

SECOND CORINTHIANS

Chapter 1

Greeting

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1:1 *apostle.* One specially commissioned by Christ. (CSB)

by the will of God. Not by accident or even by Paul's choice. Being in public ministry is a calling, a gracious privilege, not an earned position (cf Ac 9:15). In this sense, all service, pastoral and lay, must be faithful to God's mission, not to our own. (TLSB)

Timothy. Evidently with Paul when this letter was written, but not necessarily a co-author. (CSB)

A believer of Jewish-Greek descent whom Paul met on his second missionary journey (Ac 16). A trusted co-worker in ministry. (TLSB)

our brother. Our fellow believer, our brother in Christ (cf. Ac 9:17; Heb 2:11). (CSB)

church of God. The community of believers, the local representatives of the universal church. (CSB)

saints. Another term for God's people; it means "those who have been set apart as holy to the Lord." (CSB)

Achaia. Greece, as distinct from Macedonia in the north. Though the letter deals particularly with the situation in Corinth, it was also intended for Christians elsewhere in Greece. Presumably copies of the letter would be made in Corinth and circulated to them. (CSB)

1:1–2 Paul's ministry to the Corinthians has been "painful" (2:1). As Christ's representative, Paul calls them to repentance (cf 1Co 5–6; 10–11) for their willful disobedience of the Gospel of Jesus. Yet, even for this Church there is grace and peace from "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," which establishes and sustains them anew as God's saints. Like the Corinthians, we must also admit and repent of our misuse and neglect of the ministry of the Word. Too often, we trust in our own wisdom and strength to the detriment of our walk with God. Yet, Jesus is continually gracious toward us with a forgiveness that is as real as Jesus Himself. Just as He was gracious to undeserving, even arrogant, people at Corinth and restored them as saints, He can reach each one of us right where we are. • Dear Lord, thank You for continually reaching me and renewing me in and through Your Church. Amen. (TLSB)

The God of All Comfort

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. 6 If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. 7 Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

8 For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. 10 He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. 11 You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

1:3 *Blessed.* Paul bursts forth in worship. The God who brings grace and peace (v 2) is to be worshiped and praised. (TLSB)

God. The source of our comfort. (CSB)

1:4 *comforts.* Consolation and encouragement. This comfort flows to believers when they suffer for Jesus' sake, and it equips them to comfort others who are in trouble (vv. 4–7). (CSB)

First and foremost, a Christian's comfort comes through the message of reconciliation with God through the work of Jesus Christ (5:17–20). This Letter also shows how believers are agents of God's consolation and comfort for others (cf 7:5–9). (TLSB)

us in all our. Throughout this section, Paul uses the plural stylistically to speak of himself, making it easy to extend these truths to all Christians. (TLSB)

1:5 *we.* Probably refers to Paul himself (the editorial plural), though Timothy, his partner in ministry, might be included. (TLSB)

share abundantly in Christ's sufferings. Lit, "the sufferings of Christ abound for us." Christ's suffering engulfs our suffering, overcomes it, and is a resource of strength for all who are in distress (cf 1Pt 2:24). (TLSB)

1:6 Sharing Jesus' gracious forgiveness to others involves bearing the cross (cf Jn 15:20). Paul confesses how bearing the Corinthians' abuses and challenges reflects Jesus' suffering and His comfort, as he strives to deliver the Gospel message to them for the sake of their salvation. (TLSB)

same sufferings. The Corinthians, who experienced Paul's self-sacrificial love on their behalf, are now made aware of the joy of enduring such things for others (cf Heb 12:1–3). (TLSB)

1:7 For the believer, even suffering has a purpose (cf Rm 8:28), due to the sure and certain hope that sin, suffering, and death are only momentary sidetracks from the eternal life given in and through Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

1:8 *affliction we experienced.* Throughout this letter Paul uses the editorial plural (we, us, our, ourselves). Except where the context plainly indicates otherwise, these plurals should be understood as referring to Paul alone. (CSB)

Paul experienced persecution for sharing the Gospel (cf Ac 19). (TLSB)

Asia. The Roman province of that name in western Asia Minor, now Turkish territory. The precise location where Paul's hardships occurred is not given, nor is the nature of the afflictions. It is very likely that these hardships took place during Paul's three-year stay at Ephesus, the leading city in the province. (CSB)

utterly burdened. Lit, burdened "beyond our power" (cf 1Co 1:24; Eph 3:20). (TLSB)

despaired. Paul understood that his personal power and strength could in no way overcome the sufferings confronting him. (TLSB)

