

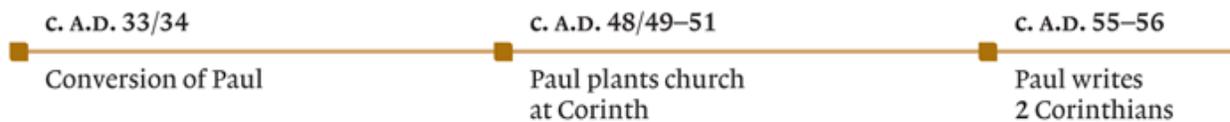
## Engage

- We are beginning a study into 2 Corinthians this week. I prayed about whether to begin this study or go into something different that weekly addresses the quarantine that we find ourselves in.
- I believe the words within 2 Corinthians will, themselves, bring comfort and instruction to us as we move through these times.
- Focus this week will be on the comfort that god brings in times of trouble.

## EXAMINE

### Introduction to 2 Corinthians

### Timeline



### Author, Date, and Recipients

The apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia around A.D. 55/56. This was approximately a year after he wrote 1 Corinthians and a year before he wrote his letter to the Romans. This is the fourth letter he had written to the Corinthian church (in addition to 1 Corinthians, see the letters mentioned in 1 Cor. 5:9 and 2 Cor. 2:3-4).

### Theme

The central theme of 2 Corinthians is the relationship between suffering and the power of the Spirit in Paul's apostolic life, ministry, and message. Paul's opponents had questioned his motives and his personal courage. They argued that he had suffered too much to be a Spirit-filled apostle of the risen Christ. But Paul argues that his suffering is the means God uses to reveal his glory (1:3-4, 11, 20).

### Purpose

### Sources

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Paul vindicates his apostolic ministry in order to (1) strengthen the faithful majority in Corinth (primarily chs. 1–7); (2) encourage them to contribute to the financial needs of other believers, as an expression of their repentance (primarily chs. 8–9); and (3) offer the rebellious minority in Corinth another chance to repent before he returns to judge those still rejecting him and his message (primarily chs. 10–13).

### A. Paul's trouble in Asia.

#### 1. (1-2) Introduction.

**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: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

a. **Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ:** Paul's introduction of himself as an **apostle** is both familiar and necessary because he was held in low regard among the Christians in Corinth. They had to remember and recognize his apostolic credentials.

i. **By the will of God** strengthens the point. Paul was not an apostle by the decision or desire of any man, including himself. Paul was an apostle **by the will of God**. Even if the Corinthian Christians held him in low regard, it did not diminish his standing as an **apostle** before God.

b. **With all the saints:** It is remarkable that Paul freely calls the Corinthian Christians **saints**, considering their many problems. We often use the term **saints** in a different way today, applying it to the "super-spiritual" instead of those who are simply set apart by a relationship of trust in Jesus Christ.

i. **All the saints who are in all Achaia** shows us that Paul intended his letters to be shared among the churches. They weren't just for the Christians in the city of Corinth but for all the Christians in the region who might read the letters.

c. **Grace and peace:** These are familiar greetings of Paul (used in all 13 of his New Testament letters), but we never get the impression that they are used insincerely.

d. **From God our Father:** This reminds us that we are children of God, yet not in the same exact sense as Jesus is the Son of God. We are sons of God, not by nature, but by election; not by ancestry but by adoption; not by right but by redemption.

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2. (3-4) *Praise to the God of all comfort.*

**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 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.**

a. **Father of mercies and God of all comfort:** Paul opens this letter by praising the God who gives so much mercy and comfort to the apostle and all believers. We get the feeling that Paul knows the mercy and comfort of God on a first-hand basis.

i. The words **all comfort** in this passage come from the ancient Greek word *paraklesis*. The idea behind this word for **comfort** in the New Testament is always more than soothing sympathy. It has the idea of strengthening, of helping, of making strong. The idea behind this word is communicated by the Latin word for **comfort** (*fortis*), which also means “brave.”

ii. “Here was a man, who never knew but what he might be dead the next day, for his enemies were many, and cruel, and mighty; and yet he spent a great part of his time in praising and blessing God.” (Spurgeon)

b. **God of all comfort:** Paul considers the Father a comforter, a Paraclete (*paraklesis*). We also know that the Holy Spirit is our Paraclete ([John 14:16](#), [14:26](#), [15:26](#), [16:7](#)) and that God the Son is our Paraclete ([1 John 2:1](#), [Hebrews 2:18](#), [Luke 2:25](#)). God, in every aspect of His being, is full of comfort, strength, and help for us.

