



2 CORINTHIANS

2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-11

WORDS OF PRAISE TO GOD THE FATHER	
AND OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST – 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-7	10
SO, PUT YOUR TRUST IN GOD – 2 CORINTHIANS 1:8-11	12
PERSONAL APPLICATION – 2 CORINTHIANS 1:12-24	13

“God reaches out to sinful human beings bestowing upon them his undeserved favor, offering them forgiveness and the invitation to be in a saving relationship with Him. When they accept His invitation, they are clothed in the garment of Christ’s righteousness.”



***WE LEARNED TO COUNT ON GOD: YOU
CAN COUNT ON HIM AND ON US!***

A GREETING LOADED WITH SIGNIFICANCE

2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-2

The apostle’s goal for this correspondence addressed to the members of the young Christian congregation in Corinth was to repair the serious break in their relationship. Paul understood that this would happen only as a result of the powerful working of God’s grace. This is evident right from the beginning of the letter in the formal greeting.

In the Greek culture of that day, the accepted format was first to mention the name of the sender, followed by the name of the person the letter is addressing. Paul put his name down as the sender. He expanded on it to remind them of a truth about himself, which he felt was extremely important for them to keep in mind as they listened to the letter being read. He calls himself “an apostle of Christ Jesus.” While this does identify him as one who had been commissioned to represent Jesus Christ, his main reason for mentioning it was something other than to stress his authority.

For this occasion and for the goal of this letter, he wanted them to keep something else in mind. So he adds the phrase that hopefully would remind them that it was solely by the power of God’s grace that he held that position. He was “an apostle by the will of God.” To become an

apostle of Jesus was not his idea at all. It was entirely, from beginning to end, God's doing. All they had to do was call to mind his dramatic conversion on the Damascus Road. Jesus Himself initiated the action that would change the heart of this zealous murderer of Christians and transform him into a believer. By itself, the remarkable transformation dramatically demonstrated the power of God's grace. Even more astounding was the fact that the God of Grace chose to make Paul an apostle. Paul holds himself up as a living and breathing example of the dynamic power of God's grace.

Timothy happened to be with Paul in Macedonia when he wrote this letter, so Paul includes him in the greeting, referring to him as "our brother." The term "brother" indicates that a close bond existed between Timothy and Paul. The possessive "our" seems to suggest that a similar bond existed between Timothy and the first recipients of the letter, among whom Timothy had ministered for a time.

The apostle Paul identifies his intended recipients of this letter with one of his favorite titles: "To the church of God in Corinth." Without making a big deal about it, Paul points to a reality that they (and we) should not forget. Although human beings are instrumental in establishing a local congregation and assuming responsibility for financial support, it is important for us to remember at all times that the church belongs to God. In making this point, Paul also may have wanted to establish, in a gentle way, that as an apostle, he has a right to get involved in the congregation's concerns. And, a solemn responsibility to do whatever he can to help this group of God's people remain faithful in its discipleship. So, they should listen to him!

Apparently, Paul had reason to believe that the concerns he had were not limited to the church in Corinth. Therefore, in his greeting he includes church members "who are in the whole of Achaia," the province which covered the southern part of Greece. Note that he calls them "saints," including those in Corinth. This wasn't a new concept. As far back as Samuel, for example, Old Testament believers were often referred to as saints or "holy ones" (Greek: "hagioi"). Note that even though the Christians of Corinth and surrounding areas were "messing up," Paul still gives them the title of "saints."

Paul wasn't "stretching the truth" when he used such a complimentary title for these people. It was based upon good theology. It reflects the basic function of God's all-sufficient grace. God reaches out to sinful human beings bestowing upon them his undeserved favor, offering them forgiveness and the invitation to be in a saving relationship with Him. When they accept His invitation, they are clothed in the garment of Christ's righteousness. God no longer sees them as sinners but as whole people — His holy people. The early Church must have responded to the biblical teaching, cherishing this term. When we join in the Apostles' Creed, we declare that we believe in "the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints." This is an occasion for us to celebrate the exciting reality of how our gracious God regards us.

After the letter-writer identified himself and the intended recipients, it was proper protocol to express a "blessing" or to wish them well with the word "Clairein" (Kyrine). In just about all of their letters, both Paul and Peter took the liberty of using a "play on words." Instead of the customary and similar sounding greeting, they wrote, "Charis," which means "grace." It was

Paul's wish, first of all, that these people receive in full measure God's gift of "Charis" — the undeserved goodness and mercy of God which has the power to bring them into a saving relationship with their Maker. Paul knew that when they would "internalize" this grace, they would experience the power of God's love which prompts it. Then, there would inevitably develop within them a deep love for God. This love will empower them to live a life that pleases Him. God's grace is not just a ticket to heaven; it bestows on those who receive it a powerful and transforming spiritual dynamic in their lives. No wonder Paul gives grace a top priority in his personal wish for his readers of that time and today, as well!

