

# INTRODUCTION AND 2 COR. 1:1 – 2:13

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## Introduction

### I. General Remarks

A. Scott Hafemann states in his commentary on 2 Corinthians, "The letter we call '2 Corinthians' is widely recognized as the most difficult to understand among Paul's letters."<sup>1</sup> Whether you agree or not, the fact it is widely perceived that way lets you know we are heading into deep water. The journey may be difficult, but I hope the reward is great.

B. Like all of Paul's letters, 2 Corinthians is an "occasional" document, meaning it was written to a specific group of Christians in a specific situation or circumstance. If one is to hear correctly what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church today in 2 Corinthians one must first hear correctly what he said in that letter to the church in Corinth. A significant part of that effort is gaining some understanding of the circumstances surrounding the letter.

C. It is easy to idealize churches in the apostolic era, to think they were free of struggle, conflict, and problems and that ministry in those days, especially for the apostles, was a walk in the park because all were of one heart and mind. That was and is the ideal, and there were mountaintop experiences among Christians then as today, but the church of every generation is made up of flawed, sinful human beings, who, though redeemed, continue to struggle with life in the overlap of ages, life on this side of the consummation. Paul had great hardships in his ministry, and it is a testimony to the power of God's Spirit that he endured them.

### II. City of Corinth

A. Corinth is located on the narrow isthmus that connects the Peloponnese with the rest of Greece. It controlled both the north-south commercial traffic between the Peloponnese and the mainland and the east-west traffic between Italy and Asia (which, for the most part, found it safer and more convenient to take this "inland" route rather than go around the Peloponnese).

B. The history of the city is in two parts. The wealthy and ancient city of Corinth was utterly destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C. It lay dormant for 100 years before being re-founded by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony in 44 B.C. It was Old Corinth that had the many temple prostitutes mentioned by Strabo and that had developed the reputation for sexual vice (so much so that the Greek verb *korinthiazō* – to act like a

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<sup>1</sup> Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 19.

Corinthian – meant to commit fornication). Sexual sin was undoubtedly abundant in New Corinth, but it was probably no different than in any pagan seaport.

C. The new city quickly became prosperous and attracted many people. Though the Romans officially dominated the scene with their laws, culture, and religion, there was a heavy influence of Greek culture. The city was religiously diverse. It not only had Roman and Greek religions but included a Jewish element and various mystery cults from Egypt and Asia.

D. Hafemann gives the following summary, based on a 1996 study by Timothy Savage, of what Greco-Roman culture stressed in terms of social status:

In regard to sizing up one's peers, Savage observes that in Paul's day Greco-Roman society stressed (1) a rugged individualism that valued self-sufficiency; (2) wealth as the key to status within society; (3) a self-display of one's accomplishments and possessions in order to win praise from others; (4) a competition for honor that viewed boasting as its natural corollary; and (5) a pride in one's neighborhood as a reflection of one's social location. These values combined to create a populace for which self-appreciation became the goal and self-gratification the reward.<sup>2</sup>

E. Religion was viewed in Greco-Roman culture as a means to health, wealth, and social standing and its value was measured by the power of its deity to deliver those things to its adherents. Hafemann states, drawing again on Savage's work:

The various religions attracted followers by providing visible displays of their gods at work, as seen in the "success" of their members. "The more powerful one's god the more strength one expected to receive and manifest." In the same way, on the popular level orators gained a following not primarily by virtue of their content, but by their ability to captivate their audiences with powerful and entertaining deliveries. In Savage's words, "They honored the one who preached with flair, force and pride."<sup>3</sup>

F. These cultural trends were magnified in Corinth, which, in Craig Blomberg's words, was the young and prosperous "New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world." To quote Hafemann again:

The "self-made" Roman "freedmen," who had applied the hard labor of their former slave status to the business of making it in this new Roman colony, were known for being crassly materialistic, self-confident, and proud. The atmosphere of sports that filled the air with its pride,

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<sup>2</sup> Hafemann, 25.

