

# “THROUGH THE BIBLE”

PASTOR SANDY ADAMS

## 2 CORINTHIANS 1-2

It's been said, "[absence makes the heart grow fonder](#)," but that old adage didn't apply to Paul's relationship with the Corinthians. After Paul left Corinth he returned to Antioch. A few months later he embarked on his *third missionary journey*. When he arrived in Ephesus he heard of problems in the church at Corinth. From Ephesus, Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians and sent it via his friend and coworker, Titus.

The reaction to Paul's letter was mixed. Some people *repented*. They responded with a godly sorrow that led to change... But others *resented*. "[How dare Paul rebuke us! Who does he think he is!](#)" Some in the church at Corinth began to question Paul's authority. They cast doubt on his integrity, and his honesty, and even his courage. It was one thing to disagree with Paul, but the Corinthians resorted to mudslinging and slander. Hey, [absence doesn't always make the heart grow fonder!](#)

News of the reaction to 1 Corinthians came to Paul in Macedonia. And it was there that he sat down and penned another letter to the Corinthians... Guess what we call it? How about "[2 Corinthians](#)." In this letter, Paul defends himself and his ministry. He becomes bold and confronts his accusers. Needless to say 2 Corinthians is an emotionally-charged book. Paul shares his heart and pleads his case as he does nowhere else. Raw feelings get exposed in Paul's response to the Corinthians.

This makes 2 Corinthians a vital book for all folks who want to serve the Lord. Ministry is not always easy, hassle-free. [Helping hurting people gets messy](#). In fact, 2 Corinthians proves it can be hazardous to *your* health. One of the challenges in ministry is helping others, without getting hurt yourself. This is why [Lifeguarding 101](#) teaches you to never jump in and swim to a drowning person. The frantic person will overcome you, and pull you under with them. What you do is toss them a lifeline... And the application for Christian service is that a good heart - a caring, well-meaning attitude - is not the only thing you need in ministry. There is a right and wrong way to minister to drowning people. All these issues and much more rise to the surface in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. Here's a course in [Soul-saving 101!](#)

The letter begins, "[Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, \(that's the city\) with all the saints who are in all Achaia:](#)" (that's the region) Here's Paul's greeting... "[Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.](#)" Paul always begins his letters, "[grace and peace](#)" - but note it's the grace that always comes first! You can't have *peace with God* without the *grace of God*.

Verse 3, "[Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...](#)" This wonderful phrase appears three times in the NT... In Ephesians 1:3, Paul writes, "[Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...](#)" Here Paul praises God for His past blessings - the favor He's bestowed on believers in Christ Jesus. The phrase also appears in 1 Peter 1:3, "[Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again](#)

to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Here, Peter praises God for giving us a *future hope* - the blessings we'll receive when Jesus returns.

But in 2 Corinthians Paul praises God not for His *past blessings*, or *future glories*, but His *present help and comfort* in the midst of our difficulties. Paul writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort..." The Greeks knew nothing of this kind of God. Their gods threw down thunderbolts, and inflicted curses. They specialized in making life hard on those who crossed them. Natural disasters, sudden calamities were attributed to the capricious whims of the gods. You served and sacrificed to the gods not out of love, but to pacify them - to keep them off your back, and keep them out of your life. What a surprise it was to the newly converted Corinthians to hear that the true God, is a God of mercy and comfort. Listen closely and you'll hear their sigh of relief as it passes down through the centuries. "Ah, what a God - not to be feared or fretted, but a God I can run to for comfort. A God who'll pick me up, not put me down!"

Paul says as much in verse 4. He refers to the true God as He "who comforts us in all our tribulation..." The English word "*comfort*" is from two Latin words which mean "*with strength*." Sure, God lets us cry on His shoulder - *but just long enough to release our pain*. He doesn't let us sulk! God joins no pity-parties. God comforts us like I comforted my kids when they were at bat and got hit by a ball. I checked them for serious injury, then wiped their tears. But after 30 seconds or so, it was time to shake it off and take their base. We didn't have time to lick our wounds and rub our boo-boos. *Look on the bright-side you got on base!*

My High School football coach had a rule. If you were seriously injured he wanted you to stay on the ground - don't move a muscle - let someone come onto the field and assist you to the sidelines. But, if you just got the breath knocked out of you, or pulled up with a cramp, he wanted you to get off the field on your own, as fast as you could. As he put it, "I don't want anybody clapping for you just because you got hurt!" At times we think we deserve some applause just because we got injured. Jesus is called "the balm of Gilead." He's a poultice that sucks out the pain, and heals our boo boos. But Jesus refuses to assign permanent disability. He heals you to send you back into action. We've got a game to play! A battle to win! We're all needed!

