

## 2 Corinthians 1:1-7 – “The Fellowship of Suffering”

As we get back into our study in Corinthians, it's timely to take a little review at the ministry that had happened at Corinth, and the correspondence by Paul to this Corinthian church.

Paul had ministered for a year and a half in Corinth. Typically Paul would travel from city to city and not stay too long in any one place. This was the second longest stay in a city for Paul (second only to his 3 years in Ephesus).

For some history on the city, you can listen to our message from 1 Corinthians 1. The context of Paul coming to this city and ministering here is found in Acts 18, and this was not an easy city to bring the gospel to.

- Corinth sat on a major trade route and was sort of the gateway city to Rome from the east. It was a melting pot of culture, intellect, and wealth.
- Near Corinth was a city called Isthmia, where every couple of years the Isthmus games were held. This event was second in size only to the Olympic games.
- A special feature at Corinth was the 'Acrocorinth', a hill of over 1,850 feet. On this hill sat the temple to Aphrodite – the Greek goddess of love and beauty. As part of their religion and worship, this temple had 1000 temple prostitutes that would come down to the city each night and offer their services to male citizens and visitors. The worship of Aphrodite was parallel to that of the Ashtoreth idolatry in the days of Israel's kings.
- Not only was there a temple to Aphrodite but there was one for Apollo right in the city as well. Apollo was the god of music, song and poetry, and for good measure, the ideal of male beauty. This brought men in to acts of physical devotion to Apollo, thus Corinth became a centre of homosexual practices.<sup>6 1</sup>

As you can see, Corinth was not only a city of wealth and commerce, but it was a city of carnality and great licentiousness. It became so known by this that “the Greek language developed a verb, *korinthiazomai*, which meant “to live like a Corinthian in the practice of sexual immorality.””<sup>2</sup> The word *Corinthian* became synonymous with an immoral, debased lifestyle.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Rom. 1:26ff.

<sup>1</sup> Prior, D. (1985). *The message of 1 Corinthians: life in the local church* (p. 12). InterVarsity Press.

<sup>2</sup> Barker, K. L. (1994). *Expositor's Bible Commentary (Abridged Edition: New Testament)* (p. 606). Zondervan Publishing House.

The people of Corinth were intellectually alert, materially prosperous, but morally corrupt.

And it's to this city that Paul comes to minister the gospel of Jesus Christ. In fact, Paul needed some reassurance and encouragement from the Lord when he got here:

- **Acts 18:9**, *"Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; <sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city." <sup>11</sup> And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them."*

And Paul did have a fruitful ministry here. A church was planted, people were saved, lives were changed. But there were also problems that arose. Instead of this church influencing the culture, the culture began to influence the church. Boats are made to be in the water, but if you get water coming into the boat, it's not going to end well.

- They became a **divided** church.
- They became a **defiled** church through immoral living.
- They became a **disgraced** church through prideful and selfish living.
- They became a **doubting** church as they questioned some of the more foundational truths of Christianity.

Paul has heard about these not so good things going on in the church at Corinth, so he writes 1 Corinthians to address the various issues and problems and see this church built up in the truth.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul is once again having to contend with some struggles going on. This time it primarily centered around the influence of false apostles who were turning the church against Paul.

This is Paul's most heartfelt letter, his most personal and autobiographical. It was a hard letter to write and through it we'll see Paul defending his conduct, character, and calling as an apostle.

"Corinthians is so vital to us. Conditions have not changed much. Many of the problems that confronted the Corinthians plague present-day believers as well. Living wisely for God is not easy in the midst of a sinful and materialistic age. But

Corinthians is filled with valuable and important lessons... which (are) so essential for our walk with the Lord.” - J. Allen Blair <sup>3</sup>

- Stalker said that the letters of Paul take the roof off the early churches and let us see what went on inside. Of none of them is that truer than the letters to Corinth.
- And now with 2 Corinthians, we get the roof lifted off of Paul’s heart to really see him share out of his own personal pain and affliction.

## **OUTLINE:**

### **I. PAUL EXPLAINS HIS MINISTRY—chapters 1–7**

- A. Triumphant—1–2
- B. Glorious—3
- C. Sincere—4
- D. Believing—5
- E. Loving—6–7

### **II. PAUL ENCOURAGES THEIR GENEROSITY—chapters 8–9**

(He was receiving an offering for the Jewish saints.)

