



**PAUL'S
SECOND EPISTLE
TO THE
CORINTHIANS**

.....

**LUTHER E.
SCHWARTZKOPF**

**LIVING WAY
BIBLE STUDY**

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Each lesson should be stapled together according to the number of the lesson in the right-hand corner of the page. The P.A. questions for the next week should be attached after the author's narrative for the current week, as they will be the home study for the next class session.

The first meeting of the class is an introduction to the study. Since the members of the small groups have no P.A. questions to discuss at the first meeting, they may use the time to get acquainted or to tell what they hope to receive by studying this course. At the first meeting, the lecturer presents background information about the course, using the Introduction lesson as a guide.

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PAUL'S SECOND EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS

LUTHER E. SCHWARTZKOPF

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The Letter of Paul to the Colossians

The Epistle of James

The First Epistle of Peter

The Second Epistle of Peter & Jude

Born in China of missionary parents (1922)

Graduated from Concordia College (Milwaukee) in 1940 and Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) in 1945

Received degree in Sociology and graduate studies in Counseling Psychology from California State University (San Bernardino, CA)

Spent entire ministry in the Southern CA District (1945–1988)

Missionary-at-large, E. Sierra area (1945–48)

Immanuel, Oceanside and Fallbrook (1948–50)

Trinity, San Bernardino (1950–72)

First full-time Director of Arrowhead Lutheran Camp (1972–88)

Served on District Bible Institute staff; developed and taught courses: How to Study the Bible and God's Purpose for Lutheran Women

Graduate Bethel Bible Series, Bible Study Institute

Served twenty (20) years on Synodical District Mission Services Department, six years as chairman

Retired from full-time ministry in 1988. With wife (Ruth) moved back to Bishop, CA to be with grandchildren and enjoy the outdoor activities as well as the beauty and majesty of the High Sierras

Called to Glory — May 13, 2006

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“Paul’s experience with the people of Corinth vividly demonstrates the power and sufficiency of God’s awesome Grace.”



THE SUFFICIENCY AND POWER OF GOD’S GRACE

Back when George W. Bush was making a run for the presidency of The United States, one of his campaign promises was that he would do something about the increasing threat of terrorism. Little did he know at the time that this would suddenly become his top priority. The horrific events of September 11, 2001 and subsequent intelligence information made it clear that members of Al-Qaeda had already slipped into our country and set up anti-USA terrorist cells in many places. In his televised speech to the nation, our president sent chills up and down the spines of those who were watching, as he declared all-out war on terrorism, echoing the call to action used by Todd Beamer to rally the heroes on Flight #93 over Pennsylvania on the fateful day: *“Let’s Roll!”*

It was the threat of “spiritual terrorism” which motivated the apostle Paul to write this second letter to the Christian congregation in the Greek city of Corinth. Because of his bond with this congregation, Pastor Paul felt a personal responsibility for the spiritual well-being of this church that he had founded (2 Corinthians 1:14). As we get into our study of this rich letter, we will discover the ways in which the cohorts of Satan himself “hijacked” the leadership of the congregation. They were “hell-bent” (literally) on carrying members to spiritual and eternal doom.

In this emotional letter, the apostle demonstrates his strategy for dealing with the insidious forces of spiritual terrorism, and he clearly

recommends it to his readers in chapter 12:9. Here it is formulated succinctly in the words Jesus spoke to him following his persistent “three-peat” prayer to God to remove his so-called “thorn in the flesh”: “My grace is sufficient for you!”

AUTHOR

Without question, the author of this letter is “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus,” as stated in the very first verse of the letter and mentioned again in Chapter 10:1. Although Paul mentions Timothy, this does not mean that Timothy was co-author. Since the people in Corinth knew Timothy quite well, Paul must have felt that it would be appropriate to include him in the greeting portion of the letter.

The contents of the letter corroborate the authorship of Paul. It is by far the most personal of Paul’s letters. It has all the characteristics of Paul’s literary style and brings us more autobiographical material than any of Paul’s writings.

