

Lesson 2

2 Corinthians 1

I. Paul's explanation of his conduct and apostolic ministry. 1:1 - 7:16.

A. Introduction. 1:1-11.

1. Salutation. 1:1,2

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints that are in the whole of Achaia:

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

1. All of Paul's epistles with the exception of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Phillipians, and Philemon begin with a reference to Paul's being an apostle of Jesus Christ. While he was not one of the Twelve, he claimed equality with them (11:5; 12:11; Gal. 2:6) on the basis of the special revelation that God gave him at the time of his conversion (1 Cor. 9:1; Gal. 1:15,16). Like them, he had been commissioned "by the will of God" to be a "chosen instrument" (Acts 9:15). He reminds the Corinthians, some of whom were questioning his authority, that he is not an apostle by self-appointment, but *by the will of God*. In the first letter he wrote of dividing after Apollos, Cephas, and even the Christ party. More recently, some had arrived who had actively opposed Paul's teaching and his influence among the Corinthians.
- 2 In himself, as creature and as sinner, he has no right whatever to utter one single word on God's behalf; but as apostle, called by God's grace and charged with God's message,¹ he not only may but must speak with the very authority of God

¹**Galatians 1:15-19** But when it was the good pleasure of God, who separated me, [even] from my mother's womb, and called me through his grace, 16 to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles; straightway I conferred not with flesh and blood:

17 neither went I up to Jerusalem to them that were apostles before me: but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned unto Damascus.

18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and tarried with him fifteen days.

19 But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.

1 Timothy 1:12-15 I thank him that enabled me, [even] Christ Jesus our Lord, for that he counted me faithful, appointing me to [his] service;

13 though I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: howbeit I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief;

14 and the grace of our Lord abounded exceedingly with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

Himself.

- 3 At the beginning of the letter Paul is establishing his apostleship as a point of contrast with these newly arrive ministers who, apparently, also presented themselves as “apostles (11:13). They based their claim on letter of recommendation (3:1) as demonstrated by supposedly superior displays of gifts (11:5-6; 12:11-12). Paul described them as “false apostles masquerading as apostles of Christ” (11:13). The opening words of this epistle indicate Paul’s concern to impress upon the Corinthians his credentials as a genuine apostle of Christ. It is striking that while the *basis* of Paul’s apostleship was Christ’s Damascus road call, the *evidence* he gives in support relates to his lifestyle, which was characterized by the sacrifice of Christ expressed in apostolic ministry. Although he could point to the existence of the Corinthian church as a letter of recommendation and refer to miraculous elements in his ministry (2 Cor. 3:2; 5:13; 12:1-6; 12:12), his chief self-characterization was in a life of hardship, conflict and weakness as the bearer of the word of God focused on the death and resurrection of Christ.
- 4 While the source of Paul’s authority was Christ, his authority was attested not just by miracles, but in the pattern of the death and resurrection of Christ stamped upon his own life and work. Sacrifice and self-giving were for Paul, as they remain for us, evidence of genuineness as Christian believers.
- 5 Paul addresses Timothy as a “brother,” a term that was also used in pagan cults. Christian brotherhood involves something far more than a confraternity of initiates, for its very heart and essence is the objective fact of oneness with and in Christ, who is the unique Son of god. The basis of Christian brotherhood is identification with Christ.
- 6 Paul refers to the principal addressees as “the church of God in Corinth,” the local representatives of the universal church. Some today would understand the term to apply to a building, but *ekklesia* is a common term for a gathering of people or even for an official assembly such as a parliament or court. Both meanings are illustrated in Acts 19 where it refers to an assembly of the people (v. 41) and to the legal assembly of the city council (v. 39).

15 Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief:

1 Corinthians 1:27-30 but God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put to shame them that are wise; and God chose the weak things of the world, that he might put to shame the things that are strong;

28 and the base things of the world, and the things that are despised, did God choose, [yea] and the things that are not, that he might bring to nought the things that are:

29 that no flesh should glory before God.