- A. Principles of grace giving—8
- B. Promises for grace givers—9

### **III. PAUL ENFORCES HIS AUTHORITY—chapters 10–13**

- A. The warrior, attacking the opposition—10
- B. The spiritual father, protecting the church—11:1–15
- C. The fool, boasting of suffering—11:16–12:10
- D. The apostle, exercising loving authority—12:11–13:14 <sup>4</sup>

## **Alternative Outline:**

1. Consolation: The Comfort in Ministry – 1-7
2. Collection: The Ministry of Giving – 8-9
3. Correction: The Vindication of Paul’s Ministry – 10-13

“While not affecting the understanding of 1+2 Corinthians, the accepted scheme of Paul’s visits and letters to Corinth does shape the interpretation of Corinthians. In the following comments on the text, the view is taken that four letters were sent and three visits made.

<sup>3</sup> Lasseigne, Jeff (2005). Ezra. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *Highway 66- A Unique Journey Through the 66 Books of the Bible* (p. 144-145). Santa Ana, CA: Calvary Chapel Publishing.

<sup>4</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 627). Victor Books.

1. Paul first came to Corinth in the spring of a.d. 51 and ministered there for one and one-half years. He sailed in the fall of a.d. 52 with Priscilla and Aquila to Ephesus where they remained while Paul continued on to Jerusalem. At Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila met Apollos whom they instructed and subsequently sent to Corinth for a period of ministry (Acts 18:18–28).
2. While Apollos ministered in Corinth (Acts 19:1) in the fall of a.d. 53 Paul returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey. Paul remained there for two and one-half years, establishing it as a center for evangelizing the surrounding provinces as well (Acts 19). The letter mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9 (a letter misunderstood by the Corinthians [1 Cor. 5:9–11] and now lost) was probably written during the early stages of this Ephesian ministry.
3. Paul learned of the misunderstanding and of additional problems in the Corinthian church from members of the household of Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11). He then received an official delegation in the form of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:17), who brought corroborating news and specific questions on issues dividing the church. First Corinthians, Paul's second letter to the church, was written to address these matters.
4. But apparently the problems in the church were still not resolved. It is possible that Timothy (cf. 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10) was the bearer of this news. Paul then decided to pay the church a second visit, sailing directly from Ephesus to Corinth. This, it seems, was the "painful visit" referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:1, apparently because of the action of the man mentioned in 2:5 and 7:12 and the failure of the Corinthians to support Paul.
5. After this visit and Paul's return to Ephesus he sent a third letter to the Corinthians (now lost, like the first) borne by Titus. It grieved Paul deeply to write this (2 Cor. 2:3–4) because of its stark disciplinary nature (7:8–9). After a riot provoked by silversmiths (Acts 19:23–41) Paul left Ephesus in the spring of a.d. 56, bound for Macedonia (Acts 20:1) with a preliminary stop in Troas where he hoped to rendezvous with Titus (2 Cor. 2:13) and receive news from him about the situation in Corinth. Because he could not find Titus there, he anxiously pushed on to Macedonia, apparently with grave concern about Titus' safety (7:5–6).
6. There he met Titus, who brought good news about the general well-being of the Corinthian church but bad news about a group opposed to Paul.
7. From Macedonia Paul wrote a fourth letter, 2 Corinthians.
8. Paul then made his third visit to Corinth during the winter of a.d. 56–57 (Acts 20:2–3).

These steps, in summary, are: (1) First visit to Corinth. (2) First letter to Corinth (now lost). (3) Second letter to Corinth (1 Cor.). (4) Second visit to Corinth (a “painful visit,” 2 Cor. 2:1). (5) Third letter to Corinth (now lost). (6) Fourth letter to Corinth (2 Cor.). (7) Third visit to Corinth.

The two lost letters were obviously not intended by God to be part of the biblical canon.”<sup>5</sup>

Remember that 2 Corinthians was actually the 4<sup>th</sup> letter written to the church in Corinth. The sequence William Barclay sets out is as follows.

1. The church founded; first visit (Acts 18).
2. The first letter (referred to in 1 Cor 5:9).
3. The second letter: 1 Corinthians. This is in response to those from Chloe’s household that brought word to Paul in Ephesus of concerns in the church. It also addressed various questions others brought to Paul.
4. The painful visit (cf. 2 Cor 2:1).
5. The third letter: severe in tone (2 Cor 2:4; 7:8).
6. The fourth letter: 2 Corinthians.
7. The third visit.<sup>6</sup>

## 1. Introduction – 1:1-2

**1:1-2 - *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: <sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.***

Throughout this letter we’re going to hear Paul at times defending his apostleship among these false apostles that have come into the church at Corinth and have attempted to discredit Paul.