<sup>3</sup> Hafemann, 26.

competition, and exaltation of heroes, not to mention that Corinth was the entertainment center of Greece, exacerbated all of this.<sup>4</sup>

### III. Occasion of the Letter<sup>5</sup>

A. Paul first preached the gospel in Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18). He supported himself as a tentmaker or leatherworker and stayed with Priscilla and Aquila, a Jewish couple that had recently moved to Corinth after being expelled from Rome. He remained in Corinth a year and a half (or a little longer, Acts 18:11, 18), probably from early A.D. 50 to the fall of 51, and won many pagans and a number of Jews to Christ.

B. After seeing the church well established, Paul sailed from Cenchreae to Caesarea, stopping off at Ephesus where he left Priscilla and Aquila. He then spent a short time with his home congregation in Antioch (Acts 18:18-22).

C. In A.D. 52 Paul began his third missionary journey and probably arrived back in Ephesus in the summer or fall of that year. He had a very fruitful ministry and was there over 2 ½ years, until the summer or fall of 55 (Acts 19:8, 10, 20:31).

D. Sometime after Paul left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus (probably in the fall of 51) and before he arrived back in that city (probably in the summer or fall of 52), Apollos came to Ephesus, knowing only the baptism of John. Priscilla and Aquila explained to him the way of God more accurately, and Apollos then went to Corinth with a letter of recommendation from the brothers in Ephesus (Acts 18:24-19:1). During Paul's absence from Corinth, Apollos and others, probably including Peter, built on the foundation he had laid there.

E. While at Ephesus, Paul learned of certain problems in the Corinthian church and wrote them a letter in which he forbid them to associate with immoral people. This letter has not been preserved, but we know about it from the reference to it in 1 Cor. 5:9. Paul must have been speaking in the context of church discipline, but some of the Corinthians apparently interpreted his words in a very general sense (1 Cor. 5:9-10).

F. Afterward Paul received more reports and a letter from the church, which prompted him to write 1 Corinthians, probably in A.D. 54. We see from 1 Corinthians that the spiritually immature believers there had formed partisan groupings that claimed to follow this or that leader. In addition, the church was marred by abuses of the Lord's table, immorality, lawsuits, uncertainties about the place of marriage and the propriety of eating food sacrificed to idols, a warped view of charismatic gifts, and a spiritualized view of the resurrection. Segments of the church were disenchanted with Paul and resistant to his leadership.

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<sup>4</sup> Hafemann, 27.

<sup>5</sup> Drawn in significant part from D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 366-370, 420-425.

G. When Paul sent 1 Corinthians, it was his intent to remain in Ephesus until Pentecost (late May) probably of 55 and then to visit Corinth by way of Macedonia (16:5-8), which would put him there sometime in the winter (1 Cor. 16:6). When he formulated those plans, he felt no urgency to get to Corinth. After all, he was in no hurry to leave Ephesus since the "great door for effective work" (1 Cor. 16:9) was still open there.

H. After sending 1 Corinthians, Paul decided it would be better to visit Corinth twice, once on the way to Macedonia and once on the way back (2 Cor. 1:15-16). He then learned, perhaps when Timothy returned (1 Cor. 4:17, 16:10-11; 2 Cor. 1:1), that conditions at the church had become critical, due in part to the arrival of Judaizing intruders from Palestine who presented themselves as leaders (2 Cor. 11:4, 13-15, 22). So Paul made an emergency visit to Corinth. Though it seems he spared the rod mentioned in 1 Cor. 4:21 (see 2 Cor. 10:1-11), the visit was painful for both the Corinthians and Paul (2 Cor. 2:1-3). For whatever reason, Paul found it necessary to leave the situation in Corinth unresolved and return to Ephesus.

I. At some point, one of Paul's opponents in Corinth defied him openly, attacking him in personal and deeply insulting ways (2 Cor. 2:5-8, 10; 7:12), and this apparently was tolerated by the church. Many think this attack occurred during the painful visit (I used to be among them), but Murray Harris makes a good case that it occurred soon after Paul left Corinth and was reported to him.<sup>6</sup>

J. In keeping with his new plans, Paul presumably told the Corinthians early in the emergency visit that he intended to visit them again on his way to and from Macedonia. But the emergency visit turned out to be such a distressing and unproductive clash, only to be followed by the personal verbal assault that was reported to him, that Paul decided it would be better to delay his next visit until *after* his trip to Macedonia (to revert to the original itinerary).