30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption:

- 7 The church at Corinth is the church of God. It is the church at Corinth, but not of. It is not the church of an apostle or a sect. It is God's church; not man's. God has called it into being; God sustains and sanctifies it; and it is God who will bring it to ultimate glory.
- 8 All of "the saints" in Achaia are linked with them (Athens -- Acts 17:34; Cenchrea -- Rom. 16:1). There is no indication that these *saints* are especially heroic or devout; they were in God's eye, his holy people. The Bible speaks of saints are quite ordinary people whom God graciously regards as special to him through faith-commitment to his son Jesus. Paul did not disown them despite the problems addressed in the first letter or their interest in the "other Jesus" which the false apostles were preaching (11:3-4). Subsequent Christians have not always been as charitable as Paul. We shoot first and teach later. Such is not according to the apostolic example.
- 9 All who are Christ's are holy, not in themselves -- for the inconsistencies and deficiencies of their daily life and witness remove any ground for such presumption -- but in Christ, the Holy One of God, in whom they have been chosen and with whom they have become one.
- 10 The entire epistle is encapsulated in this first verse -- "the apostle ... to the church." The question is, "Will the church at Corinth submit to the authority of the Apostle Paul?"
- 11 **V. 2** -- God is set before the Corinthians as the sole true source of grace and peace. It was a convention in ancient letters to express pious wishes for the health and well-being of the readers, invoking the names of the gods. Paul adapts it to Christianity, introducing the distinctively Christian hope for *grace and peace* that come *from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. This characteristically Pauline greeting combines and elevates the common Greek and Hebrew greetings. *Chairein* ("greetings," Acts 15:23; 23:26; James 1:1) becomes *charis*, to which Paul makes reference at the beginning and end of every epistle. The Hebrew *shalom* is replaced by *eirene* (peace), the latter term referring to the peace that comes to man from God (cf. Phil. 4:7) as a result of his having peace with God. The **peace** for which he prays is the enjoyment of harmonious fellowship with God enjoyed by those who have taken hold of his **grace** shown in the birth and death of *the Lord Jesus Christ*.²
- 12 It should be noticed that the deity of Jesus Christ is plainly implied by the

²**2 Corinthians 8:9** For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich.

2 Corinthians 6:1 And working together [with him] we entreat also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

language of this verse.

1. First, the Lord Jesus Christ is united with God our Father as the source of grace and peace, which shows Him to be one with the Father in deity and dignity. This could not be so were He a created entity and not the co-eternal and consubstantial son.
2. Second, Jesus Christ is distinguished by the title “Lord,” the very term which is used in the Septuagint version of the O.T. to translate the sacred four-letter name of God.
 1. The prophecy of Isa. 40:3 is fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist whose voice cries in the wilderness, “Make ye ready the way of the Lord” (Mk. 1:3).
 2. Christ himself foretells that in the day of final judgment many will vainly address him as “Lord, Lord” (Mt. 7:21ff).
 3. Thomas calls the risen Savior “My Lord and my god” (John 20:28).
 4. The identical title is used of God the Father (e.g. Luke 2:26; Mt. 11:25; 1 Tim. 6:15).
 5. Christ, indeed, is Lord of all (Acts 10:36; Rom. 10:12) and King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16; 17:14).
 6. Confession of him as Lord is essential to salvation (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11).

2. Gratitude for divine comfort. 1:3-7

3 Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort;

4 who comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound unto us, even so our comfort also aboundeth through Christ.

6 But whether we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or whether we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which worketh in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer:

7 and our hope for you is stedfast; knowing that, as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so also are ye of the comfort.

1. Paul generally follows the salutation with thanksgiving for the grace evident in the lives of his converts (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:4-9) and a summary of his prayer requests for them (e.g. Phil. 1:3-11; Col. 1:3-12). Here, however, he offers praise to God for consoling and encouraging him. This untypical concern with his own circumstances shows the distressing nature of the experience in Asia from which he had so recently been delivered (vv. 8-10). He highlights the aspects of God’s character he had come to value in deeper measure as a result of personal need and divine response -- God’s limitless compassion (cf. Ps. 145:9; Mic. 7:19) and never failing comfort (cf. Isa. 40:1; 51:3, 12; 66:13).