ORIGINALLY INTENDED READERS

As stated in the salutation, the letter was originally written for the Christians in the city of Corinth, as well as other believers “in Achaia,” a Roman province which took in all of Greece south of Macedonia. Corinth was the capital city of the province.

The strategic physical location of the ancient city of Corinth had a lot to do with the development of its character as one of the most commercial cultural centers in the area. It was located on the isthmus, which at that point was only about ten miles wide. The captains of merchant ships heading both east and west had a choice of routes. They could elect to sail a distance of 200 miles around the southern tip of Peloponnesus, and take on the risk of having

to deal with violent storms and treacherous currents. The other option for ancient sea-captains was to unload their cargo on one side of the isthmus and have it transported overland. If the vessel was not too large, it could be loaded onto a wheeled vehicle and hauled across the narrowest part of the land on a paved road. The captain would then reload his cargo and be on his way.

Taxes from this activity and other commercial ventures, along two prominent trade routes that crossed each other in Corinth had contributed to the wealth of the city. The city was also renowned the world-over as host to the biennial Isthmian Games, which brought many visitors and large sums of money to the city. The Temple of Aphrodite, the Greek “goddess of love and beauty,” stood atop the hill at whose base the original city was built. Fans of the goddess came to Corinth in droves to take part in the sensual rituals associated with the worship of Aphrodite, who was the equivalent of the Roman Venus.

The glamour and glory of ancient Corinth came to a grinding halt in 146 BC, when the Roman armies overran it. The invaders razed the entire city and took most of its treasures back to Rome. The inhabitants were either killed or sold into slavery. The once beautiful city lay in ruins for almost 100 years. In 44 BC, Julius Caesar ordered it rebuilt, and slaves who had gained their freedom were sent to occupy it.

At the time of Paul, Corinth was no longer a Greek city, but a Roman colony quite cosmopolitan in make-up. Its strategic location on two major trade routes enticed businessmen from a variety of nations. It became a center for the worship of many of the Greco-Roman gods and goddesses. Corinth also had attracted many nationalities and a variety of religions.

We know that among these was a settlement of Jews. Later, a discovery of a stone bearing the inscription “Synagogue of Hebrews” confirmed the Jewish settlement. Its shape and size suggests that it may have served as the lintel over the entrance to the Jewish synagogue where, according to Acts 18:4, Paul preached his first sermon after arriving in Corinth. At the time of Paul, the city of Corinth could very well have deserved the label “sin city.” In many ways, the Corinthians lived in a moral and spiritual “smog” strikingly similar to that in which we find ourselves today.

In 1858, the rebuilt city was destroyed by a major earthquake. The original site was abandoned and the modern city of Corinth was built a little over three miles to the northeast.

PAUL’S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH IN CORINTH

The relationship of Paul with the congregation of Christians in Corinth is more fully known than are his dealings with any of the other churches that he founded. According to the book of Acts, Paul’s first visit to Corinth was made in the last phase of his second missionary journey when he left Athens and went to Corinth. Here he met with a Jewish couple, Priscilla and Aquila, who along with all the Jews in Rome had been ordered to leave the imperial city under an edict of Emperor Claudius in AD 49. Like Paul, they were newcomers to Corinth, and also like Paul, they made their living with the craft of tent-making (or leather-working). He worked with them during the week and on the Sabbath proclaimed the Gospel in the local synagogue (Acts 18:1–4).

After a fairly short period of time, some of the leaders of the synagogue showed resentment against Paul. They made it so uncomfortable for him that he discontinued his visits to the

synagogue and focused his ministry on the Gentiles. His witnessing was blessed. Along with some Jews who had responded favorably to Paul’s message, many non-Jews came to faith and became the nucleus of a Christian congregation in Corinth. While the exact length of time is difficult to calculate, his stay in Corinth must have been around two years, making it the longest stay at any church he founded (Acts 18:9–11).