But that wasn't all Paul embodied in his wish for them. His wish for them was "Grace and peace!" With this, Paul highlighted the blessings which would be theirs once they allowed God's free gift of grace to go to work in their lives. The Greek word for "peace" is "eirene" (eye-reh-nay). In this case, the Greeks simply "didn't have a word" to convey the rich meaning of the Hebrew "Shalom." Eirene was the best they could come up with. "Shalom" meant more than just the absence of conflict, strife, or confusion; it had a powerful positive connotation. It described a state of mind and heart which was finely tuned, and integrated with, the higher purposes of the Lord of heaven and earth.

When you take a long look at Paul's short greeting, you can see that it "speaks volumes." It goes way beyond simply wishing people a prosperous, healthy, and happy life. It covers the full scope of life on this earth and the dimension of eternity itself. This was Paul's majestic and meaningful wish for the Corinthians. It was especially fitting for the Christians in Corinth. If they were to have inner-peace, as well as peace in their fellowship, all of them would need to draw upon the all-sufficient power of God's grace. The same goes for us, too!

WORDS OF PRAISE TO GOD THE FATHER AND OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–7

In just about every one of his letters, after the introductory greeting, Paul writes a brief passage of thanksgiving or concern for something special in the lives of his intended readers. (See 1 Cor. 1:4-9; Philippians 1:3–8; Colossians 1:3–8). Here, Paul first focuses on the comfort that he and his fellow workers had recently experienced. Then he explains that all of this had taken place so that he would be in a position to be a strengthening force in their lives as they struggled in their faith. In doing this, Paul was establishing the theme around which the rest of the letter would revolve.

When Paul proclaims “Praise be to God,” he was borrowing from 1st-century Jewish liturgies that are still in use among Jewish people today. But he quickly “Christianizes” it with the phrase, “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” attesting to the belief that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the very Son of the Father. He expands on this by calling Jesus “our Lord,” giving Him the very name by which people of the Old Testament referred to the Almighty God. This was something that probably didn’t go unnoticed by his first readers.

The first special quality of God to which Paul’s doxology is directed is that He is “the Father of compassion” (most versions have the word “mercy”). Again, when Paul used this term, it sounded quite similar to prayers from the Old Testament. However, for Paul it was extolling God the Father, whose greatest act of mercy and compassion for human beings was when he “gave His only-begotten Son” to be the Savior of the world. Jesus was compassion personified.

For those Corinthian Christians who accepted God’s compassion, and had been brought into a saving relationship with their Creator, it was also true that their heavenly Father was “The God of all comfort.” The Greek word for “comfort” is *paraklesis*, from which we get one of our names for the Holy Spirit: “Paraclete.” This literally means “one called to your side” — primarily to “be there for you” and to give you the assistance you might need. This suggests a special nuance of meaning for the word “comfort.” Instead of thinking of comfort as simply an expression of sympathy, it has the connotation of “strengthening.” The word “comfort” has the same root as the word “fortify.” We can be quite certain in the light of the theme of this letter that this is what Paul wanted to stress. He wanted his people to count on God to “fortify” them, so that they would be more than equal to the challenges they would meet.

After his proclamation of praise for a God such as this, Paul proceeds to give his personal testimony about his own experience which solidified his conviction about it. He knew from firsthand experience that God could always be counted on to fortify those who trusted in Him. When he makes the “blanket statement” (v. 4) that “God comforts us in all our troubles,” Paul uses the present tense to convey the idea that this comforting is on-going. It is perpetual.

In giving his testimony about the reliability of God in seeing them through “all their troubles,” Paul wants them to see all this from another angle. He wants them to understand that all of this was going to prove to be beneficial for them: “So that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” Because of his experiences, Paul could more easily identify with them in their struggles, and thus be more effective in his ministry to them. More important, he could pass on to them the secret of his survival — confidently entrusting himself and his well-being to the “God of all compassion and comfort.” Talk about personal security! It doesn’t get any better than this.

Naturally, Paul must have given a lot of thought to the whole idea of “Why” he was experiencing so much hardship as he tried to carry out his responsibility as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Obviously, the Holy Spirit gave him some insight. He came up with a clear picture of how it had been with Jesus. Think of how Jesus suffered at the hands of wicked people and the forces of evil. Consider the greater good that came to the world through the redeeming work of Jesus. The same forces of evil were still on hand, doing their utmost to sabotage the work of the apostles. This is what he must have meant when he said that the sufferings of Christ “flow over into our lives.” In a way, such sufferings brought to Paul the blessing

of “sharing” at least a little bit of what Christ experienced. It made him feel closer to His Lord. As a result of this personal suffering, Paul would also be better able to identify with others who were struggling with their faith, and thus be better qualified to help them.

This thought is repeated and spelled out clearly in verses 6 and 7. Paul confidently expresses his personal conviction that they will have a better way of dealing with the adversities that will come their way. We have to admit that we can only guess the nature of these adversities. Very likely, it wasn't going to be like some of the things Paul had experienced. From the outside, there may have been such things as hostility, denunciation, discrimination, which came their way from people in their pagan community. Or it may have come from conflicts within families or relations. We know that the persecution of Christians seemed to be inevitable in the Early Church, as it had been predicted by Jesus Himself (John 15:20).