1:9 Paul's hardships were so life-threatening that he regarded his survival and recovery as tantamount to being raised from the dead. (CSB)

sentence of death. Whatever the sufferings or persecutions, they were severe. (TLSB)

rely ... on God. A key principle of this letter. God's grace is all-sufficient, and our weakness is precisely the opportunity for his power to be displayed (cf. 12:9–10). (CSB)

Despairing of oneself often causes one to trust more completely in God. Jesus clearly teaches that His people will face suffering in this world (Jn 16:33) as they strive to share the Gospel (Mt 16:24–25). But this suffering avails much, for it is in and for the name of Jesus (cf Ac 9:16). Suffering was part of Paul's calling to deliver the Gospel (4:10–12; Rm 9:3; Php 3:10–14). Though God does not capriciously hurt His people, there are certain aspects of His love that He can teach us only through suffering. "Although these afflictions are for the most part the punishments of sin, yet in the godly they have a better end, namely, to exercise them, that they may learn amid trials to seek God's aid, to acknowledge the distrust of their own hearts, and so forth" (Ap XIIB 54). (TLSB)

raises the dead. Paul knew the strength of his God and the confidence confidence that only He brings lasting life (cf 12:9–10; Rm 8:31–39). (TLSB)

1:10 *deadly peril.* Lit, "so great of death," "great dangers of death." Graphically describes God's even greater rescue of those who "had received the sentence of death" (v 9). (TLSB)

1:11 *helps us by prayer.* The prayer of believers avails much. Members of the Body of Christ are concerned for one another and lift one another up in prayer (cf Col 1:3; 2Th 3:1) (TLSB)

blessing. Gk *charisma.* Denotes God's gracious activity in our lives (cf. Rm 5:15; 6:23); in this case, God's gracious rescue of Paul. (TLSB)

1:3–11 Paul puts suffering in the context of God's grace. Sharing the Gospel in the midst of a sinful world means that opposition is bound to come (Jn 15:20) and may even overwhelm God's people as they share the Good News with others. Christ Jesus promises that in the midst of carrying crosses, burdens, and even the abuses and persecutions of others, His burden will be light (Mt 11:28–30). He not only will sustain us as His people (Rm 5:1–5) but will refresh us and bring joy in the midst of such struggles (Mt 5:11; 2Co 12:9–10). • Lord Jesus, teach us to be open to the challenging experiences that loving others in Your name brings, so we might trust in You all the more and rejoice exceedingly when others come to faith in You because they have known us as Your people. Amen. (TLSB)

Paul's Change of Plans

12 For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you. 13 For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand and I hope you will fully understand— 14 just as you did partially understand us—that on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you. 15 Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a second experience of grace. 16 I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me

on my way to Judea. 17 Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say “Yes, yes” and “No, no” at the same time? 18 As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. 19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. 20 For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. 21 And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, 22 and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. 23 But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth. 24 Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.

1:12 In defending his trustworthiness against the slanders being spread about him, Paul appeals to the witness of his own conscience and to the Corinthians’ firsthand knowledge of his character. He had spent 18 months with them when he first came to Corinth (Ac 18:11), so they could not plead ignorance of his integrity. (CSB)

1:12 *boast.* Paul challenges his detractors (cf 1Co 4; 2Co 11). His “boast” is not in himself, but in his sincere service to the Corinthians as the apostle of Jesus Christ to them (cf 1Co 1:31; 4:1; 2Co 11–12). To boast in Christ about the Corinthians (v 14) is not only okay but also blesses his hearers. (TLSB)

Simplicity. Straightforward, pure motives. (TLSB)

earthly wisdom. Lit, “wisdom of the flesh,” which claims no need for God. (TLSB)

grace. Paul was not there to peddle his or anybody else’s wisdom, but to proclaim Christ and His grace (cf 1Co 1:20–24; 2:1–5). (TLSB)

1:13 *what you read.* Paul’s writings. (TLSB)

In keeping with their knowledge of Paul’s character, they can trust what he writes from a distance: He means what he says. (CSB)

1:14 *just as you did partially.* Some in Corinth had allowed their confidence in Paul and his apostolic authority to be shaken by the false apostles who had penetrated their ranks. (CSB)

day of our Lord Jesus. His return (cf. 1Th 2:19–20). (CSB)

When Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead (cf 1Co 5:5; 1Th 5:2; 2Pt 3:10). (TLSB)

boast. Paul rejoices in shared faith. One of the greatest joys in life is that someone comes to faith in Jesus because they heard the Gospel from you. (TLSB)