Paul says God comforts us, "that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." Empathy may well be one of the most powerful forces on earth. *The knowledge that someone cares* can reach into the deepest depression and lift us up! *Compassion and empathy is huge!* David Ausburger wrote, "It's so much easier to tell a person what to do with his problem than to stand with him in his pain." I've heard it put, "Someday, after we have mastered the winds, the waves, the tides, gravity, and outer space, we will harness the energies of love: and then, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire." You can know the right words to say, but healing happens when truth is spoken in love!

Verse 5, "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ." Listen to it in *The Living Bible*, "You can be sure that the more we undergo sufferings for Christ, the more He will shower us with His comfort and encouragement." In other words, an *abundance of suffering* equals an *abundance of comfort*.

Here's a poem, "Until I learn to trust, I never learned to pray; and I did not learn to fully trust till sorrows came my way. Until I felt my weakness, His strength I never knew, nor dreamed 'til I was stricken that He could see me through. Who deepest drinks of sorrow, drinks

deepest, too, of grace; He sends the storm so He Himself can be our hiding place. His heart, that seeks our highest good - knowing well that things annoy. We would not long for heaven if earth held the only joy."

Verse 6, "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." Paul was in a no-win situation... On one hand his critics could say, "Doesn't God protect His own? Anybody who's truly God's servant wouldn't end up in as much trouble as Paul." On the other hand they could accuse, "Look at Paul, he lives in a world opposed to the Gospel, yet he never suffers. He must not be doing anything for God." It was damned if you do, and damned if you don't.

But Paul sets the record straight... "*Whether I'm condemned or consoled is out of my hands!*" If he's rejected it because he preached the Gospel to a hostile crowd. If he's consoled, it means he found a receptive audience. Yet Paul's mission was to preach the Gospel regardless of the response!

"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." In his critics' eyes Paul *can't win*. But in his eyes he *can't lose*. His *hope is steadfast*. If you *suffer for Christ*, you'll be *comforted by Christ*.

Verse 8, "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." Whatever hardship Paul suffered in Ephesus it crippled his confidence! He got depressed. If he'd been alive today someone would've put him on meds! Like an old, worn-out dog, He wished God would put him down - just call him home, and put him out of his misery! Imagine the great Apostle Paul suffered from depression, and he didn't cover it up. He wasn't ashamed. He wants to be sure the Corinthians know... *It happens!* Even God's servants battle the blues!

Verse 9, "Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves..." Some commentators believe a warrant was issued for Paul's arrest and execution. Whatever this "*sentence*" was Paul was in dire straights. Paul continues, "Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead..." Here's a reason God allows trials and tribulations - we need to be stripped of our *self-confidence*. It needs to be replaced with a *God-confidence!*

A wife decided to clean out her husband's wardrobe. She was tired of seeing him in his old-fashion threads. *He objected!* He thought his taste in clothes was fine. The wife finally won the battle, and she added her husband's old clothes to the items she was selling at the garage sale. Yet the husband felt vindicated when a lady shopper spotted his clothes, and shouted, "Perfect! This is exactly what I've been looking for!" He was about to take a jab at his wife with his best, "*I told you so!*" when she added, "*These clothes are perfect for the scarecrow in my garden!*"

Everybody's diet needs a regular slice of humble pie. *We need to be reminded we're not all that!* We're servants. The power comes from God! It's funny, my trash pick up is on Monday morning! That means I always end a big day of ministry for Jesus by rolling my trash to the street! It's a fitting reminder that God raises the dead! I put out the trash!

It's God - not Paul, not me or you - "who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us..." If Jesus won for us such a great victory over death, why would you think He'd now watch us flounder in life? "He will still deliver us" God is faithful to the finish!

And notice how Paul finishes his thought on Christ's great deliverance, he adds, "you also helping together in prayer for us..." The Greek phrase, "*sunupourgeo*," here translated, "*helping together*" is composed of three words: *with, under, work*. The Greek term is a picture of several guys pulling together as a team to lift a heavy object. Paul is reminding the Corinthians that they're working together in prayer... Life is full of *objects too heavy to lift* - and *obstacles too entrenched to move* - and *mountains too high to climb* - *on our own!* But through prayer we join forces and overcome together!

And we do it for a reason. "That thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many..." When we face a trial together in prayer, we praise the Lord together when He answers our prayer! *Prayer by many* ends up in *praise by many!*

In verse 12 Paul starts to respond to the criticisms that had been leveled at him, "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." Paul tells us up front, he can be bold in his defense because his conscience is clear! Real authority is born out of a clear conscience! Paul said he acted "*in simplicity and godly sincerity*. Sadly, too many people serve the Lord out of a buried shame. They can't live the life themselves, so they teach or preach it to others. This is why the Church today lacks boldness and real authority. We've gotten away from being what we're suppose to be. We complicate Church and ministry with man's wisdom - but it's really just as simple as walking sincerely and spreading God's grace!