In its formative stage, this congregation in Corinth had the benefit of the ministry of Paul, assisted by Priscilla and Aquila. Acts 18:24ff tells us that this congregation was also blessed with the services of the highly educated, converted Jew from Alexandria named Apollos. According to Acts 18:28, this man spoke with eloquence and fervor, “proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.”

Paul had a high opinion of how this group of Christians had grown in the faith. In his first letter, he referred to them as having been “enriched in every way — in all your speaking and in all your knowledge...you do not lack any spiritual gift” (1 Cor. 1:5–7). Quite a “positive stroke” for these Christians, especially since it came from their highly respected pastor!

PURPOSE OF THE LETTER

Paul had gotten word from Titus about a troubling situation that was brewing in the congregation at Corinth. It was probably inevitable, with all of the various “isms” being promoted in their community, that some of the weaker members would be misled into one form or another of paganism. But more insidious, was the internal problem of influential false teachers who had wormed their way into positions of leadership and credibility in the congregation. At first some members were “hoodwinked” by these “schmoozers.” The

members, who had come under their influence, inevitably came to realize that a lot of their ideas did not “square” with what Paul had taught them. When they brought this up in their discussions, the false teachers’ response was to disparage the credentials and credibility of Paul. They began a vicious “smear” campaign against him, pulling no punches!

Paul’s primary purpose was to do what he could to undo the damage done to his reputation and somehow bring about a restored relationship with these people who were so dear to him. Second Corinthians offers a marvelous illustration of how the apostle Paul went about his effort to solve this serious problem. For one thing, Paul refrained from scolding the people for being so gullible, or for being disloyal to him. He simply used the Gospel and had faith that this alone could bring about the right outcome. This was a good move on his part. With the blessing of God upon his efforts, his relationship with the people at Corinth was restored and the people so dear to him were brought back to the only living way to God and eternal salvation. Paul’s experience with the people of Corinth vividly demonstrates the power and sufficiency of God’s awesome Grace.

DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING

Putting together a precise and accurate timetable of Paul’s activities presents quite a challenge. However, most Bible scholars agree that 2 Corinthians was written around AD 55 while Paul was in Macedonia. He had arrived in Corinth for his first visit early in AD 50. When he left Corinth after his extended ministry there, he first went to Antioch. After spending “some time” there, he made his way through Galatia and then on to Ephesus, which became his base of operations for his ministry in Asia Minor. It was in the Spring of AD 55, around the Feast of Pentecost, that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. Shortly after, Paul left Ephesus heading for Macedonia, where he met up with Titus and was told about the problems that had flared up in the church at Corinth. It was from Macedonia, shortly before winter, that he wrote what we refer to as 2 Corinthians.

UNITY OF THE LETTER

Many scholars today take the view that one or more sections of 2 Corinthians, as we now have it in our Bibles, simply cannot have belonged to the original document. The footnote in the Concordia Self-Study Bible (NIV) gives a concise summary of some of their reasons for taking this view. Conservative scholars view these theories to be without the support of a single shred of external evidence. Not a single writer from the early years of the Christian Church, not a single original manuscript, and absolutely no thread of tradition have expressed so much as a hint that 2 Corinthians ever existed in any form other than in which we now have it. This is the perspective from which this Bible Study was developed.

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This letter's pervading theme of the complete sufficiency and power of God's grace in the face of trials and afflictions of every kind is one that seems in a unique way quite appropriate for the Christian church in the 21st century.

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VALUE OF THE LETTER

One commentary begins with the sweeping statement: "Saint Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians may without exaggeration be described as one of the richest of all the writings of the New Testament...its rediscovery today could hardly fail to be an ennobling and fortifying experience for the Church of Christ." This letter's pervading theme of the complete sufficiency and power of God's grace in the face of trials and afflictions of every kind is one that seems in a unique way quite appropriate for the Christian church in the 21st century.