Paul begins (as he often does in his letters) stating that he is ***an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.***

This was not something that Paul has chosen for himself. He’s not a self-proclaimed apostle. This hasn’t been Paul enforcing his will, but rather he’s an apostle by the will of God. He knows exactly who he is. His was a divine calling. And that would go a long way for Paul when he would be up against adversity, criticism, and rejection. This would sustain him in the face of hardship.

<sup>5</sup> Lowery, D. K. (1985). 2 Corinthians. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 550–552). Victor Books.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce, F. F. (1979). *New International Bible commentary* (p. 1348). Zondervan Publishing House.

- It's important for us to recognize who we are by the will of God too. We can easily question the things that are happening to us if we fail to recognize who we are in Christ. We're the church, the bride of Christ. We're called out, saved, set apart for God and unto God. He loves us and we're His!

Paul communicated these things in this introduction. Though these believers in Corinth were flawed, they were the **church of God**! They were part of the **saints** throughout Achaia. This was not some specialized unit, these were those that have been set apart to God for His service and glory. This was not something they had to earn or achieve. This was the result of being in Christ.

If you have put your faith in Jesus today, you are a saint! You are set apart by God and for his glory. So live in Him and for Him, no matter what trials you are encountering, you're His! And you are loved.

And like Paul often did, he uses the common greeting of the day.

- Grace (*charis*) was the typical Greek greeting while peace (*shalom*) was the typical Hebrew greeting.
- And it's always in this order. Because you can't experience the peace of God until you've come to know the grace of God.

This grace and peace only comes from **God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. If you're lacking peace or grace, look to the one Who provides it all.

## 2. Comfort in Suffering – 1:3-5

**1:3-4 - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> 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.**

Though Paul has encountered trials and tribulations, struggles and suffering, Paul directs his praise to God.

This word **blessed** is the Greek word *eulogetos*. It means to speak well of (where we get our word eulogy). ~~When Paul uses it of God it's used as an adjective and only applied to God.~~

Paul sees God as worthy of all praise. And God revealed Himself in His Son, the **Lord Jesus Christ**. This spoke of His sovereignty (Lord), His redemption (Jesus who saves), and His promises (Christ the anointed One).



- He's no longer known as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as He was in the Old Testament (and as true as that still is), He's now known by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul was more than happy to direct all praise to God because He was the **Father of mercies and God of all comfort**. Paul has experienced this time and time again. And we have experienced this too!

- The mercy of God continues to abound to us each and every day. If God were to act justly, we would be all be long gone. But He showers us with mercy, we're sheltered in the Son, and as a result we can experience the comfort of God.
- This comfort of God is continually available to us. Notice, He's the God of **all** comfort. The question is, where do you go for comfort? We all have things that comfort us, but true and lasting comfort resides with God. We may get a semblance of comfort in other things (chocolate, staying in bed) but those things don't really improve things. Real comfort – **all** comfort, is with God! Is He your *first retreat*, or your *last resort* in these times?
- This word **comfort** is the Greek word *paraklesis*, which means to call to one's side; to encourage and strengthen by consolation and comfort. When Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit in John 14:26, He referred to Him as the Helper, which is the word *parakletos*, speaking of One that would come alongside and provide help or comfort.
- This was so foreign to the Greeks, many of whom populated Corinth. They feared their gods. Calamity was seen as a result of their gods unhappy with them. They ran from their gods in trouble. They didn't know gods that brought comfort. But our God is one we run to to find comfort.

He's the God of **all** comfort because He comforts us in **all** our tribulation! And guess what, we are going to experience **tribulation**.

Here's something that is going to stand out in our study in 2 Corinthians – as believers and followers of Christ, we're not immune from suffering. We've never been promised to be kept from hardships as Christians.

We would almost think that turning to Christ would alleviate any potential problems and difficulties. I know we all pray for that (reading through Job this week – Yikes!).

