were being bombarded with political campaigns. Politicians are notorious for telling you what you want to hear. Many of them flip-flop on their views.

In verse 19, Paul says that the Gospel message that they preached to the Corinthian church had no doubt in it. Back in his first letter, Paul covered the true Gospel message (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). When Paul says “*was not “Yes” and “No,”*” he was saying that the Gospel message that they preached did not say maybe Jesus died and rose from the dead. They said “Yes”, Jesus died and rose from the dead, without a doubt. So what does “Amen” mean? It is used to show that you are in agreement with what was said or “Yes”. Can you ever think of a reason that God, the Father would say “No” to Jesus?

This verse makes me think of Matthew 7:9-11. 9 “*Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!*” God knows how to give us gifts and blessings.

"We might never have had this precious verse if Paul had not been so ill-treated by these men of Corinth. They did him great wrong, and caused him much sorrow of heart ... yet you see how the evil was overruled by God for good, and through their unsavoury gossip and slander this sweet sentence was pressed out of Paul." (Spurgeon)

21 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, 22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Where ever the attack came from against Paul, they were attacking Paul’s credibility. In these verses, he lets them know by attacking his credibility, they are attacking God’s credibility

because Paul and his team are commissioned by God. The power they received from God through the Holy Spirit helps them to stand firm for Christ. Their power is not their own. The NASB says that God has:

- a. Anointed us
- b. Sealed us
- c. Gave us the Spirit in our hearts.

23 I call God as my witness—and I stake my life on it—that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. 24 Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.

In verse 23, Paul swears an oath that “*it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth.*” Paul takes swearing an oath very seriously. In Matthew 5:33-37, Jesus warns against making oaths. He doesn’t forbid it but He does warn how serious swearing an oath is.

“Even when Paul had corrected the Corinthians, he had not lord[ed] his authority over their faith, ruling over them. On the contrary, he tried to work with them for their own joy. Paul desired happiness for the Corinthians, and he knew they could stand firm in the blessings of Christ only by faith.” Holman New Testament Commentary - 1 & 2 Corinthians