



## 2 Corinthians chapter 1

Taught at our Sunday evening service, 6th February 2022 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

**Reading:** Acts Corinthians 18:1-11

**Good evening. Let's pray.**

### Introduction

Tonight, we're going to begin a verse by verse study of 2 Corinthians - the apostle Paul's second letter to the church in the Greek city of Corinth - a city that still exists today, though it has seen many rebuilds throughout its long history; as a result of war, earthquakes, and even a fire. At the time of writing - around 60 AD - Corinth was a major centre of commerce thanks at least in part to its geographical position.

You can see here, that it's toward the southern end of mainland Greece, and if we **zoom in**, you'll see it's nearby Athens - in fact, around 50 miles or so away... that's as close as we are to Chatham or Maidstone. But what made it particularly well placed was its position on a piece of land just 4 miles or so wide - and it was quicker to sail to Corinth, transport goods across **this piece of land**, and set sail from the other side, than it was to sail around the lower parts of mainland Greece. And like today, time is money - especially where shipping is concerned.

But what was it like? Well, a busy city for sure – even larger than Athens at this time, with around 80k Roman Citizens living there. But it was also famous for its immorality, including its temple prostitutes. In fact, if you acted in a morally bankrupt way, you'd likely be called a Corinthian. That's not a good reputation to have – as an individual, or as a city! And if you or I were looking to start a church, it might not be the kind of place we'd think of first. I doubt we'd be saying – you see how morally bankrupt that city is, how they love their temple prostitutes and worship of idols – I think we should plant a church there! I'm sure we'd fill a church!

But of course, God – who is rich in mercy – had quite the other perspective, and told Paul by a vision, as we read earlier in the first 11 verses of Acts 18, that He had many people in this city. And so Paul plants this church, and stays there 18 months teaching the Bible.

However, some 7 years on he hears that the culture has affected, or infected the church. That they are not holding fast to what they have learned. And so he writes to them – about sexual immorality, about division in the church, about marriage, about the dangers of false teachers, of what to do with meat offered to idols, and famously – about love. That's 1 Corinthians.

And as is evident in this second letter, the church listened. But not all took that well – and some retaliated in the only way they could, not by critiquing the message, but by questioning the authority of the messenger. And so as Paul writes this second letter, he'll address those attacks – and in doing so we'll understand a great deal about Paul's heart. If 1st Corinthians informed us of Paul's message, then 2nd Corinthians could be considered to inform us of Paul's character.

So, let's dig a little deeper into the details of this letter – and what it says.

## Overview of 2 Corinthians

First up, a few notes about this letter:

- It's the 47th book of the Bible, and 8th of the New Testament
- Written to the church in Corinth, of which Paul was the founding pastor
- Written from Philippi where there was another church Paul would write to 5/6 years later
- Written in around 60 to 55 AD, possibly in 57AD
- Likely written in the same year as 1st Corinthians
- Possibly 1 of 4 letters sent by Paul (possibly another either side of 1st Corinthians)
- 13 chapters long, 257 verses (average of 20 per chapter), 6'092 words

But let's talk about the content of this letter. At it's simplest, we can break this letter down into three sections:

- Chapters 1 to 7 – Christian living
- Chapters 8 to 9 – Christian giving
- Chapters 10 to 13 – Christian guarding

Digging into this deeper, Gerard Crispin - in his Bible Panorama - notes that the first 7 chapters see Paul's Intro, change of plans, forgiveness for a restored backslider, nature and outworking of his ministry noted, alongside the need to separate from evil, need for reconciliation, and the Corinthians repentance caused by first letter.

In chapters 8 & 9, Paul writes regarding Christian giving to those in need in light of the example of the Macedonians and Christ Himself.

And finally in chapters 10 to 13, Paul defends and vindicates his apostolic authority, citing his manifested signs of an apostle, and his preference to come to them gently next time.

We'll look at each of these things, taking in around 1 chapter a week, and tonight we're going to study through all of chapter 1. Zooming in a little further to that, then...

## Overview of chapter one

We can summarise this chapter with perhaps 5 words:

- Grace
- Comfort
- Trust
- Simplicity
- Gentleness

And we'll come back to these at the end of our study this evening.