K. After returning to Ephesus and being informed of the personal attack, Paul sent Titus to the Corinthians with the "severe letter" referred to in 2 Cor. 2:3-4, 7:8-12, a letter Paul wrote out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears. Paul assured the Corinthians of his love for them but also laid down the standards he expected in the churches and sought to determine if they would meet those standards (2:9). He also demanded the punishment of the person who had opposed him so maliciously (2:3-9, 7:8-12). This letter was not preserved.

L. Titus presumably let it be known that he had plans to meet Paul in Troas or Macedonia with news of their response, which told the Corinthians that Paul had changed his plan to visit them on the way to and from Macedonia (or perhaps Paul noted his change of plans in the letter). This opened Paul to charges that he was fickle, untrustworthy, and indifferent to the feelings of the church, which leads him to explain the change of plans in 2 Cor. 1:12 - 2:2.

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<sup>6</sup> Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 226-227.

M. Titus also had the responsibility, depending on the Corinthians' response to the severe letter, to organize the collection for Jerusalem (8:6) to which the Corinthians initially had been willing to contribute. Their participation in this would not only bless the poor in Jerusalem but would signal their fellowship with Paul and the apostolic church.

N. Shortly after the riot recorded in Acts 19:23 - 20:1, Paul left Ephesus for Troas (2:12-13), where he hoped not only to preach the gospel but to meet Titus returning with news of Corinth. When Titus did not show, Paul headed for Macedonia (2:13), apparently in keeping with a contingency plan he had with Titus.

O. In Macedonia, Paul encouraged the Christians (Acts 20:1-2) and organized the collection for the Jerusalem believers (8:1-4, 9:2). The Macedonian churches were themselves facing "the most severe trial" and "extreme poverty" (8:2). When Paul got there, Titus had not shown up, so Paul still had no idea how his severe letter had been received in Corinth (7:5).

P. Titus soon arrived, and Paul's distress turned to joy because the church at large had responded positively to Paul's strong words (7:6-13). The majority had repented of their rebellion against Paul's apostleship. There was a segment, however, that continued to resist his authority and gospel, and 2 Corinthians is shaped by the presence of both groups.

Q. Paul probably started writing 2 Corinthians soon after receiving Titus's encouraging report, but it seems likely that he received more bad news about the church before completing it. There is a change of tone in chapters 10-13 that suggests Paul had news of a counter-offensive that had been launched against him by the Judaizing intruders. He does not state that he received new information between chapters 9 and 10, but that would have been obvious to the Corinthians by his specific references to the new charges against him.

#### IV. Purposes

A. Andreas Kostenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles Quarles identify four major purposes for 2 Corinthians 1-9.<sup>7</sup>

1. Paul's change of travel plans made him vulnerable to the charge he was unreliable and unworthy of trust. He needed to defend his reliability and explain the reasons for his change of plans.

2. He wrote to encourage the Corinthians to restore the man they had disciplined for verbally attacking him.

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<sup>7</sup> Andreas Kostenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 481.

3. He wrote to clarify the nature of his apostolic ministry and his qualifications for that ministry.

4. He wrote to encourage them to fulfill their pledge to contribute to the offering for the saints in Jerusalem.

B. Scott Hafemann writes:

In [2 Corinthians] Paul both comforts and encourages the majority of the church, while at the same time defending his apostleship in order to strengthen those who have repented and to win back the recalcitrant minority. Moreover, behind the Corinthians lurk Paul's opponents, whom Paul does not address directly, but who are the most direct source of the problem. Paul's goal in writing, therefore, is to prepare for his next visit to the Corinthians in which he will have to judge those who persist in their rejection of him and his gospel.<sup>8</sup>

