

2 Corinthians 1 (1-3) – God, Jesus, Paul, and You

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus – Paul introduces himself this way in 9 of the 13 biblical books he wrote (cf. Romans 1:1 / 1 Corinthians 1:1 / 2 Corinthians 1:1 / Galatians 1:1 / Ephesians 1:1 / Colossians 1:1 / 1 Timothy 1:1 / 2 Timothy 1:1 / Titus 1:1). As for the other 4, Philemon was a personal letter to someone that did not doubt his apostleship. 1 & 2 Thessalonians were written to a church that received Paul’s words as God’s words (1 Thessalonians 2:13). And in Philippians, Paul reveals not only his great credentials and achievements, but how he suffered the loss of everything to come to Christ (Philippians 3:4-8). And that is what Paul is saying in 2 Corinthians, that suffering for the sake of Christ and the cause of the Gospel are what a real apostle does.

False teachers were constantly attacking Paul’s credentials, but he always insisted on his true calling by God. It was vitally important, because the New Testament was not yet complete, and people had to count on Paul as an apostle of God, to give the people the word of God. A confirmation of his apostleship was especially necessary in Corinth, because some people were falling for a group of false apostles that had elevated themselves above Paul. In this letter, Paul is not simply defending himself. He is particularly concerned with protecting the church (12:19). Accordingly, this epistle gives the fullest account of the nature, lifestyle, action, ministry, and authority of a true apostle. And his description and personal example is full of application for the life of every true Christian. Paul was not just an apostle; he was a model of a Christian disciple.

by the will of God – Paul did not earn his apostleship by personal achievement, or educational standard, and he was not given apostolic authority by any ecclesiastical decree. He was called as an apostle by divine appointment (cf. Acts 26:15-18 / Galatians 1:11-24, 2:9). But he says that these false “super apostles” were self-appointed (10:18) servants of Satan (11:12-15). They claimed that Paul was self-appointed, that he wasn’t one of the original twelve, that he had been a persecutor of the church, and that they had every right to be called apostles, too. After all they were more successful and more popular than Paul, so they must have God’s blessing on their ministry. But Paul counters that while they claimed the name of Jesus, their lifestyle and teachings were not like those of a true apostle. Their focus on having worldly success and being able to live a true Christian life without suffering was just an appeal to the carnal nature of prideful people. This letter is as relevant today as ever, as false teachers flatter the undiscerning, twisting the scriptures about our identity in Christ into promises of health, wealth, power and influence. But Paul contrasts his call to God’s will with that of those who are self-willed.

and Timothy our brother – Paul wrote 13 epistles. Timothy is mentioned in 10 of them, 6 times in the introductions, with 2 other letters addressed to him personally. Timothy was there when Paul founded the church at Corinth (Acts 18:5), and the Corinthians were well acquainted with him (1 Corinthians 4:17, 16:10). He was Paul’s “main man” (Philippians 2:19-22).

To the church of God that is at Corinth – The church at Corinth was a true church, not a false church, but it had false apostles in it. And there were true believers who had fallen prey to these false teachers. So, Paul was instructing and warning them, using his own life as an example.

Corinth was a very significant city. It was the commercial hub of southern Greece, and it served as a sort of bridge between the eastern and the western regions along the Mediterranean Sea. It had

a very diverse population. It was headquarters for the worship of Aphrodite. And it was a morally wicked and proud place. Their sense of superiority made it harder for people to listen to someone like Paul, and easier for them to fall for the false apostles. Paul was in Corinth a he most likely wrote chapters 1 and 2 of Romans, in which the sinfulness of mankind is so clearly portrayed.

with all the saints – Even in a wicked place like Corinth, God was building his church. The term *saint* does not refer to some special class of believers. It refers to any and all believers (cf. Romans 1:7 / 1 Corinthians 1:2 / 2 Corinthians 1:1 / Ephesians 1:1 / Philippians 1:1 / Colossians 1:2 / 1 Thessalonians 3:13 / 2 Thessalonians 1:10 / Philemon 1:5). It is not some level you achieve. It is a declaration of God, because all believers who put their faith in Jesus Christ have his righteousness credited to their account. All true Christians are truly saints. Even in today's wicked world, God is still calling people out of the darkness and into his marvelous light.

who are in the whole of Achaia – This letter was meant to be shared. The Romans divided Greece into two provinces, Macedonia and Achaia. Macedonia was the northern province. It included the cities of Philippi (Acts 16:12-40), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9), and Berea (Acts 17:10-14). Achaia was the southern province. It included Athens (Acts 17:15-34), and Corinth (Acts 18:1-17).