## Chapter one

But now, starting at verse 1, we see Paul note that this is written from him and Timothy - as are the letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians (1 & 2 Thessalonians also written from Silvanus), and he writes:

### **2 Corinthians 1:1**

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,  
To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia:

So Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ. Not through his own making, but through God's calling. And in case like me you didn't know the depth of meaning of the word apostle, it conveys the idea of a delegate, one sent with full power of attorney to act in the place of another, the sender remaining behind to back up the one sent. Finnis Dake notes, that in the case of Christians it means God sends them to do what He, Himself would do if He went.

And so Paul writes. Not for his own glory, or his own benefit. But that this church may please God the Father in all that they do. And even though this was written - at times very specifically - to the church in Corinth, Paul notes this is also to all the Christians living in the Achaia region. And like them, we may not be dealing with all the specific issues raised (at least not this week!) but we would do well to take note, and to apply this to our own lives - because like the church in Corinth, we are the church of God. Not Paul's church. Not Bob's church. But God's church.

And Paul writes:

### **2 Corinthians 1:2**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, as has often been noted from this pulpit - you can't experience the peace of God without first receiving the grace of God. It's just not possible. Without our God's Riches At Christ's Expense - that spells grace by the way - we cannot experience that peace.

But also, note how Paul opens this letter - one where he will deal with those personally attacking his authority, and questioning his motives - by greeting them with grace and peace. What an example!

He continues...

### **2 Corinthians 1:3-4**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Now, who has ever had a difficult time? Just me? No, this is relevant to us all!

The root meaning of the word comfort here conveys the idea of one who comes alongside to help. And it's good when those near and dear to us, come along side us in times of need. And an ear really is sometimes all that is required. Indeed, we're told in Romans 12:15 to weep with those who weep. But there has to be more than that. And there is.

Because, while knowing that others have suffered in the same way may provide momentary explanation, it doesn't change my situation. But rather, Paul says, we are to comfort with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. That is, the very best thing you can do is to point your grieving friend, spouse, child or colleague to God - for it is in Him that we are comforted.

Let me put it like this: we can't be fair weather Christians. In fact, if we walk away from the Lord when times are tough, we're walking away from the greatest comfort we could have in that moment!

Practically, what does that mean? Well, start with the Word of God - He has breathed 66 books into existence so that you may be comforted, encouraged and equipped. Just look at the Psalms!

Add to that, prayer. Pray for your needs. Come before Him. But also listen to Him - for His guidance and direction. It's no good locking a sat nav in the boot of your car and hoping it will help you on your journey - you actually need to listen to what it's saying. And you need to listen to God.

And add to that fellowship - God has put you in a community of people called His church. If you're listening to this and you're not part of a local church - find one, and serve within it. You have a duty to help others, as much as they have a duty to help you.

And communion. Never forget that God has already dealt with the greatest problem you could ever face. One that you could not solve on your own, or even with the help of everyone else on the planet. God has so graciously dealt with us, that unlike those around us - for whom this is as good as it gets - we have God's promise, that, for us as Christians, this is as bad as it gets!

That's why Paul was able to write this to the Thessalonians:

#### **1 Thessalonians 4:13-17**

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

God is the source of any comfort worth having - and we have to point people to the source. And I think we need reminding to go to that source ourselves.

Verse 5...

#### **2 Corinthians 1:5-7**

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.

So Paul is saying, whether he and Timothy be afflicted or comforted, it is for the good of those in Corinth, and for an example to them - knowing that the same comfort, from God, and of God, is available to them. And Paul's example in trials will be evident throughout this letter. And he reminds them in the very next verse:

#### **2 Corinthians 1:8-11**

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.

This is brutal honesty - for Paul to say that he despaired even of life itself. But all this had a purpose, and an end - that he might give up in his own abilities, his own skills, his own energies - that ALL his trust should be in God. And oh how God wants to use your trials to teach you to trust Him too.

The need for sleep is one of those daily reminders that we are not God. That our energies are finite. That's a reminder that Sian and I are getting very often right now with our firstborn!