C. Kostenberger, Kellum, and Quarles say regarding the purpose of chapters 10-13:

Paul's defense of his apostolic authority becomes much more intense. Paul was no longer confident that the Corinthians would recognize the false apostles for what they were or that they would reaffirm his own apostolic authority. Paul wrote these chapters to urge the Corinthians to reject the false apostles and their message and to embrace again the gospel that Paul had preached. Paul also wrote to announce his plans to make a third visit to Corinth. Finally, he wrote to urge the Corinthians to examine their faith to determine whether it was authentic.<sup>9</sup>

## V. The Church

A. It was predominantly Gentile but quite diverse. It included Jews, Greeks, Romans, slaves, and freedmen.

B. In the words of Gordon Fee:

Thus, the picture that emerges is one of a predominantly Gentile community, the majority of whom were at the lower end of the socioeconomic ladder, although there were two or three wealthy families. As former pagans, they brought to the Christian faith a Hellenistic worldview and attitude toward ethical behavior. Although they were the

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<sup>8</sup> Scott J. Hafemann, "Corinthians, Letter to the" in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 176.

<sup>9</sup> Kostenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, 481.

Christian church in Corinth, an inordinate amount of Corinth was yet in them, emerging in a number of attitudes and behaviors . . .<sup>10</sup>

## **2 Cor. 1:1 – 2:13**

### I. Introduction - 1:1-11

A. Salutation (1:1-2) – *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through [the] will of God, and Timothy, the brother, to the church of God that is in Corinth [along] 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.*

1. Paul is an apostle of Christ by the will of God. He was chosen to be God's instrument for spreading the gospel, particularly to Gentiles. His authority derives from the Lord himself (10:8, 13:10), which is why opposing him is such a serious matter.

2. Timothy joins with Paul in sending the letter, not in writing it; he is in accord with what Paul has written. Timothy, of course, is one of Paul's co-workers, a person well known to the Corinthians (Acts 18:5; 1 Cor. 4:17, 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:19).

3. Paul does not write to the "church of Corinth" but to the "church of God in Corinth." Congregations are local expressions of the universal church that belongs to God. Implicit in the fact the church belongs to God is that it should listen to one who has been chosen as a messenger by God.

4. "Saints" are simply "holy ones," meaning Christians, God's people. Achaia is the Roman province in which Corinth was located. Paul includes all the saints in the surrounding area who presumably would have ready access to the letter and who would be in the sphere of Corinthian influence.

5. "Grace" refers to God's unmerited favor; "peace" refers to the peace that comes to man as a result of his having, through grace, peace with God.

B. Gratitude for divine comfort (1:3-7) – *<sup>3</sup>Blessed [is] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassions and God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup>who comforts us in all our affliction so that we are able to comfort the ones in any affliction through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. <sup>5</sup>For just as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so through Christ our comfort also abounds. <sup>6</sup>And if we are afflicted, [it is] for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, [it is] for your comfort, which is working in [your] endurance of the same sufferings which we also are suffering. <sup>7</sup>And our hope for you [is] firm, knowing that as you are sharers of the sufferings, so also of the comfort.*

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<sup>10</sup> Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 4.

1. Paul begins with an expression of gratitude to God, declaring that he, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is worthy of praise. It is easy to overlook the meaning and significance of Jesus' title "Lord." That word has lost its impact in our culture, and in the words of one commentator, "has become one of the most lifeless words in the Christian vocabulary."<sup>11</sup> Inherent in the baptismal confession noted in Rom. 10:9 that "Jesus is Lord" is that one belongs absolutely to him and owes him absolute obedience. That is why Jesus said in Lk. 6:46, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and not do what I tell you?"

2. The focus of Paul's praise here is the fact God had comforted Paul and his companions in all the hardships, dangers, persecutions, and anxieties he experienced in carrying out his apostolic commission (1:8-10, 4:7-12, 11:23-29). God sometimes comforts by relieving the hardship (e.g., 1:8-11, 7:5ff), but other times he does so by convincing us that everything will be fine in spite of the hardship (i.e., provides the strength and encouragement to endure – see, 1:6).

3. Paul is already responding to the notion that his suffering was a strike against his apostleship, a sign of God's disfavor. He does so not for his own ego but because it was important for the Corinthians and the cause of the gospel that his authority as an apostle not be subverted. In describing God as the Father of all compassions (or mercies) and the God of all comfort, Paul is correcting implicitly the notion that God's servants are immune from suffering. If that were so, there would be no need for God's comforting.