In his book, *The Word of the Lord Grows*, Dr. Franzmann writes:

"The second letter to the Corinthians is certainly one of the most difficult of Paul's letters, which is not to say that it was difficult or obscure for its first readers. They lived in the situation which we must laboriously reconstruct...it is an angel to be

wrestled with, if we would receive a blessing. But the blessing is a rich one and worth the wrestling."

In this letter, Dr. Franzmann also points out that we see Paul the "man" and Paul the "apostle." We see him in battle for his very existence as an apostle. We learn that the battle must be and why it must be. We learn that battle is necessary in the life of the Church and that it can even be beneficial for it. And above all, we learn that the battling in the church doesn't have to forsake the principle of love. Great insights to explore in depth!

God bless our study of 2 Corinthians so that we, who are also being bombarded with false religious ideas and pagan philosophies of life, will be faithful to God's Word and put the power of God's Grace in Christ to work in all we think and do and say. Are you ready? "Let's Roll!"

PERSONAL APPLICATION*2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-11*

God of all Grace, I thank You from the bottom of my heart that, through Your Holy Word and the working of the Spirit, You have opened Your heart to me and showed me all that You have done for me through Your Son Jesus. Help me to grow in my appreciation of the on-going power of Your Grace, as I work through this Bible Study today. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Review

1. What was Paul's primary purpose in writing this letter to the members of the congregation in Corinth, which he had formerly served as pastor?

On which of Paul's three missionary journeys did he first visit the city of Corinth (Acts 15:36-41, 18:1)?

What experience led Paul to travel to mainland Europe in the first place (Acts 16:9-11)?

2 Corinthians 1:1-2

2. Paul identifies himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (v. 1). How does Luke's account of Paul's encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road support this statement (Acts 9:1-5)?

Paul elaborates on this in Galatians 1:15. According to Paul, who took the initiative in his miraculous conversion and subsequent call to apostleship?

To what quality of God does Paul here, and in I Corinthians 15:9-10, attribute all of this?

3. Where did Paul and Timothy first meet (Acts 16:1-3)?

How had Timothy been brought to the Christian faith (2 Timothy 1:5)?

As you think about your religious experience, do you see any similarities to that of Paul or Timothy's? Explain.

4. Tell what you have learned about what was going on in the church at Corinth. Do you think Paul had something special in mind when he described the Church as “belonging to God”?

5. Give the name Paul calls the believers in Corinth and in the province of Achaia?

Did this term originate with Paul? (Psalms 30:4, 31:23, 34:9, 116:15) Explain.

What is the theological basis that allows such a title to be given to imperfect people? (Romans 3:23–24).

6. What do you think Paul was wishing for the recipients of this letter with the words “grace” and “peace”?

Write the Hebrew word for “peace.”

2 Corinthians 1:3–7

7. What two qualities of God does Paul highlight as especially worthy of high praise, as he moves into the body of the letter?

With all of the great qualities of God, what do you suppose moved Paul to feature these two in this letter (vv. 4–7 give some hints)?

Paul doesn't mention specific troubles for which they would need special compassion and comfort. Can you think of some problems that might come their way as they tried to live their faith in a pagan community?

We know that Christians who live in countries which are governed by Muslims (e.g., Sudan, Malaysia, Pakistan) experience all kinds of hardships. Do you sense any problems that come your way because you are a believer?

2 Corinthians 1:8–11

8. What were some afflictions Paul experienced in his quest to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles? (See also 2 Cor. 4:7–12, 11:23–29)

How bad were they? (vv. 8–10)

9. What does Paul request of these Christians (v. 11)? State the two ways good will come as a result.



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



2 CORINTHIANS

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"Enter into the joy of the Lord."



PAUL'S DEFENSE OF HIS PERSONAL INTEGRITY

The days preceding the most recent Election Day proved to be quite typical of most previous elections. Many candidates tried desperately to come up with something that they could use to discredit their opponents. Some observers called it "negative campaigning." People on the street use a more colorful term and call it plain old "mud-slinging."