"For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand." Apparently, Paul had been accused of talking out of both sides of his mouth. He was *saying one thing, but living another*. Yet Paul defends himself... "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. 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." On his way to Macedonia Paul intended to stop off in Corinth. He spoke of his plan in 1 Corinthians 16:5... "Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia... And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go. For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits." But notice the catch - Paul was up front from the outset, "*if the Lord permits*."

Obviously, Paul made plans. There's nothing wrong with *praying, then planning*, but he was always open to God changing His plans. It reminds me of James 4:13, "Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil." Make plans, but don't be rigid or dogmatic. *Inflexibility is a denial of God's sovereignty and providence.*

Verse 17, "Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly?" Because Paul had not visited Corinth on his way to Macedonia his critics had made it a reason to cast doubt on Paul's credibility. He's wishy-washy! They were saying, "*Why follow Paul when he doesn't know where*

he's going and what he's doing? If he's irresponsible with his schedule how can you listen to what he says about God and faith?" But Paul can be trusted! He doesn't make or break plans lightly, flippantly. Everything he does in ministry has a reason.

Paul continues, "Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh..." He doesn't make moves based on *earthly wisdom*, but *godly principles*. Verse 18, "But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No." Paul wasn't a guy who couldn't make up his mind! Say one thing today, and the opposite tomorrow. His yes was yes, his no was no!

And Paul points to his preaching as proof! "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us - by me, Silvanus, and Timothy - was not Yes and No..." There was never any ambivalence, or uncertainty, or lack of clarity in Paul's message. In fact, the hallmark of his ministry was the definiteness of the truths he preached! He says, "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." Here's where Paul got dogmatic - not in his *planning*- but in his *preaching*!

There are passages that are hard to pin down. They lend themselves to multiple interpretations, and can be interpreted multiple ways. It's wise not to be adamant! *But those passages are the exception rather than the rule*. Paul says, "The promises of God in (Christ) are Yes, and in Him Amen." When it comes to Jesus and the Gospel we can be certain. Thus, when we speak of Jesus there needs to be a boldness, a surety, about what we preach! Not a "ah, well... maybe... perhaps... I think... It could be..." We need to speak with assurance!

Verse 21, "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." On the shipping docks of an ancient port merchandise was marked by its owner's seal. The seal was a waxed impression that proved ownership. And this is a function of the Holy Spirit's presence is in our lives. The indwelling Holy Spirit is God's proof-of-purchase! His presence means we belong to Him! Paul also refers to the Spirit as our "guarantee." He's our down-payment on the blessings of heaven. We get a little taste of heaven through the Holy Spirit!

"Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth." The reason Paul didn't come to Corinth is he felt like chewing them out. He was angry with their carnality. If Paul had stopped by Corinth on his way to Macedonia it would've been an unpleasant visit. He's hoping the Corinthians get their act together before he comes. He seeks *fellowship* not their *dis-fellowship*.

"Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand." Paul must've thought he was sounding bossy. He assures the Corinthians they don't belong to him. He's not their Lord! He has no desire to bully them or dominate their faith. Paul was just a concerned co-worker sharing biblical advice from a caring heart!

Chapter 2, "But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow." Now the fact Paul says he won't "*come again to you in sorrow*," is an indication that he may've paid an earlier visit to Corinth that we're not told about in his epistles, or in the book of Acts. Acts 18 describes Paul's initial visit to Corinth. It was anything but sorrowful. *It was a blast planting a church* But it is possible that when Paul heard about the problems in Corinth, he made a quick jaunt across the Aegean from Ephesus to address some of the issues.

Verse 2, "For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me? And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is the



joy of you all." Paul didn't like being the heavy unless he had to be. He usually sent Timothy or Titus to be the enforcer. Someone other than Paul himself did the dirty work. And this is good policy. It's a strategy we use here at Calvary Chapel. Once upon a time, I did the church discipline. I went to folks in sin, and had the hard conversations. If they accepted what I said great – great! But if they disagreed, or bucked, or got mad at me they ended up leaving the church and stopped hearing God's Word. But several years ago I turned over all the discipline and confrontations to our elders. Now when a person gets angry they're ticked off at the elders - *but they'll still hear the Bible from me*. My relationship with them is preserved so I can help them grow in the Lord... *And this is the reason Paul wants to preserve his relationship with the Corinthians.*

He says in verse 4, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you." When we read 1 Corinthians we didn't realize Paul had bathed the scroll in tears. But he had! He'd written the letter in "anguish of heart" and "many tears."

"But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me," but all of you to some extent - not to be too severe." The sin in the church wasn't just an affront to Paul personally, it was a blight to the whole church. Remember the sin of Achan in the OT... One man's sin led to God's punishment and the nation's defeat. Now the same phenomena was occurring in Corinth!