4. The afflictions Paul endured in his ministry were an extension, an overflowing, of Christ's suffering into his life, so rather than being a strike against his authenticity as an apostle his suffering was a mark of his solidarity with the Lord. And his afflictions were matched by a corresponding degree of comfort from God so that, as Christ's suffering worked for the benefit of others, he and his companions could be vehicles of God's comfort to others.

5. More specifically, Paul says in v. 6 that the afflictions he and his companions endured and the corresponding comfort they received from God was for *the Corinthians'* comfort and salvation. Rather than use his suffering to attack him, the Corinthians should be grateful that he has endured it so as to bless them.

6. The divine comfort Paul and his companions have directed to the Corinthians is at work in the Corinthians' endurance of the things they are suffering because of their allegiance to Christ. Perhaps Paul is referring to relational conflicts from being Christians in a town immersed in paganism and licentiousness or from standing for the truth in a church that is divided on the matter.

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<sup>11</sup> Alfred Plummer, quoted in David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 59.



7. Paul tells them in v. 7 that his hope is firm that they will endure in the faith in the face of whatever hardships they are experiencing for Christ, knowing that God is supplying for them the comfort needed in those hardships.

C. Deliverance from a deadly peril (1:8-11) – <sup>8</sup>*For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, about our affliction which took place in Asia, that we were exceedingly burdened, beyond [our] power, so that we despaired even of living. <sup>9</sup>Indeed, [we] ourselves had within ourselves the sentence of death, so that we might not have confidence in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, <sup>10</sup>who delivered us from so great a death [threat]. And he will deliver [us], [he] in whom we have hoped [that] he will deliver [us] yet again, <sup>11</sup>as you also join in helping by petition on our behalf, so that thanks may be given by many persons for the gift [given] to us through many [prayers] on our behalf.*

1. Paul provides a recent specific instance of grave affliction that he endured and regarding which he was comforted by God's deliverance. We can only guess to what Paul is referring by "afflictions which took place in Asia," but a reasonable guess is that it was tied to Jewish opposition to Paul that was stirred up by the riot in Ephesus mentioned in Acts 19:23-41. In his address to the Ephesian elders, Paul refers to having been severely tested by the plots of the Jews (Acts 20:19).

2. Whatever these hardships were, the situation was so bad that Paul was convinced in his own heart that he was going to die; his missionary career was going to be cut short with urgent projects left incomplete. Humanly speaking, his situation was absolutely hopeless; there was no way out.

3. Paul says that their sense of certain death was permitted to help shift their confidence from themselves to God who raises the dead (which, figuratively, is what happened to Paul). The impotence of one's own wisdom and ability is most clearly exposed on the threshold of death, the point of utter helplessness. Their deliverance was so dramatic and so clearly God's work that it enhanced their confidence that God was not ready for Paul's labor to cease.

4. Paul therefore is confident that God will continue to deliver him from perils in response to prayers on his behalf, that he will continue to say "yes" to those prayers. As a consequence, many people will give thanks to God for delivering Paul in response to their prayers.

## II. Paul's Conduct Explained - 1:12 - 2:13

A. Introduction (1:12-14) – <sup>12</sup>*For this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience, that with frankness and sincerity of God, [and] not in fleshly wisdom but in [the] grace of God, we behaved in the world and even more so toward you. <sup>13</sup>For we do not write to you anything other than what you read or indeed understand, and I hope that you will understand completely, <sup>14</sup>just as you also understood us in part, that we are your boast, even as you also [are] ours on the day of [our] Lord Jesus.*

1. Paul says he is proud of the fact, which he knows at the core of his being, that he and his companions conducted themselves with frankness and godly sincerity in their dealings with the world in general and with the Corinthians in particular. They did not act in keeping with worldly wisdom, meaning they were not devious and insincere, but in keeping with the grace of God. God's grace given to them in Christ motivated them to act as God would have them act, and reliance on that grace in their ministry, reliance on God's gracious working through them in their ministry, freed them from the pull "to cheat," to try to produce results by underhanded means. They would do what was right, act with integrity in all matters, and leave the results to God.