2. He is the Father of mercies or pityings: from Him loving compassions flow to His children when they are being tested by affliction. Could Paul have had Psalm 103:13-14 in mind?³
3. God is the God of all comfort -- that is the divine fount of all consolation to His people. "All" excludes any other source as well as the complete adequacy of that comfort for every circumstance that may arise.⁴ No suffering, however severe can separate the believer from the tender care and compassion of his Heavenly Father. On the contrary, it is precisely in the extremity of the believer's weakness that the supreme power and grace of God are magnified.
4. Paul employs the term "comfort" in its basic Greek sense of standing beside a person to encourage him when he is undergoing severe testing. The present tense shows that God comforts us constantly and unfailingly, not spasmodically and intermittently; and He does so in all our affliction, not just in certain kinds of affliction. If any one knew the experimental proof of this great assurance it was the Apostle Paul.
 1. 2 Corinthians 11:23 Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as one beside himself) I more; in labors more abundantly, in prisons more abundantly, in stripes above measure, in deaths oft. 24 Of the Jews five times received I forty [stripes] save one. 25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; 26 [in] journeyings often, [in] perils of rivers, [in] perils of robbers, [in] perils from [my] countrymen, [in] perils from the Gentiles, [in] perils in the city, [in] perils in the wilderness, [in] perils in the sea, [in] perils among false brethren; 27 [in] labor and travail, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. 28 Besides those things that are without, there is that which presseth upon me daily, anxiety for all the churches.
5. It goes without saying that the affliction must be for the sake of or on account of Christ.⁵

³**Psalm 103:13-15** Like as a father pitieth his children, So Jehovah pitieth them that fear him.

14 For he knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.

⁴**Philippians 4:19** And my God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

⁵1 Peter 4:14-16 If ye are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed [are ye]; because the [Spirit] of glory and the Spirit of God resteth upon you.

15 For let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evil-doer, or as a meddler in other men's matters:

16 but if [a man suffer] as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this name.

6. Paul sees his suffering (note Acts 9:15, 16; 20:22, 23) not merely as personally beneficial, driving him to trust God alone (v. 9; 12:7), but also as directly benefitting to those to whom he ministered. To experience God's comfort (help, consolation, encouragement) in the midst of all one's affliction is to become **indebted and equipped** to communicate the divine comfort and sympathy to others who are in any kind of affliction and distress.
7. **V. 5** provides the reason why suffering equips the Christian to mediate God's comfort -- no matter how great the sufferings a Christian is called upon to endure, they are matched, and more than matched by the comfort God bestows.⁶ Whenever Christ's sufferings were multiplied in Paul's life, God's comfort was also multiplied through the ministry of Christ. The greater the suffering, the greater the comfort and the greater the ability to share with others the divine sympathy. Jesus foresaw that both he and his followers would suffer. God would strike the shepherd and the sheep would be scattered abroad. **Mark 14:27**. Paul teaches that there is a solidarity that exists between Christ and his people. Paul had good reason to understand this. After heaping persecution on believers, the risen Lord has asked, "Why persecutest thou *me*?" Peter told the dispersion to rejoice as they participate in the sufferings of Christ. **1 Pet. 4:13**.
8. Paul was one of the most afflicted of men. He suffered from hunger, cold, nakedness, stripes, imprisonment, perils by sea and land, from robbers, from the Jews, from the heathen, so that his life was a continued death, or as he expressed it, he died daily. Besides these external afflictions he was overwhelmed with cares and anxiety for the churches. As the cherry on top of the sundae, he had a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him. **11:24-30; 12:7**.
9. In the midst of all these trials God not only sustained him, but filled him with such a spirit that he actually rejoiced in being thus afflicted.⁷ This state of mind can be experienced only by those who are so filled with the love of Christ, that they rejoice in every thing, however painful to themselves, whereby his glory is promoted.
10. Not only is there a solidarity between Christ and Christians, there is also a solidarity between brother and brother. Not only is the believer bound to Christ, but he is also bound in Christ, to every other believer. He cannot act as an isolated individualist, because he is a member of an organic **whole**. **V. 4. The comfort we receive from God through Christ we are both to give and to**

⁶**2 Corinthians 4:17** For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory;

⁷**2 Corinthians 12:10** Wherefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