PAUL ANSWERS THE CHARGES OF UNTRUSTWORTHINESS

2 CORINTHIANS 1:12 - 24

The false teachers in Corinth engaged in vicious "mud-slinging" hoping to discredit Paul and win the support of the members of the congregation. As one writer put it, "they went right to the jugular vein of character." They questioned Paul's integrity. They reminded the people of an incident with which all of them were familiar. In his first letter to them, he had indeed promised to visit them right after he had traveled through Macedonia. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 16 that he was looking forward to the visit and hoped that he would be able to stay awhile. He mentioned that he even hoped to spend the entire winter with them. It was a matter of record that this didn't happen. He had not kept that promise. The "spin" which his detractors put on Paul's failure to keep his promise was: "See! How can you possibly trust a man who says one thing and does something else?"



PAUL ASKS THEM TO TRUST THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE

2 CORINTHIANS 1:12-14

Before Paul takes on the matter of his change of travel plans, he asks his former parishioners to just stop and think about their personal experience with him while he was their pastor. Close to two years would have given them ample time to judge his character. Had he ever done anything that would give them just cause to question his integrity? This is a rhetorical question for which Paul takes the liberty to give the answer. He tells them that this is the one thing of which he was especially proud. His record with them was impeccable. “Our conscience testifies we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God” (v. 12).

Please note that when Paul writes, “especially with you,” he doesn’t mean to imply that he was less than that with others. He is simply suggesting that because he was with them for such an extended ministry they may have had more opportunities to be impressed with his sincerity and trustworthiness. Perhaps, to keep his detractors from using such a boast against him, he makes it clear that he was able to conduct himself with integrity because God had so empowered him.

In the last statement of verse 12 about “worldly wisdom,” Paul seems to be alluding to the underhanded tactics of the false teachers in their attack on Paul’s reputation, as well as their methods of propagating their false ideas. Paul takes the opportunity to emphasize again that both his conduct and his message of salvation and hope were gifts of “God’s grace.”

In verse 13, Paul elaborates on what this means to them. The message he had brought

them was never fuzzy or ambiguous. They could trust the integrity of it. They didn’t have to “read between the lines,” or look for double meanings. In verse 14, Paul expresses his hope that as they remember his performance while he was with them, and as they read his correspondence, they will agree with Paul about his evaluation of his ministry among them. “As you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us.” He deserved their commendations.

The apostle Paul just can’t pass up an opportunity to bring up the “end times.” He does so not to strike fear and terror into their hearts, but only to emphasize how important it was for them to live out their lives with the dimensions of eternity in the picture at all times. On the Great Day of the Lord’s Second Coming, they will experience a gratifying vindication for their “boasting” of Paul and his Gospel message. On that day they will hear God’s commendation for Paul: “Well done, good and faithful servant... enter into the joy of the Lord” (Matthew 25:21). Their pride in Paul will be accompanied by personal gratitude that they had remained loyal to Paul. For they, too, will hear God welcome them into Paradise. As you and I remain faithful to the Gospel of God, we also can look forward to hearing that same gracious invitation to “enter into the joy of the Lord.” We, too, will be filled with a new sense of appreciation for those who faithfully brought the Gospel to us — our parents, pastors, Sunday School Teachers, Bible Study Teachers, relatives and friends.

NOW ABOUT HIS CHANGE OF TRAVEL PLANS

2 CORINTHIANS 1:15-17

Before Paul launches into his explanation of how his change of plans developed, he gently chides them for allowing these itinerant theologians to spoil what he regarded as a relationship of

mutual trust. He writes: “Because I was confident of this...” (v. 15). The thought had never entered his mind that they would be anything but loyal to him. It must have been like that for God when he was “let down” by our first parents in the Garden of Eden. The Lord had a wonderful relationship with Adam and Eve. He had never disappointed them. He met all their needs and gave them a completely happy existence. God had every reason to believe that they would be loyal to Him. Along came God’s detractor, a complete stranger to them. Like a smooth-talking traveling salesman, he began to sell them “a bill of goods” that God was “holding back” something from them. Satan injected into their minds the seed of doubt. In just a matter of minutes, Adam and Eve moved from trusting God to gobbling up the “sales pitch” of God’s great enemy. Unbelievable!