c. **That we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble:** One great purpose of God in comforting us is to enable us to bring comfort to others. God’s comfort can be given and received through others.

i. Often, we never receive the comfort God wants to give us through another person. Pride keeps us from revealing our needs to others, so we never receive the comfort God would give us through them.

ii. “Even *spiritual* comforts are not given us for our use alone; they, like all the gifts of God, are given that they may be distributed, or become instruments of help to others. A minister’s trials and comforts are permitted and sent for the benefit of the Church. What a miserable preacher must he be who has all his divinity by study and learning, and nothing by experience!” (Clarke)

iii. “Mr. Knox, a little before his death, rose out of his bed; and being asked wherefore, being so sick, he would offer to rise? He answered, that he had had sweet meditations of the resurrection of Jesus Christ that night, and now he would go into the pulpit, and impart to others the comforts that he felt in his soul.” (Trapp)

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3. (5-7) *Paul's personal suffering and consolation.*

**For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. 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. 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.**

a. **The sufferings of Christ abound in us:** Paul had a life filled with suffering. He described some of these sufferings in [2 Corinthians 11:23-28](#): *stripes... prisons... beatings... stonings... shipwrecked... perils of waters... robbers... in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.* Yet, Paul knew that all his sufferings were really **the sufferings of Christ**.

b. **So our consolation also abounds through Christ:** Because Paul's sufferings were **the sufferings of Christ**, Jesus was not distant from Paul in his trials. He was right there, identifying with the apostle and comforting him.

i. "As the hotter the day, the greater the dew at night; so the hotter the time of trouble, the greater the dews of refreshing from God." (Trapp)

ii. We can count on it: when sufferings **abound, consolation also abounds**. Jesus is there to bring comfort if we will receive it. Of course, this assumes we are not suffering *as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.* Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. ([1 Peter 4:15-16](#))

iii. "It is not of suffering as suffering that the apostle here speaks. There is no tendency in pain to produce holiness. It is only of Christian suffering and of that sufferings of Christians, that is, of suffering endured for Christ and in a Christian manner, that the apostle says it is connected with salvation, or that it tends to work out for those who suffer an eternal weight of glory." (Hodge)

c. **Our consolation also abounds through Christ.** God may allow situations in our life where our only **consolation** is found **through Christ**. Sometimes we think the only consolation is found in a change of circumstances, but God wants to console us right in the midst of our difficult circumstances, and to do it **through Christ**.

i. This is the same idea Jesus expressed in [John 16:33](#): *In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*

ii. Jesus also suffered, therefore He is fully qualified to comfort us in our time of trial. ([Hebrews 2:18](#))

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d. **If we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation:** If Paul and other ministers were afflicted, it was for the sake of God's people (like the Corinthian Christians). God had a larger purpose in Paul's suffering than just working on Paul himself. God brought **consolation and salvation** to others through Paul's sufferings.

i. How could God bring **consolation and salvation** to others through Paul's suffering? As suffering brought Paul closer to God and made him rely more and more on God alone, Paul was a more effective minister. He was more usable in the hand of God to bring **consolation and salvation** to God's people.

ii. Whenever we pray, "Lord, just use me. I just want to be used by You to touch the lives of others," we do not realize that we pray a dangerous prayer. Through this good prayer, we invite God to bring suffering into our lives if that is the proper tool to make us more able to bring **consolation and salvation** to the lives of others.

e. **Which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer:** The consolation and salvation the Corinthian Christians received from Paul's suffering were at work in the Corinthians, making them able to endure **the same sufferings** Paul and the other apostles endured.

i. Significantly, Paul writes of **the same sufferings**. It is unlikely the Corinthian Christians were suffering in exactly the same way Paul was. Probably, not one of them could match the list Paul made in [2 Corinthians 11:23-28](#). Yet, Paul can say they are **the same sufferings** because he recognizes that the exact circumstances of suffering are not as important as what God does and wants to do through the suffering. Christians should never get into a "competition" of comparing suffering. There is a sense in which we all share **the same sufferings**.

ii. Of course, sometimes it is useful to compare our sufferings to those of others – to see how *light* our burden really is! It is easy for us to think our small problems are really much larger than they are.

iii. The New Testament idea of suffering is broad and not easily limited to just one kind of trouble (like persecution). The ancient Greek word for suffering (*thlipsis*) originally had the idea of actual physical pressure. In old England, heavy weights were put on certain condemned criminals until they were "pressed to death." *Thlipsis* describes that kind of "pressing."

f. **Effective for enduring:** God's desire is that we would be **enduring** through suffering. The ancient Greek word for **enduring** is *hupomone*. It isn't the idea of passive, bleak acceptance, but of the kind of spirit that can triumph over pain and suffering to achieve the goal. It is the spirit of the marathon runner, not of the victim in the dentist's chair.