But in all trials, God is the one who will sustain us, comfort us, save us, deliver us. But you notice what else Paul says here? "you also helping together in prayer for us". Wow - that is, praying for others in their time of need is a practical, tangible help. It's not the same as saying "I'm thinking about you". For it is coming before the God and creator of the entire universe, asking Him to intervene, to give strength, to have His way in that person for their good.

So are you trusting in yourself? Or in God?

Are you going through a trial? Could it be that God is teaching you to trust in Him alone? Yes.

He did it with Paul. And He did it with Moses too. Moses was raised in the house of Pharaoh, with the best education possible. And his first act at delivering just one of his countrymen was all in his own strength - and he had to flee for his life. Yet 40 years later, he returns without confidence in his own abilities - saying "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." It was then that God used him to deliver a nation.

Verse 12...

#### **2 Corinthians 1:12-14**

For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you. For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand, even to the end (as also you have understood us in part), that we are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Simplicity and godly sincerity. We have a simple faith that can be summarised in 4 words: Christ died for me.

This is such an affront to the man who wishes to be saved by his intellect. But that's what it comes down to. Not anything you have done. But entirely what Christ did for you. And Paul was underlining the fact that he had never preached anything other than this. He didn't aim for the intellect, but for the heart.

And his heart was that they would now honour God in all things - there was no ulterior motive. But that hadn't stopped some questioning whether his heart was really in it - as if he wanted to visit one moment, and couldn't be bothered the next. So he writes:

#### **2 Corinthians 1:15-18**

And in this confidence I intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit—to pass by way of you to Macedonia, to come again from Macedonia to you, and be helped by you on my way to Judea. Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No? But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No.

Paul is saying - am I fickle? Do I talk out of both sides of my mouth? No - there has never been a change on my desire to visit, only the timing of it, and that for your benefit - not to suit my calendar or what I can selfishly get out of it.

### **2 Corinthians 1:19-20**

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me, Silvanus, and Timothy—was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.

Again, Paul wasn't fickle - but rather he was in the will of God. And God is never fickle - His promises are ALWAYS true:

### **2 Corinthians 1:21-22**

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

That is, Jesus is the bond between them. He is what they have in common. He is the security of his and their salvation, His Holy Spirit the guarantee in their hearts. A guarantee of what? An eternity with Christ.

I like what JVM notes:

Sometimes, especially at funerals, we hear the song, "Safe in the Arms of Jesus." Well, the word here is not safe in the arms of Jesus. When you are put into Christ by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, you are a part of His body. Rather than being safe in His arms, you are as safe as an arm of Jesus Christ. You are as safe as a member of His body. What a wonderful security that is!

**J Vernon McGee**

They could not have anything greater in common. Nor could we. So, Paul's reason to delay his visit wasn't to reject them, but to spare them.

### **2 Corinthians 1:22-24**

Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth. Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.

And here we see just the start of Paul's explanation in this letter, that he didn't want to come to them in heaviness of heart. And that's a pastor's heart. He loved these people. He didn't want to visit and spend all his time correcting their behaviour, as permissible as that would be - he wanted to come and encourage them. That's a world away from those who seek to lord it over others, such as those Jesus rebuked the church in Ephesus for in Revelation chapter 2:

### **Revelation 2:6**

But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

What Jesus hates here, is this idea of Nico - meaning to conquer, and the laity - the ordinary people, which is what gives rise to a clergy and laity that has resulted in all sorts of menaces in the church. But rather, Paul, who elsewhere speaks of Timothy as a spiritual son, opens this letter calling him a brother. There's no one-upmanship, only a recognition of those whom God has called to serve in various roles - each part of the body doing its share.

But Paul is far from finished on this matter, and we'll pick that up at the start of chapter 2 next week.

## Summary

So looking back at the 5 summary words we started this chapter with, we can now add a little more detail:

- Grace - then peace
- Comfort - with the comfort of God
- Trust - in God, not in self
- Simplicity - and godly sincerity
- Gentleness - withheld visiting

## Application questions

As we close this evening, there are lots of questions we could ask ourselves - but perhaps some of the most challenging to us may be these:

- Are you gracious to those against you?
- Are you going to God for comfort?
- Are you trusting in yourself? Or in God?
- Do you overcomplicate the gospel?

**Let's pray.**