Paul goes on to explain that when he decided to change plans he was thinking of what might be best for them, “so that you might benefit twice. I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia.” This way, instead of one visit from the apostle, they would have two! Obviously, this was Paul’s answer to the charge that he was undependable, and maybe even a bit “wishy-washy.” He implied that he had given a lot of thought to his decision to alter his itinerary. He didn’t do it “lightly.” Furthermore, whenever he makes plans, as in his original plan to visit them, he sincerely intended to follow through. He didn’t “make...plans in a worldly manner,” saying “Yes, yes” and “No, no” in the same breath! Circumstances had changed. What would be best for them was always the overriding factor. If they had not allowed their minds to be contaminated by opinions of people who didn’t even know Paul personally, they probably would have given Paul the benefit of any doubt about his change of plans. Doesn’t this send a warning to us about our willingness to give credence to negative rumors (especially “juicy gossip”) about church leaders and others?

PAUL SHOOTS DOWN THE DETRACTORS’ “FALSE SPIN”

2 CORINTHIANS 1:18-20

When he wrote “But as surely as God is faithful,” Paul put himself under an oath. The “hidden agenda” of his detractors was quite obvious to him. They wanted to destroy his credibility so the people in Corinth would be more open to accepting the “new teachings” which they wanted to promote among them. Unlike other biblical authors, it was fairly common for Paul to use oaths when he wanted to defend or emphasize a crucial truth. This fits in quite well with what we know about his passion for the Gospel and the intensity of his personality.

It was especially appropriate in these circumstances. For Paul, it was a real crisis. They needed to know that there was absolutely nothing shaky or questionable about the saving truths which he and his associates, Silas and Timothy, had taught them. It was never a Yes or No, but always and only “Yes.” Paul goes beyond concern for his standing with them. He inserts a “plug” for the Old Testament Scripture as well. All of the Messianic Prophecies, God had miraculously fulfilled in the person and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. In Jesus, all of them were a resounding “YES!” What Paul taught them could be validated by checking it against what the Scriptures of the Old Testament clearly taught. Since this was something they could count on, Paul writes: “And so through him [Jesus] the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God.”

Paul may be alluding here to a practice in Jewish synagogues of that day. When the worship leader spoke a word of praise to God, members of the congregation would personally validate what the leader had said by declaring “Amen!” The word was carried over to the New Testament worship. In some churches today, “Amen” has become a formalized response to prayers and benedictions, which are spoken by the worship leader.

Sometimes it is sung and at other times is simply spoken. In churches with less-structured worship, congregation members are encouraged to shout “Amen” whenever they are moved “by the Spirit” to express their endorsement of what a preacher has said. The “Amen” fervently proclaims in the vernacular: “Right on!” All of this can serve to remind us that no matter how wonderful and glorious the truths about God may be, it really doesn’t have much value for us until we personally endorse them. Whether aloud, or silently in our heart, we need to affirm with a solid Amen, through which we say: “That’s for sure!”

FOUR OTHER TRUTHS WE CAN SAY ‘AMEN’ TO

2 CORINTHIANS 1:21-22

Having established the dependability of God Himself, Paul builds on this truth as he proceeds to make his case before the people of Corinth. He reminds them that God Himself has been involved in all this, every step of the way. To help them get a clear understanding of what this means, Paul uses four illustrations or analogies, drawn from everyday life.