We're comforted in **all our tribulation**. This word for tribulation and trouble is the Greek word *thlipsis*. It means a pressing or pressure. In this day, in Roman

culture, if they caught someone that they perceived to be bad, and they wanted to get information out of him, they would lay the individual down, place a board over his chest, and roll a large boulder upon it. With every slight breath the person let out, the boulder would rest heavier upon him until it would crush and kill him. Similar tactics applied to England's history. R.C. Trench writes, "When, according to the ancient law of England, those who willfully refused to plead had heavy weights placed on their breasts, and were pressed and crushed to death, this was literally *thlipsis*."

- I'm sure many of you have felt like that at times. And some of you may be thinking, but I thought the Christian life was to be easy and devoid of difficulty! Not so fast.
- Paul says in **2 Corinthians 4:8–11**, *"We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—<sup>10</sup> always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. <sup>11</sup> For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh."*

Paul says these are things they faced, it was pressing, but it didn't destroy them. Why? Because God was with them, He's the God of all comfort who comes alongside to strengthen and help in time of need.

But why must we go through times of tribulation and trials?

This passage reveals a couple of reasons:

1. **That we may experience Gods comfort.** When we are weak, He is strong. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:10 these things happen that Jesus may be manifested in our lives. We know that tribulations build greater godly character – **Romans 5:3–5**, *"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> and perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup> Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."*
- Trials build in us a greater godly character that causes us to reflect Him all the more. How shallow we would be without pressures and trials. I'm already shallow enough with the pressures and trials I do face. I can't imagine if I didn't go through these character building times in my life?



- Trials have a good effect in squeezing us to see what's really coming out of us. Is it Jesus or self?

## 2. That we may share this comfort with others.

There is a tremendous learning and growing experience we gain when we go through trials. But as we experience God coming alongside us in strength and comfort, it's also so that we can come alongside others in their times of trial.

God does not comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters.

- I'm sure anyone who has been through a real hardship in their life knows it's those who have been through hardship as well that can be a real comfort to them. Notice, Paul says: ***that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble***... We don't have to have the same trial to be of comfort. We don't have to say, *'Well I've never really been through that so I better not try to help.'* Have you experienced God's comfort in your life? Then you're qualified to come alongside others when they're hurting and facing difficulty.
- Our suffering is not punishment for something we've done, it's equipping us for something we have yet to do.

And God's method of comforting us is often through other people. But so often, usually because of pride, we tend to keep everything in and not allow others to come along side us and be those agents of God's comfort. We miss out because we don't share our needs. May that not be the case here at RCC.

## ***1:5 - For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.***

The New Living Translation puts it this way: *"For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with His comfort through Christ."*

- When we think of consolation, we usually think of a prize given to the loser. In a sporting event a consolation round is the round that teams or players are designated to because they lost. But the beauty of it is, the loser doesn't leave empty handed. You see, when we suffer we can tend to think, *I'm really losing out here.* Yet God is saying, *On the contrary, you're actually gaining!* We're getting filled with more of the Lord, more of His blessing, more of His love, kindness, and comfort. It's through our suffering that we become more aware of the comfort God is and always has been.
- "Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it."

—Helen Keller, *Optimism* <sup>7</sup>

### 3. Strength in Weakness – 1:6-7

**1:6 - *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.***

Many of the critics of Paul, and false apostles who had moved into the church at Corinth, were trying to put themselves in a better position than Paul by showing how good everything was going for them. *‘We’ve got healthy lives, our families are good, our bank accounts are solid, but look at Paul – he’s a mess! How could God be at work in him if he’s suffering so much?’*

They were hoping to use Paul’s sufferings to disqualify and discredit him as an apostle.

But again, Paul reveals that whatever he may go through, it’s working out a greater work in others. This is what God does. God doesn’t need strength to show strength. He shows strength from weakness. Paul’s affliction was to help others.

- “If you want to live your whole life free from pain You must become either a god or else a corpse. Consider other men’s troubles; that will comfort yours.” —Menander (fragment) <sup>8</sup>
- And when Paul shared the comfort he received from God in his affliction, it comforted others all the more!

**1:7 - *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.***

Paul was confident that whatever suffering and affliction the believers in Corinth would encounter, it would only cause them to see and receive the comfort of God.

<sup>7</sup> Merriam-Webster, I. (1992). *The Merriam-Webster dictionary of quotations* (p. 301). Merriam-Webster.

<sup>8</sup> Merriam-Webster, I. (1992). *The Merriam-Webster dictionary of quotations* (p. 302). Merriam-Webster.