1:15 *this.* That Christ is at work through Paul’s ministry to the Corinthians, producing mutual faith and joy. (TLSB)

might have a second experience. Here and in v. 16 Paul refers to his change of itinerary. Originally he had planned to cross over by sea from Ephesus to Corinth, visiting the Corinthians before traveling north to Macedonia, and then, returning from Macedonia, to visit them a second time, thus giving them the benefit of two short visits. This was when he was on good terms with them. What probably occurred was that he paid them a quick visit directly from Ephesus, a visit he had not contemplated and one that

proved to be “painful” (2:1). That visit then gave rise to his letter that caused them sorrow (see 7:8–9). (CSB)

They needed a second apostolic visit and restoration because of their arrogance. (TLSB)

1:17 Opponents were accusing Paul of being fickle in his care of the Corinthian Church. They falsely claimed that he was afraid to be bold in person (cf 10:10). Paul ultimately defends not himself but the ministry of Jesus that comes in apparent weakness and foolishness (cf 1Co 1:18; 2Co 4; 13:4) (TLSB)

was I vacillating? Paul’s opponents in Corinth had been attempting to persuade the Christians there that this change of plan was evidence that his word was not to be trusted, that he was fickle and unreliable. The two rhetorical questions are in effect his denial that he acts lightly and that he says “Yes” and “No” at the same time so that it is impossible to know what he means. In any case, his plan to visit the Corinthians had not been abandoned; it had simply been modified. (CSB)

Yes ... No. Paul does not say one thing and mean the other. God is faithful, and Paul’s ministry as God’s representative is faithful too (1:1). (TLSB)

1:18 *not “Yes” and “No.”* Paul now (vv. 18–20) appeals to the gospel message he had preached to them: Believing it, they had found it to be altogether true and entirely free from ambiguity, and by their experience of its dynamic power they had proved it to be one great affirmative in Christ, in whom all God’s promises are “Yes.” (CSB)

1:19 *Silvanus and Timothy.* Co-workers with Paul in ministry to the Corinthian Church. (TLSB)

in Him it is always Yes. The message of Jesus Christ is the reconciliation, the forgiveness for the world (cf Jn 12:47). In Christ alone, God fulfilled all His OT promises of redemption. (TLSB)

1:20 *promises of God.* In the OT covenant and Jesus’ earthly ministry. (TLSB)

“Amen.” The “Amen” uttered by the congregation at the end of an offering of prayer or praise (cf. 1Co 14:16). (CSB)

Understanding Jesus’ incredible work on behalf of the world calls for the response of faith—“Amen,” or “Let it be so for me.” (TLSB)

1:22 *seal.* Note from Ephesians 1:13. Baptized. A seal marked ownership. The word was used for a wax seal on a scroll (Jn 3:33; Rv 5:1–5; Jer 32:10); also for a brand on an animal or a tattoo on a slave or soldier. In the OT, God sealed Cain to protect him (Gn 4:15), and circumcision sealed the Israelites as God’s people (Gn 17:11; Rm 4:11; Col 2:11–12). God’s seal marks all those in heaven (Rv 7:2–4; 9:4). A seal leaves its image; through Baptism, the promised Spirit (Lk 24:49; Ac 2:33) makes us His dwelling (2Co 1:21–22). “Baptism and the Lord’s Supper—appointed as outward signs—work as seals” (LC III 98). (TLSB)

a guarantee. A part given as a guarantee that the whole will be forthcoming. The part is of the same kind as the whole. The first installment of a sum of money that has been inherited, e.g., assures the recipient that the whole will be received. This justifies the expansion of a single Greek word into several English words: “a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” (CSB)

The Holy Spirit received in Baptism is God’s “deposit” of His continued faithfulness. God would bring Paul’s ministry with the Corinthians to its appointed end (Php 1:6). (TLSB)

1:23 *witness against me.* Paul defends his ministry among the Corinthians, calling God Himself—the one who chose (v 1) and dispatched him to serve them—to vindicate his thoughts and actions. (TLSB)

to spare you. Paul’s change of plans for visiting the Corinthian Christians had been motivated, not by a fickle and insensitive attitude, but by love and concern for them. (CSB)

Paul did not fail to come to them out of personal weakness or fickleness but out of love for them (cf 1Co 4:14–21). (TLSB)

1:24 *lord it over your faith.* The Gospel comes in service (cf 11:6–23; Mt 20:28). The Gospel seeks to persuade, to encourage, and to call to faith. “Christ was not sent to bear the sword or possess a worldly kingdom” (Tr 31). (TLSB)