First, he wanted them to bring into sharp focus this basic truth: “Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ” (v. 21). The Greek word for “stand firm” was a legal term that indicated certain things will be carried out, as in a contract. In this case, Paul was focusing on his personal trustworthiness, as well as the Corinthians themselves. In effect, this is what Paul is saying here: “God will follow through on what He has begun.” It’s in the contract! God will not let you down (2 Timothy 1:12).

Second, Paul says it was God who had called him to be a special messenger who would speak for God. He says he had been “anointed” by God to take on this awesome responsibility. He used the same word (*chrīoo*) that the Septuagint (Greek Translation of the Old Testament) used in Exodus 28:41 where Moses was told to anoint his brother Aaron and his sons to be priests of God. Saul was similarly “anointed” to be the first King of Israel (1 Samuel 9:16). In the Old Testament, anointing involved a ceremony in which oil was poured on the head of a person designated by God for a certain task. The English translation of the title “Messiah” is simply “The Anointed One.” The Greek word for “Messiah” is “Christos.” The root in the verb “*chrīoo*” means “to anoint.” It is quite obvious that Paul was not speaking of a literal anointing with oil. He had in mind an anointing by the Holy Spirit. Paul wanted to leave this thought with them: He did what he did because God had commissioned him. Thus, his message had the authority and efficacy of God behind it.

The third “picture” word which Paul reminds them to keep in mind is that God had “set his seal of ownership on us.” Again, this is a term from the world of commerce. It referred to the practice of attaching a wax seal to the opening of a sack or an

envelope, to indicate ownership and to be a warning not to mess with its contents. Some students of the Bible take this as a reference to Holy Baptism, through which God claims us as His very own. We receive the sign of the Cross on our forehead and over our heart, to signify that through Christ, our crucified Savior, we belong to God with all of our being. Others see it as a reference to the evidence of the indwelling Holy Spirit which effectively identifies us as belonging to God!

The fourth analogy which Paul uses is from the world of commerce. Paul says that God had “put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” A deposit is made by a buyer to a seller as a guarantee that the balance of the purchase price will soon be paid. When believers experience a measure of the Holy Spirit in their lives, it points to the future when believers will experience to the full what it means to be in a saving relationship with God. Paul wants them to know that he and his colleagues have the Spirit of God in their lives now, and they take this as a strong guarantee that they will experience the fullness of it someday. God will keep His Word! When you and I express our faith in the Gospel and in God’s promises for life and eternity, we can be sure that the Spirit of God is within us (See: 1 Corinthians 2:10–16).

Why did Paul go to such great lengths to make these four concepts illustrate the complete dependability of God? A very plausible explanation is that he wants them to understand that God has been involved every step of the way in all of Paul’s planning and doing. Thus the charge that he has been fickle and frivolous in his dealings with the Corinthians simply doesn’t “hold water.” The charge brought against Paul by his detractors simply doesn’t have any basis in reality, whatsoever.

**BOTTOM LINE:
HE WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THEM!**

2 CORINTHIANS 1:23–24

Once again, Paul uses an oath, calling God as his “witness” to corroborate what Paul gave as his reason for his change of plans. It was for their benefit: “In order to spare you” (v. 23).

Verse 24 is almost like a parenthetical statement that Paul slipped into this discussion about his intense concern for them. He may have sensed that a possible response to this could have been that Paul was “stepping over the line” a bit. “Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.” It’s like he’s taking a step back to make clear that he recognized that ultimately they have personal responsibility in the matter of faith. However, because of his love for them, he wants to work with them to get them back on solid ground. His motive for his passionate concern is that they might experience the joy that comes from being faithful to God. Paul gives us a neat model of ministry. It emphasizes genuine pastoral concern that shows itself in a cooperative “working together,” rather than in a domineering, “knuckle under,” authoritarian pastoral style.

Paul isn’t quite finished with his impressive vindication of his ministry and his personal integrity. He told the members of the church at Corinth not to listen to the renegade false teachers. He assured them that he loved them and wanted only the best for them — always!