

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

APRIL 13TH–14TH, 2024 // 2 CORINTHIANS

## THE SECOND LETTER OF PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS WHO WERE THE "CORINTHIANS?"

Corinth was a prosperous Roman city in Greece that connected two trade routes and became a popular place of business between traders from all over the world.

- Corinth made money on customs & taxes, prostitution/temple worship, tourism, and sports (Isthmian games).
- Corinth also had many philosophers and itinerant religious teachers.

## WHO WROTE 2 CORINTHIANS?

2 Corinthians is a letter written by Paul to the church in the city of Corinth around 55–57 A.D. while Paul was in Ephesus or Macedonia.

- Paul had helped start this church and had lived in Corinth for 1 ½ years (Acts 18), but as he moved on to start churches in other cities, he had received troublesome news about the spiritual health of the church in Corinth.
- At times, Paul's relationship with this church had been quite tense—he'd written to them two letters of instruction and correction (1 Cor.), another letter with more instruction concerning matters of church discipline (2 Cor. 2:3–4, which we don't have), and paid them a visit (2 Cor. 2:1, which apparently didn't go too well either).
- Yet, Paul won't give up on these Believers.

## BACKGROUND & HISTORICAL SETTING OF 2 CORINTHIANS

In addition to the tension between Paul and this church and all their other issues, traveling "super apostles" with impressive letters of ministry came in and began to challenge Paul's legitimacy as an apostle and his entire approach to ministry.

- When Paul tried to correct this, the church turned on him, and things got really messy (misunderstandings about travel plans, accusations, failed attempts to reconcile, broken relationships, etc.).

## WHAT IS 2 CORINTHIANS ABOUT?

Paul and Titus connected in Macedonia (2 Cor. 7:6–7, 13), and Titus brought a mixed report from Corinth: there was a spirit of repentance among the majority (2 Cor. 2:5; 7:6–16), but some were still ridiculing Paul and holding him in contempt.

- Paul writes to these Believers to reaffirm his commitment and urge reconciliation with them.
- Paul pleads for reconciliation and repentance.
- To defend his apostleship, Paul explains his theology and why his ministry looks the way it does (unimpressive, weak, and simple).
- In contrast to the "super apostles," Paul instructs these Believers in what leadership in Christ's Kingdom looks like: strength in weakness and leading as a servant.

## WHY STUDY 2 CORINTHIANS?

Reconciliation, forgiveness, repentance, and restoration in broken relationships are rare things in today's world (even in the Church).

- Even as Christians, we will hurt each other and need to forgive those who wrong us (2 Cor. 2:7).
- Living in unity with other Believers requires us to forgive one another and honor the roles that God has placed others to play in our lives.
- Our world is obsessed with flashy leaders with big personalities, exceptional talents, strong giftings, and often narcissistic tendencies (even in the Church).
- God's way of measuring success and significance is much different than the world's: we need to be reminded that in God's Kingdom greatness is servanthood.
- God values humility and weakness because His love and power were made known through the death and resurrection of Jesus!

## THE GOD OF COMFORT (2 CORINTHIANS 1:1–11)

Paul introduces himself as an apostle of Christ by the will of God to the church in Corinth because he was still held in very low regard by many of the Christians there (v. 1).

- Timothy, one of Paul's spiritual sons and ministry partners, is listed as the co-sender of this letter.
- Even though the Corinthian Christians had struggled with sin, strife, rebellion, and immaturity, Paul still addresses them as "saints."

Paul's relationship with these Believers has been strained at times, yet he still greets them with, "grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 2).

- It probably wasn't easy for Paul to extend grace and peace to those who might have still been criticizing and misunderstanding him—but Paul does so sincerely because they're still in his spiritual family.

Paul had experienced suffering, hardship, difficulties, and trials, yet he'd also encountered the grace and comfort of God during his afflictions (vs. 3–4).

- Paul's comfort seems to be based on his feeling of deep relief and reassurance that many within the Corinthian church had responded well to his strongly worded letter (7:6–7).
- Everything was going to be OK, and Paul was relieved.

The comfort, relief, and peace God has given Paul was intended to be passed on—we receive comfort from God so that we can comfort others who are suffering.

- The general principle is that the blessings of God are not ends to themselves but a means by which we can bless and comfort other people—we are blessed to be a blessing! The trials in your life can be used to bless others.

Because Paul's life had been united with Christ (Eph. 2:13) and hidden in Christ (Col. 3:3), it had also been filled with suffering for Christ.

- Yet, through Christ, comfort and grace had overflowed into Paul's life—Jesus was right there with Paul amid his pain and hardship.
- Paul's willingness to endure affliction had resulted in others hearing the gospel and knowing Jesus, which was for their comfort and salvation.

As we go through suffering, affliction, pain, and hardship in the Christian life, God provides grace, comfort, and peace to us—that suffering also produces in us, "patient endurance" and grows our character.