- receive from one another.** God's comfort does not terminate on the one who receives it. **Rom. 12:15.**
11. In this short paragraph the verbs and nouns for *comfort* (which presupposes suffering) occur 10 times, for *trouble* 3 times, and for *suffer(ing)* four times. Directly or indirectly suffering is referred to 17 times in five verses.
 12. In this context, Paul's description of God as *the Father of compassion* and *the God of all comfort* takes on real beauty. God called Isaiah to "comfort, comfort my people." **Isaiah 40:1.** Isaiah described the tenderness of God's comfort "as a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you. **Isaiah 66:13.**
 13. If God is the source of mercy and comfort, Christ is the channel through whom they come to us. In all our relationships with God we seek *comfort* and *compassion* in the name or by the authority of Jesus.
 14. **V. 6** restates and applies **v. 4b**. Paul's suffering benefitted the Corinthians because he was thereby prepared to administer divine encouragement to them when they were afflicted. Whether he suffered affliction or received comfort the advantage remained for the Corinthians. They too would know an inner strength that would enable them to patiently endure the same type of trial that confronted Paul.
 15. Power and weakness, one of the unifying themes of the letter, are hinted at in this opening paragraph. All believers suffer the weakness of troubles through their Christian service. Nevertheless the power of God in his mercies and comfort meets us at our point of need. Great though our sense of weakness may be, the power of God is always greater. Some today raise the hopes of their people by promising them immediate health and prosperity as their due portion from God. These promises seem to be tailor made for a society whose need for instant gratification is unprecedented in history. Paul, by contrast, soberly refers to his readers' *sufferings*, and he promises, not immediate healing and success, but God's *comfort* which they will experience as they patiently endure.

3. Deliverance from a deadly peril. 1:8-11.

8 For we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning our affliction which befell [us] in Asia, that we were weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power, insomuch that we despaired even of life:

9 yea, we ourselves have had the sentence of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead:

10 who delivered us out of so great a death, and will deliver: on whom we have set our hope that he will also still deliver us;

11 ye also helping together on our behalf by your supplication; that, for the gift bestowed upon us by means of many, thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf.

1. In v. 8 Paul proceeds to describe the afflictions (“hardships” - N.V.) in which he received divine comfort and empowering.⁸ It overtook Paul in the province of Asia, which was probably somewhere other than Ephesus, the leading city. (Otherwise “in Ephesus” would have been used as in 1 Cor. 15:32; 16:8.) It probably occurred between 1 and 2 Corinthians. The Corinthians probably had some knowledge of the events given the vague reference, but Paul now informs them of the overwhelming character and unique nature of the event. He had been so “utterly, unbearably crushed” (RSV) that he had no hope of survival. The Greek word translated “despair” (from *poros*, passage), implies the unavailability of exit from oppressive circumstances.
2. In his estimation Paul had received a death sentence from which there was no reprieve. But in the face of this event which was tantamount to death, there was another event that was tantamount to resurrection. All of this undermined Paul’s self confidence and compelled his utter dependence upon God who raises the dead, and who, therefore, can deliver the dying from the grip of death.
3. Paul’s appointed task was not yet fulfilled, his fight not over, his course unfinished -- though the day would come when he would be ready to be offered, knowing that the time of his departure had come and that his earthly pilgrimage was at an end (2 Timothy 4:6ff.). However much he may have desired to depart and be with Christ he realized that until the apostolic work for which he had been chosen and called was completed to abide in the flesh was more needful for the sake of those to whom he had been sent (cf. Phil. 1:23f).
4. It is very easy to think of God as remote and distant from our present situation, to regard God as a God of theology and not of reality. Preachers need to know about the God of yesterday and the God of tomorrow, but if they lack personal confidence in the God of today, how will they help people in the crises of life? Paul shows that God’s power reached even into those evil circumstances to draw Paul into a deeper relationship with himself.⁹

⁸Various suggestions have been given for Paul’s Asian affliction. Those commonly suggested: 1) fighting wild beasts in Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32); 2) suffering 39 stripes (11:24) after having been arraigned before a local Jewish ecclesiastical court; 3) the riot at Ephesus instigated by Demetrius (Acts 19:23-41) or an unsuccessful attempt after the riot to lynch Paul; 4) a particular persecution encountered in Ephesus or elsewhere (cf. Acts 20:19; 1 Cor. 16:9) shortly before his departure for Troas; and 5) a prostrating attack of a recurrent malady. The last suggestion is favored by a) the allusion in v. 10 to Job 33:30 (LXX); b) the fact that a Jew could regard sickness as death and healing or recovery as a return to life (see, e.g., Hos 6:1,2); c) the present tenses of vv. 4-6; d) the perfective implications of *eschekamen* (“we feel we received”) in v. 9; and e) the twice-repeated *rhysetai* (“he will deliver”) in v. 10.

⁹Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing [unto him]; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and [that] he is a rewarder of them that seek after him.