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ – Grace and peace are mentioned as part of the greeting in all 13 of Paul's letters. And here Paul clearly indicates that grace and peace come, not simply from God the Father, but also from the Lord Jesus Christ. By doing this, Paul clearly identifies Jesus as both distinct from the Father and coequal with the Father.

Vs.3 – This opening section of Paul's letter (vs.3-11) is crucial to his purpose in defending his apostolic authority. And it is also crucial for believers to understand, because of the instruction it gives about the comfort that God provides to us in times of trouble.

As Paul writes this letter, he was having to deal with all the activity, opposition, and suffering that are normal to an apostle. This truth, that suffering is not only normal for an apostle, but is actually part of being a believer, is essential to his argument in this letter (6:4-10, 11:16-33 / cf. Acts 14:19-22). God's plan is to use affliction to develop you as a disciple. It is one of the marks of actually being a true disciple (2 Timothy 3:12). Sometimes people will come against you because Christ is in you (John 15:19-21). Philippians 1:29 – *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.* Those that God gives the gift of belief in Christ also receive the gift of suffering for the sake of Christ.

Paul was under heavy persecution. And that is certainly a big part of what he means by *affliction*. But when he mentions *all our affliction* in vs.4, it becomes clear that he is referring to more than just persecution. Affliction is trouble that brings distress, and it comes in many forms and in many different areas of your life. So, Paul was suffering because of persecution. But he was also suffering because he knew about the continuing immorality of some in the church. Furthermore, Paul was suffering because he knew that false teachers had come into the church. They were undermining his credibility and authority, saying that since he was continually suffering, he must not be a true apostle. That he must be living in sin. That he isn't faithful, he is a fraud. Or that he doesn't have enough faith. Or he was so fickle, saying that he was coming to Corinth, but then changing his mind, and changing his route and timing, again and again, it proves he doesn't know

or follow the will of God. Or he is being punished by God. The false apostles were using these and other lies to promote themselves. And people were following these false teachers. Paul wasn't as concerned with defending his reputation as he was defending the church from error.

Now God may at times use physical afflictions as a means to train believers, and he may also use certain afflictions as corrective discipline. But this is not always the case. You can be afflicted and it not be because of some sin you're in. And Paul wasn't suffering because he wasn't a true apostle, he was suffering because he was a true apostle. He was suffering for the sake of Christ (vs.5). He wasn't suffering because of his sin. And he blessed God in the midst of all of it.

Blessed be – Paul starts his discussion of God's comfort by talking about who God is. God *is* blessed and is *to be* blessed. The Greek word for “blessed” is where we get our word eulogy from. It means adoration. And you should notice the order here. We ought to adore God first because of who he is (*Blessed be...*), and then for what he does (*who comforts us...*). You should seek the face of God before you seek the hand of God (cf. Matthew 6:9-11, 33). It's praise before petition.

the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ – Notice that vs.3 is different than vs.2 (Ephesians 1:3 / Romans 15:6 / 2 Corinthians 11:31 / 1 Peter 1:3 / cf. Matthew 27:46 / John 20:17 / Ephesians 1:17 / Revelation 3:2). This brings up an important question. In what sense is the Father, the first person of the Trinity, the “God” of Jesus, and in what sense is he the “Father” of Jesus? The answer is that God the Son, in his Incarnation, became one person with two natures. Jesus is both fully God and fully man. In theological terms this is called the doctrine of the hypostatic union. The Father is the God of Jesus with regards to his humanity. The Father is the Father of Jesus with regards to his divinity. God the Father was always the Father of God the Son (cf. John 1:1-3, 14, 18, 17:24-26 / 1 Corinthians 15:23-28 / Galatians 4:4-5 / Philippians 2:5-11 / 1 John 1:1-3, 4:9-10, 14). In theological terms this is called the doctrine of eternal sonship. The Son, as a conscious, divine Person, distinguishable from the Father, existed as deity, prior to the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem (cf. John 17:24 / Ephesians 1:4 / 1 Peter 1:20 / Revelation 13:8). Before the Incarnation, Jesus was God the Son (cf. John 8:58).