2. Paul firmly denies the insinuation, apparently smoldering in some quarters of the church in Corinth, that his letters were duplicitous, that he wrote in such a way as to mask his true meaning or intentions. Paul says he writes what he means, that his letters contain nothing other than what they read. By adding "or indeed understand" I think he is suggesting that at least some of the misrepresentations of his meaning are not good faith misunderstandings but a deliberate twisting of what he wrote to use against him.

3. Just as the Corinthians have come, through Titus's visit, to a partial understanding of the actions and intentions of Paul and his companions, he hopes they will come to understand completely, through what he goes on to write, that he and his companions are their boast, the noble messengers through whom they were included in Christ, just as the Corinthians will be Paul's boast on judgment day.

a. Paul elsewhere mentions that when he is called to account before God he will take pride in the fruit of his apostolic ministry, those who have been brought to faith in the gospel through his faithfulness to his commission (e.g., 1 Thess. 2:19-20; Phil. 2:16, 4:1).

b. The implication is that they will not come to this complete understanding for which Paul hopes until the points at which they continue to misunderstand his actions and intentions are cleared up. He sets out to do this in the following paragraphs.

B. Canceled Visit Explained (1:15 - 2:2) – <sup>15</sup>*And in this confidence, I was intending to come to you first, so that you might have a second benefit;* <sup>16</sup>*that is, [I was intending] to go to Macedonia through you and to come to you again from Macedonia and to be helped on my way to Judea by you.* <sup>17</sup>*So by intending this was I then being fickle? Or do the things which I intend do I intend according to [the] flesh, so that there may be with me the "Yes, yes" and the "No, no"?* <sup>18</sup>*But God [is] a trustworthy [witness] that our word to you is not "Yes" and "No."* <sup>19</sup>*For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, by me and Silvanus and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No"; rather, in him has been "Yes."* <sup>20</sup>*For as many as [are] the promises of God, in him [is] the "Yes"; therefore, through him the Amen is also [spoken] by us to God for [his] glory.* <sup>21</sup>*Now the one who makes us firm along with you in Christ and has anointed us [is] God,* <sup>22</sup>*who also has sealed us and has given the down payment of the Spirit in our hearts.*

<sup>23</sup>Now I call God as a witness, upon my own life, that in order to spare you I did not again come to Corinth. <sup>24</sup>Not that we exercise lordship over your faith; rather, we are coworkers for your joy, for in the faith you have stood firm. **2** For I decided this in myself, not again to come to you in grief. <sup>2</sup>For if I grieve you, then who [is] the one who makes me glad except the one who is grieved by me?

1. Instead of returning to Corinth as he had intended, Paul had sent the severe letter by way of Titus. The congregation generally received that letter well and repented of their rebellion against Paul's apostleship, but a segment of the church grumbled that it was too harsh and suggested that Paul was unreliable, which implies he was without clear direction by the Spirit, and indifferent to the feelings or needs of the church. Since this affects his credibility as an authentic apostle, and thus the credibility of his message, he tackles these issues.

2. Being confident that they did or would recognize that he and his companions were worthy objects of their pride, Paul had planned a double visit to benefit the Corinthians, on the way to and coming from Macedonia. He was neither divided about the matter ("yes and no") nor uncommitted to the decision (fickle). This was not some worldly ploy to gain an advantage by telling them what they wanted to hear.

3. To stress the point, Paul says that God is a trustworthy witness to the fact their word to the Corinthians was neither equivocal nor insincere ("yes and no"). God testifies to that in the fact he entrusted them to deliver the gospel of Christ, the ultimate in committed and unequivocal messages, God's definitive "yes" to all his promises.

a. Jesus is the one in whom all of God's promises are "yes" in that he is the door to the blessings and rewards of the consummated kingdom. In Jesus is the fulfillment of the promised Messianic age.

b. This is why, in corporate worship offered to God through Christ, Christians joyfully acknowledge this truth by saying "Amen" (which expresses agreement) when it is uttered (e.g., when Christ is praised). In so doing, we glorify God for his faithfulness.