- As we share in Christ's sufferings, we share in His comfort (v. 7).
- Simply put, there are some experiences of God's love we can't know until we've suffered.
- There's a lot of Paul's bio and ministry that we don't know, but we do know it was difficult.
- Regardless of the stories being told about Paul in Corinth, in the province of Asia (modern-day Turkey), he had experienced affliction and great danger.
- The hardship, danger, and trouble he'd faced was so intense he apparently came close to losing his life (vs. 8–9).
- But all of this was so Paul and his ministry team would learn "not [to] trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead."
- Could it be that God uses impossible situations and painful hardships to teach us how to rely on Him, not ourselves?
- God's deliverance proved to Paul that
  1. God would do it again (v. 10) and
  2. God answers prayers (vs. 11).

## A CLEAR CONSCIENCE (2 CORINTHIANS 1:12–14)

Paul had been severely criticized by some in Corinth because he'd changed his travel plans and apparently not kept his promises.

- The accusations against Paul were that he was fickle, worldly/fleshy in how he made plans, and dishonest.
- Misunderstandings amongst Christians unfortunately happen—and when they do, Satan uses them to sow seeds of division.

Against these accusations that he's fickle, dishonest, and unreliable, Paul defends himself by simply stating he has a clear conscience before God in how he's conducted himself and his ministry (v. 12).

- It's been a ministry of "godly sincerity and purity," not by human wisdom but by God's grace.
- Paul wasn't flashy or impressive, but he wasn't manipulative either—he was sincere.

Paul's critics in Corinth were extremely cynical and had a very critical, distrusting spirit toward him.

- Paul wanted them to know that he'd never written anything they could not read or understand—there was no hidden messaging or sinister, secret agenda (v. 13).
- We're called to have critical minds (Bereans, Acts 17:11), but not critical, fault-finding spirits (Jude 1:16; grumblers and faultfinders).

Paul believed the Corinthians "partially understood" that he was trustworthy—but he wanted them to understand this fully so they could take pride in him just as he took pride in them (v. 14).

- Paul wanted them to have a healthy sense of satisfaction in their relationship with him as their leader when they stood before Jesus together on the day of the Lord.

## POSTPONED PLANS (2 CORINTHIANS 1:15–24)

Before the days of air travel, cars, rail transport, e-mail, phones, text messaging, or the internet, communication and travel were both very complex (and often unstable) things.

- Paul had originally planned to spend a winter in Corinth (1 Cor. 16) to gather collections for the poor in Jerusalem, but he had to change those plans.
- He then planned two visits to Corinth on his way to and from Macedonia to Judea (vs. 15–16).

Then Paul's plan B had to be scrapped because he realized that the Corinthian church couldn't bear another painful visit (v. 23).

- Even as Paul informed the church about his change of plans, the opposition just accused him of being of "two minds" and making his plans in a fleshly, human way with no regard to God's will (v. 17).
- Nothing could be further from the truth!

As surely as God is faithful, Paul was a truth-teller and an honest person who lets his "yes" be "yes" and his "no" be "no" (v. 18, Mt. 5:37).

- Since Paul had maintained integrity in the greater matter of faithfully and truthfully proclaiming Jesus Christ to them, questioning his integrity in a smaller matter was unfair.
- There's no duplicity in Christ or in the message about Christ—His promises to us are "yes."

No matter how many promises God has made throughout the history of the Bible, one thing can be relied on: in Christ, they are "yes."

- Through trusting in Jesus, we say "amen," and receive those promises into our lives.
- The Holy Spirit is God's guarantee that He's dependable and will accomplish all that He has promised. The Spirit has sealed us and been given in our hearts as a down payment.

The Holy Spirit is a "down payment" of what God has promised in your future. He enables us to enjoy the blessings of heaven in our hearts today.

- God can be trusted. You may struggle with trusting people, cynicism, doubt, and suspicion, but don't let that affect your trust in God.
- God has a plan for you. He's made you promises that He's never going to take back, and your job is to simply say "amen" and believe.

Even though there was a twisted, suspicious interpretation of Paul's actions, the real reason he hadn't returned to Corinth as originally planned was because of loving, pastoral wisdom.

- Paul wanted to spare all parties involved from a painful and unfruitful confrontation (v. 23).
- Sometimes it's just not the right time to have certain conversations. Wisdom knows when to wait.

It's not that Paul wanted to "lord" over these believers and their spiritual lives. He was an apostle and had a level of authority as a spiritual leader, but at the same time, he was simply a "worker with [them]" (v. 24).

- The core nature of Christian ministry is working alongside others in a joyful way.
- True spiritual leadership is servanthood. It is humble, trustworthy, and looks a lot like Jesus.

## BROKEN BUT BEAUTIFUL

- As we follow Jesus, we'll experience suffering, affliction, pain, and hardship.
- Yet, God provides us with the grace, comfort, and peace that we need as we need it. There are some experiences of God's love we can't know until we've suffered.
- The comfort God gives us in our affliction is so that we can comfort and be a blessing to others.
- As we live in Christian community, people are going to let us down, misunderstand us, criticize us, and hurt us.
- We must learn how to forgive, repent, and seek reconciliation, even as we put our trust in God and His plans for Christ's Bride (Mt. 16:18).
- We must rely on God's faithfulness, seek His will, and live our lives with integrity.