The deity of Jesus Christ is seen in many passages, but one of the clearest statements in the NT is in Titus 2:13 (cf. 2 Peter 1:1 / Jude 1:4). The terms “God and Savior” both refer to the same person, Jesus Christ. The construction in Greek is known as the Granville Sharp rule, first articulated in 1798. In the construction article-noun-καί-noun (where *καί* = “and”), when two nouns are singular, personal, and common (i.e., not proper names), they always had the same referent. Illustrations such as “the friend and brother,” “the God and Father,” etc. abound in the NT to prove Sharp's point. The only issue is whether terms such as “God” and “Savior” could be considered common nouns as opposed to proper names. A proper name in Greek was one that could not be pluralized. Since both “God” and “savior” can be found in the plural, they aren't proper names.

The God we praise is the one who is *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. There are a lot of false ideas about God in the world, but there is only one true God. Attempting to bless any “God” who isn't connected with Jesus Christ, and who isn't the Father of his Son from all eternity, is blessing a “God” who isn't real, but only an imagination. The Trinity is the truth! God the Father is the source of our blessings, God the Son is the reason for our blessings, and God the Spirit is the means of our blessings. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!*

the Father of mercies and God of all comfort – The OT declares that God is the source of mercy (Exodus 34:6 / 2 Chronicles 30:9 / Psalm 86:15 / Jeremiah 3:12 / Joel 2:13) and comfort (Psalm 23:4, 119:50 / Isaiah 40:1, 66:13 / Jeremiah 31:13 / Zechariah 1:17). And it's very important to the NT (Acts 9:31 / 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17). 10 times in vs.3-7 you see “comfort”, “comforts”, or “comforted”, each coming from some form of the same Greek root word. It basically means to come alongside and help. Jesus used this word to describe the Holy Spirit as the Comforter or Helper (John 14:16, 26, 15:26, 16:7). The Apostle John uses the same word to describe Jesus as our advocate (1 John 2:1). And the Father is *God...who comforts us in all our affliction*. The entire Trinity is involved in strengthening our faith in and through the experiences of life.

In this passage, when Paul speaks of comfort, he's not talking about being comfortable. He's not saying that God makes my way easy, or causes me to relax. No, this is far from that. And Paul is not simply speaking of comfort in the sense of a soothing sympathy, like how a mother takes her crying child into her arms. It is that, but it's more than that. The idea behind this word is conveyed by the Latin word for comfort (*fortis* – you know the English word “fortify”), which also means bravery, courage, strength. Paul is saying that God mercifully came alongside me, and he encouraged me and strengthened me to endure. This is his praise in the midst of his pain.

Paul needed to be comforted. People were assaulting his character. People were assaulting his ministry. People were falling prey to false teachers. He had to live with heavy persecution, demonic attack, governmental opposition, physical pain, uncertainty, changes of plans, betrayals, desertions, disappointments, and all kinds of other physical, financial, mental, and relational discomfort. And yet here he is talking about being comforted. Paul had to deal with a lot of hurt. But he is proclaiming a message of great hope despite great hurt. We need this message today.

Through it all, God had encouraged him, making him brave, and courageous. God had fortified him. Paul knows the mercy and comfort of God personally, and intimately. And he praises God for the mercy and comfort he gives to the apostle and to all believers. He's the God of all comfort, the reason why you can always be encouraged, because he is always there to help you find the strength you need, and he *is* the strength you need. Praise his name.

In this letter, Paul is recalling all of the various trials and troubles he has had and is having as an apostle of Jesus Christ. He isn't doing this for the sake of sympathy or self-promotion. He is using this as evidence of his apostleship. Paul is also sharing his experience as an example of how God is involved in the difficult experiences of every true Christian. And his suffering is part of equipping him for ministry by enabling him to comfort others and to express the power of God. And this is something all believers are supposed to share in, giving and receiving comfort.

who comforts us in all our affliction – When Paul says *all our affliction*, he is referring to more than just suffering under persecution (*all...affliction*), and more than just himself (*our affliction*). Affliction comes to all Christians. And this is a promise of comfort for all believers in all of their afflictions. God is there to encourage and strengthen you when the pressure is on. Why does he do this? What does this look like? How does it come to us? That is what Paul will tell you next.

But that message is for Christians. If you do not know Christ, you must come to him if you want to receive true, eternal comfort. Nothing else will last. Jesus is your only hope in a world of hurt.