Recall the situation Paul dealt with in 1 Corinthians 5. A brother in the church was shacking up with his step-mother - and the church hadn't stepped in! *They were tolerating blatant incest*. And worse, they were proud of their tolerance. They thought they were being non-judgmental. Paul rebuked the Corinthians. There's no merit in being soft on sin. The man's sin was a cancer. And if you don't get rid of a cancer it spreads and eats at the health of the whole body. The church needed to call this man to repentance - or else give him his marching orders. His choice was to repent and be dis-fellowshipped. They should've told him not to come back until he'd righted his ship.

And apparently, the discipline worked! Verse 6, "This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him." The Corinthians had swung to the opposite end of the pendulum. In his first letter Paul emphasized the need for discipline, but now he's having to encourage them to forgive the man and receive him back.

Verse 9, "For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things." We think of church discipline as a test for the person who's fallen into bondage, but it's actually an indicator of the spiritual health of the whole church. When a situation arises that has to be addressed, it's the church and its leadership, that's being tested. Most married couples want to have a baby, but we don't always want to change smelly diapers. *And that's how I see church discipline*. We like to see folks get born again, but a church with spiritual babies has to change a lot of dirty diapers. We need to roll up our sleeves, and care!

"Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices." Once a person repents we need should be swift to forgive. If not, we play right into the devil's hands! Revelation 12:10 calls Satan, "the accuser of the brethren." Satan loves to take a person Christ forgives, and bury him under a mound of condemnation. Let's not help him. Church people actually assist the devil by either *withholding forgiveness or tolerating sin*.

"Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia." Paul explains why he hadn't returned to Corinth. He sent Titus to deliver his first letter, but when he left for Macedonia Titus had yet to report back with the Corinthians' response. Paul wanted to hear from his sidekick and the Corinthians before he made his visit. It amazes me that most of the ill-feelings the Corinthians had toward Paul arose simply because he didn't visit them when he said he might... It just goes to show it's *little stuff* - that cause the *biggest problems*. Major schisms can occur over miscommunications. I've had people get mad at me, and harbor a grudge for years because of a simple confusion. Rather than assume the worst, if they'd come to me, and asked me what I'd really meant by what I did or said - we could've resolved the conflict, and enjoyed fellowship.

Paul concludes chapter 2, "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place." Here, some historical background is helpful. A "Roman Triumph" was the equivalent of a ticker-tape parade. If a military commander wins a victory over an enemy on foreign soil, captures at least 5000 soldiers, and gains new territory for the Emperor – he got rewarded with a triumphant procession. The honored general rode in a golden chariot, with his officers. The spoils of victory were on display. His *conquering army*, with his *conquered foe*, marched behind him. The priests added to the spectacle by burning incense, and filling the streets of the city with a sweet fragrance. Paul is saying that Jesus Christ is also THE conquering general who is forever celebrating His triumph! Jesus also won a battle on foreign soil. He was God, but He humbled Himself as a man and was dispatched to a foreign front. He also conquered 5000 people. On the Day of Pentecost 3000 were saved. Several days later another 2000 joined their ranks. We've also been added to the Victor's spoils!

Paul adds to his analogy of the conquering general, verse 15, "For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life." I love this... we're not only the spiritual spoils, and the foe Christ captured, and the conquering army who'll return with Jesus - *we're also the fragrance of Christ!* That means we're all *a bunch of little stinkers!*

To other Christians we're a breath of fresh air. Have you noticed when you discover another Christian in the office there's instant camaraderie? A bond forms. *You support them - they support you.* But to the man who rejects Jesus we become an embarrassing odor. I guess you could call us, "body odor" – after all we are all the body of Christ! But when an unbeliever smells our stench He opens up a window and hopes that we leave... *A Christian is a perfume to some, and a noxious fume to others!* Yet if no one smells me at all - if I'm odorless - there's something wrong! When I walk into a room the people present should hold their nose or breathe deep. Either way, I just want to give off a smell for Jesus! We are *"the fragrance of Christ!"* And this carries heavy responsibility! Paul asks, *"And who is sufficient for these things?"* All the glory belongs to our triumphant General!

"For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ." The one smell neither believer or unbeliever - should have to tolerate is *hypocrisy*. It fouls up the air for everyone! Phoniness is rotten eggs and spoiled milk. Whatever you do - don't play the hypocrite. Notice in closing, Paul wasn't a *"peddler of the Word."* He never slapped the hood, and told-you-what-you-wanted-to-hear. He was sincere and spoke truth! A witness for Jesus doesn't have to be smart, or articulate, or talented - but there is one indispensable qualification and that's *sincerity!*