### Sources

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g. **Or, if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation:** God did not work only through the *suffering* Paul endured. God also worked good things in others through the *comfort* Paul received from the Lord.

i. We see Paul living in the footsteps of Jesus, who was truly an *others-centered person*. Paul's life is not focused on himself, but on the Lord and on those whom the Lord has given him to serve. Is Paul suffering? It is so that God can do something good in the Corinthian Christians. Is Paul comforted? It is so that God can bless the Corinthian Christians. Suffering or comforted, it wasn't all about Paul; it was all about others.

ii. "We are not brought to real submission until we have been laid low by the crushing hand of God." (Calvin)

h. **We know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation:** According to many passages in the New Testament, suffering is promised in the Christian life ([Acts 14:22](#), [1 Thessalonians 3:3](#), [Philippians 1:29](#), [Romans 5:3](#)). Nevertheless, we are also promised consolation in the midst of suffering.

#### 4. (8-11) *Paul's desperate trouble.*

**For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift *granted* to us through many.**

a. **Our trouble which came to us in Asia:** We don't know the exact nature of this trouble. It was probably some type of persecution or a physical affliction made worse by Paul's missionary work.

i. There are at least five suggestions for this **trouble**:

- Fighting with "wild beasts" in Ephesus ([1 Corinthians 15:32](#)).
- Suffering 39 stripes after being brought before a Jewish court ([2 Corinthians 11:24](#)).
- The riot at Ephesus ([Acts 19:23-41](#)).
- A particular persecution shortly before Paul left for Troas ([Acts 20:19](#) and [1 Corinthians 16:9](#)).
- A recurring physical malady.

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**b. We were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life:**

Whatever the problem was, it was bad. Because of this problem, Paul lived with the awareness that he might die at any time (**we had the sentence of death... who delivered us from so great a death**).

i. Because of the threat of death, many feel Paul's problem must have been persecution. However, the idea of a recurring physical malady isn't a bad choice. In that day, Jews could refer to sickness as "death" and healing as a "return to life." The use of the present tense in [2 Corinthians 1:4-6](#) and [1:9-10](#) imply that the problem was still with Paul as he wrote the letter. This makes it more likely – though by no means certain – that the trouble was a stubborn illness.

ii. **In ourselves** tells us that Paul's **sentence of death** was something he felt within, not something that a court of law had imposed on him from without.

c. **That we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead:** Even though the resurrection is a future event, there is a sense in which the reality and power of the resurrection touches every day for the suffering Christian. As we know by *the power of His resurrection* we will also be blessed by *the fellowship of His sufferings*. ([Philippians 3:10](#))

d. **Who delivered us... and does deliver us... we trust that He will still deliver us:** Paul knew that God's work in our lives happens in three different verb tenses. God works in us past, present, and future.

e. **You also helping together in prayer for us:** Paul knew the value of intercessory prayer and was not shy about asking the Corinthians, despite their many spiritual problems, to pray for him. The Corinthian Christians were really **helping together** with Paul when they prayed for him.

i. Paul knew that blessing in ministry was **granted to us through many**: that is, through the prayers of **many** people. We often think of the great things God did through Paul, and we rightly admire him as a man of God. Do we think of all the people who prayed for him? Paul credited those praying people with much of his effectiveness in ministry.

ii. "Even an *apostle* felt the prayers of the Church necessary for his comfort and support. What innumerable blessings do the prayers of the followers of God draw down on those who are the objects of them!" (Clarke)

f. **Persons:** This is literally "faces." The idea "is that of faces upturned in prayer, the early Christian (and Jewish) attitude of prayer being one of standing with uplifted eyes and outstretched arms." (Bernard)

**QUESTIONS****Sources**

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- How did Paul describe God? (3)
- For what reason does God comfort us? (4)
- Whether he was afflicted or comforted how did Paul believe it would benefit the Corinthian church? (5-7)
- How did Paul describe his troubles in Asia? (8)
- By what means was Paul delivered? (9-11)
- Have you ever felt like quitting because of situations, which were very small compared to what Paul endured?
- In what spirit did Paul determine not to come to the Corinthian church again? (1-2)
- In what spirit did Paul write his previous letter to them? (3-4)
- What new instruction did Paul give concerning the man disciplined for incest? (6-8)
- What are we not ignorant of? (11)

**Sources**

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