In verse 7, Paul expresses his confidence in the Corinthian Christians. He tells them: “Our hope for you is firm.” These words certainly give a strong hint that whatever had caused the rift between them and the apostle had been cleared up. The basis for his unshaken hope is that as they are sharing in sufferings, they also are sharing in the comfort that God provides. Whatever spiritual terrorists may come up with, the Corinthians are “fortified.” They have a well-founded security against spiritual terrorism.

SO, PUT YOUR TRUST IN GOD

2 CORINTHIANS 1:8-11

So that the people in Corinth would get an idea of the complete reliability of God, Paul gives a specific example from a recent personal experience, which we assume they hadn't

known. He refers to the “hardships we suffered in Asia” (vv. 8–9). While we really can't say precisely what had taken place, we certainly get the impression that things got pretty ugly. He says, “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure so that we despaired even of life.” In fact, Paul recollects, “in our hearts we felt the sentence of death” (v. 9). Paul said that the situation in which he found himself was absolutely hopeless and, that humanly speaking, there wasn't a ray of hope left in him. As far as Paul was concerned, he was “as good as dead.”

But even this situation wasn't a problem for God. God came through and delivered him. “He delivered us from such a deadly peril” (v. 10). Paul shared what he gained from this experience. He learned the lesson that we should not depend upon ourselves. But even more importantly, he learned that you can trust in God, no matter how desperate the situation might be: “On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us” (v. 10).

In verse 11, Paul tacks on a short statement about the importance of intercessory prayer. He attributes his deliverance from the jaws of death solely to divine intervention. Then he involves his friends in Corinth concerning his safety in future “close calls.” Even though God does it all by Himself, He welcomes the appeals of His people by way of intercessions. When God's people become involved in prayer, on behalf of someone like the apostle Paul, they praise God by declaring that they are looking to Him for divine help. When help arrives, they are set to thank Him for His “gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many” (v. 11). God is honored, and the people expressing their faith are enriched by this interchange with God.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 CORINTHIANS 1:12–24

Gracious Father in Heaven, as I open my Bible to Paul's second letter to the Church in Corinth, I open my heart to the Holy Spirit. Please help me to understand and take to heart what You want to teach me so that my faith may grow, and so that I may sense the Spirit's presence in my life, through Jesus, my Savior and Lord. Amen.

Review

1. This section of 2 Corinthians deals with Paul's defense of his personal integrity. Please consult Lesson 1 to provide the following details.

Who was responsible for influencing the Corinthians to question the integrity of the Apostle Paul?

What was the motive for doing this?

On what action of Paul did they base their contention that he was not trustworthy?

Why do you think Paul was so concerned about vindicating himself in the eyes of the church at Corinth?

2 Corinthians 1:12–24

2. As Paul recalls the years he spent as pastor to the Corinthians, what is his assessment of his performance in their midst?

What "approach" does he say he disavowed in all of his dealings with them?

What do you think Paul meant by his statement here concerning "sincerity and holiness," that his record was impeccable, "especially in our relations with you"? (Acts 18:11)

3. In appealing to his readers to trust him, to which future event does he turn their attention?

How do you see a lesson in this for your faith?

2 Corinthians 1:15–17

4. When Paul writes in verse 15 that he was "confident of this," on the part of the people of Corinth, what is he referring to (see preceding verses)?
-

Paul acknowledges that he hadn't kept the promise he made about a proposed visit. What was he counting on, on the part of the Corinthians?

Put yourself into the picture. You are a member of the congregation at Corinth. Would it be your first impulse to accuse Paul of lacking integrity because he made a switch in his travel plans?

Whom did the Corinthians allow to influence their thinking in such a negative way? (Acts 18:12)

What should the people have done? (If you have a copy of the Small Catechism, check out Luther's explanation of the positive side of the Eighth Commandment)

2 Corinthians 1:18–22

5. What does Paul do at the beginning of verse 18 to show that he considers these attacks against his integrity as very serious?

If the people of Corinth went along with the charges against Paul, how might this affect their attitude toward his message?

What was "at stake" for the people?

What assurance does Paul give his readers about the message he had proclaimed to them while he was with them?

In whom has God said "YES" to every prophecy of the Old Testament, according to Paul?

6. In verse 18, what does Paul do again as he strives to show that they should not question the authenticity of anything he had taught them?

What did Jesus teach about the use of oaths? (See Matthew 5:33–37).

How might you reconcile Paul's frequent use of oaths with the words of Jesus?

How does the word “Amen” indicate that the Corinthians should never have any doubt about the Gospel of God?

2 Corinthians 1:23-24

7. Which words in verse 23 show that Paul had his readers in mind when he changed his plans?

Which two phrases in verse 24 help us to understand how Paul wanted them to regard his style of ministry?

What it wasn't

What it was