4. Paul then cites (vv. 21-22) the fact that it is God who makes him and his companions, along with the Corinthians, stand firm in Christ, and who has consecrated them (anointed) and sealed them with the down payment of the Holy Spirit. His point seems to be that they, like the Corinthians, are God's possession and can be counted on to act accordingly, i.e., not to be fickle or double-minded.

5. In v. 23 Paul calls God as a witness that it was in order "to spare" the Corinthians that he changed his plans to return to them on the way to Macedonia.

a. Having said that, he hastens to clarify (v. 24) that he does not mean that he and his companions exercise lordship over their faith. Apparently some in Corinth thought Paul's group was guilty of "playing lord." They are not lords themselves but only servants of the Lord who work together to bring joy to the Corinthians.

b. As evidence of their working to bring the Corinthians joy, Paul cites the fact the Corinthians have (through the work of Paul and his companions, most recently the severe letter) stood firm in the faith. Alternatively, their standing firm in the faith is why Paul et al. continue working for their joy (they are fitting objects of apostolic ministry).

6. This parenthetical reference to the Corinthians' joy leads Paul to expand on the reason for his change of plans (2:1-2). He wanted to spare them (and himself) the agony and frustration of another sorrowful visit. If he had come to Corinth as planned, it would have been "with grief," meaning the grief of more misunderstanding and distrust rather than the kind of grief that leads to repentance.

7. Moreover, because his own joy is, to some extent, dependent on that of his congregations, to have inflicted this kind of spiritually unproductive grief on the Corinthians would have dried up a source of his own happiness.

### C. The "Tearful/Severe Letter" (2:3-11)

1. Motivation of the letter (2:3-4) – <sup>3</sup>*And I wrote this very thing, lest when I came I should have grief from [those] of whom I ought to rejoice, being confident regarding you all that my joy is [the joy] of all of you.* <sup>4</sup>*For out of much affliction and anxiety of heart, I wrote to you through many tears, not that you should be grieved but that you should know the love which I have abundantly for you.*

a. Instead of making a return visit on the way to Macedonia as he had planned, Paul wrote the "severe letter" rebuking them and demanding that they show their spiritual mettle by punishing the person who had attacked him so viciously. His purpose was to remove the friction between them by having them reassert their allegiance to him, so that when he did pay them another visit it would be a happy one.

b. He wrote such a strong letter so that his next visit would bring him joy rather than grief, being certain the changes that brought him joy also would bring them joy. In other words, he called them to repent because he knew that his joy in their repentance is their joy also, even if they did not yet appreciate that fact. Contrary to many commentators, I do not believe Paul is saying that when he wrote the severe letter he was sure the Corinthians would respond positively to his appeal. There are indications in the letter that he was unsure of their response (2:4, 12-13, 7:5-9).

c. Paul wrote to them out of anguish over their spiritual welfare and shed many tears in the process. He knew that his words would inflict some pain, but he was

no way lashing out at them or trying to even the score. He wrote what they needed to hear in the hope they would realize how much he truly loved them.

d. Christian love compels us to correct our erring brothers and sisters, but this is never easy to do. Herbert Farmer puts it this way in his book *The Healing Cross* (London: Nisbet, 1939), 196:

Love meets its most searching test when it is faced with the necessity of deeply estranging the loved one in order to bless him. And the more the love is pure and intense, the severer the test is, the more fierce the temptation to keep friendship at the cost of truth. When love is crying out for fellowship, it is the hardest thing in the world deliberately to pursue a course which you know for the time being will destroy it.

2. Appeal to forgive the disciplined offender (2:5-11) – <sup>5</sup>*Now if someone has caused grief, he has not [only]<sup>12</sup> grieved me but, to some extent (lest I exaggerate), all of you. <sup>6</sup>This punishment by the majority [is] enough for such a person, <sup>7</sup>so that on the other hand you should rather forgive and comfort [him], lest such a one should be swallowed up by more abundant grief. <sup>8</sup>Therefore, I urge you to confirm [your] love for him. <sup>9</sup>For indeed I wrote for this [purpose], that I might know your quality, whether you are obedient in all things. <sup>10</sup>And to whom you forgive anything, I also [forgive]; for indeed, what I have forgiven -- if I have forgiven anything -- [it was] on account of you in [the] presence of Christ, <sup>11</sup>lest we be outwitted by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.*

a. Paul's letter had called for the Corinthians to punish the one who had attacked him (7:11-12). He did so because the attack was not simply a personal matter but involved his authority as an apostle, which authority had to be defended for the sake of the church. The attack not only grieved Paul, but also grieved the Corinthians to some extent, specifically when Paul's letter convicted them of their failure to have acted in his defense (7:11).

b. Harris (p. 227) gives the following assessment of the offender and the nature of his wrongdoing:

We conclude, therefore, that the ἄδικία [the wrong] was a verbal assault on Paul's person and authority carried out by a member of the Corinthian church at some indefinite time between the "painful visit" and the "severe letter." With considerably less confidence we may conjecture that the offender was a spokesman for an anti-Pauline clique . . . , that he objected in particular to Paul's disciplinary methods such as those outlined in 1 Corinthians 5, and that he may have insulted Paul in the context of resisting

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<sup>12</sup> Harris states (p. 223), citing Zerwick § 445, "On occasion [Paul] uses the negative, not with an absolute meaning ('not at all'), but in a relative sense 'not so much,' or 'not primarily,' or 'not only' (cf. 1 Cor. 1:17; 2 Cor. 7:12)." Thus NIV and TNIV read "he has not *so much* grieved me" and NET reads "he has not saddened me *alone*."

the authority of one of Paul's representatives, such as Timothy, who would have reported the incident to Paul.

c. The Corinthians responded to Paul's directive and disciplined the offender, probably meaning that the group as a whole had disfellowshipped him. The offender suffered as a result, and presumably was brought to repentance, but some apparently wanted to continue or even increase his punishment. Paul instructs them to forgive this man and to encourage him by confirming their love for him. This would serve to assure him of God's forgiveness. The goal is not to overwhelm him in grief but to redeem him.

d. In v. 9 Paul says that he wrote to test their spiritual mettle, to see if they would acknowledge his divinely given apostolic authority. By disciplining the offender, they stood the test and proved their obedience in all respects (see 7:11-12). Now by ending the punishment they would be doing the same.

e. In v. 10 Paul assures them that the one they forgive has his forgiveness also. In other words, they need not worry that Paul might not approve of the reinstatement of the one who hurt him so badly. Having learned of the man's repentance from Titus, he has forgiven him. He downplays the degree of personal wrong by adding "if there was anything to forgive" in order to downplay the magnanimity of his mercy.

f. His forgiveness had been given at least in part for their good, that is, for the very purpose of facilitating the reconciliation, and in conformity with the judgment of Christ. A failure to reconcile with the penitent offender would have been to play into Satan's hands by allowing him to make off with one of the community's members.

D. Assurance of His Concern for Them (2:12-13) – <sup>12</sup>*Now after coming to Troas for the gospel of Christ, and a door having been opened for me by [the] Lord, <sup>13</sup>I did not have relief in my spirit because I did not find my brother Titus. Instead, having said farewell to them, I went into Macedonia.*

1. Paul assures his readers that, despite appearances to the contrary (i.e., change of plans and "severe letter"), he cares very deeply about them. After facing mortal danger in Ephesus, Paul left for Troas primarily to preach the gospel, and the Lord opened a door for him there (i.e., provided an opportunity for an effective work).

2. Despite the promising mission, when Titus did not show up in Troas with news of the Corinthians' response to Paul's letter, Paul was restless. So deep was his concern for the church in Corinth at this point, that he left the promising mission field of Troas and went to Macedonia (apparently in keeping with a contingency plan) to learn as soon as he could how Titus had been received. (Note: Paul spends a week in Troas on the return leg of his missionary journey – Acts 20:7-12).

3. Paul picks up his rendezvous with Titus in 7:5ff, but before doing so, he writes several chapters on the nature of his apostolic ministry (2:14 - 7:4).