5. This description gives an insight into Paul's mind as he wrote. It has an amazingly modern psychological ring to it. The words that Paul uses of his circumstances (*great* -- means by implication that which surpasses description; *far beyond our ability to endure* -- literally, beyond our power), are later used by Paul in important passages where he turns the words on their head so as to indicate the "surpassing power of God," the "in describable glory" and the "power" of Christ perfected in weakness.¹⁰
6. Vv. 10-11 -- The Father of Compassion had delivered Paul from a deadly peril, and he will deliver, which is the basis of hope. If Paul had received the sentence of death he had also come to rely on God and to set his hope on God.
7. It is no accident that the references to God's deliverance of Paul and to prayer are placed side by side. In prayer, human impotence casts itself at the feet of divine omnipotence. The God who raises the dead and who delivered Paul is responsive to prayer. As the Corinthians are united in prayer for Paul they are said to be helping or "working together" with God.
8. Paul refers both to prayer and thanksgiving, indicating the close connection between them. Prayer to God for specific needs is rightly followed by thanksgiving; one is incomplete without the other.
9. The great lesson of this overwhelming affliction which had befallen him was that he (and all who are Christ's) should trust, not in self, but in God "the Raiser of the dead." This is a theme which provides a key to the whole epistle.
 3. Is Paul assailed by anguish of spirit? It is God who always leads him in triumph in Christ (2:13f).
 2. Do we have the treasure of divine glory in earthen vessels? It is that it may be seen that the exceeding greatness of the power is of God, and not of self (4:7ff).
 3. Is Paul always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake? It is that the life of Jesus may be manifested in his mortal flesh (4:10f).
 4. Is the outward man decaying? Yet the inward man is renewed day by day (4:16).
 5. Though our earthly tabernacle suffer dissolution, we are to put on an eternal heavenly habitation (5:1 ff).

¹⁰**2 Corinthians 4:7** But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves;

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory;

2 Corinthians 12:9 And he hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for [my] power is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

6. The climax is reached in chapter 12 where Paul explains how through the endurance of a “thorn in the flesh” he was taught that God’s grace is all-sufficient and that His power is made perfect in weakness (12:7ff).
7. This was a principle to which even our Lord submitted in procuring our salvation, for He was crucified through weakness, but is alive through the power of God (13:4 -- for he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth through the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him through the power of God toward you.).

B. Paul’s conduct explained. 1:12 - 2:13.

1. Characteristics of his conduct. 1:12-14.

12 For our glorifying is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we behaved ourselves in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.

13 For we write no other things unto you, than what ye read or even acknowledge, and I hope ye will acknowledge unto the end:

14 as also ye did acknowledge us in part, that we are your glorying, even as ye also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus.

- 1) Before defending himself against the specific charges of vacillation and domineering leveled against him by his opponents (1:15-2:4), Paul deals with two more general accusations: that he had acted shamelessly and insincerely in his relations with the Corinthians and that in his letters he had show worldly shrewdness and had been evasive by writing one thing but meaning or intending another (cf. **Vv. 12b, 13a**). The defensive nature of Paul’s language indicates that he was under strong attack from some part of the Corinthian church. They charged that he had behaved himself badly both in the world and also in his relations with them. **V. 12**. Specifically in question were his sincerity and wisdom. **V.13** seems to indicate that some question had also been raised concerning that which he had written. No less serious was their belief that he was a vacillating, worldly man ready to say Yes and No in the same breath. **V. 17**.
- 2) The testimony of a clear conscience is something in which to glory. Paul is content to leave his readers to draw their own conclusions from the contrast between the blameless consistency of his conduct and the behavior of the adversaries who had leveled the charges against him. The glorying of the latter was marked by insincerity and carnal pride. But Paul’s glorying is in the Lord (cf. 10:17); he attributes nothing to self, but all to the grace of God (cf. 1 Cor. 15:10). The holiness and sincerity to which he testifies are *of God*, that is they have their origin in Him and not in Paul. Fleshly wisdom he had shunned from the first moment of his arrival in Corinth (cf. 1Cor 2:1ff).
- 3) Although Paul refrains from saying so, the Corinthians were wrong in this case. Instead of showing loving concern for him in his great difficulties in Ephesus they had written him off as unspiritual and vacillating. We do well to avoid such unkind and ill-formed and ill-informed opinions as shown by the Corinthians. Let

the facts be first gathered and explanations provided before firm opinions are reached.

- 4) These baseless charges Paul answers in the only way possible for him -- by appealing to the testimony of his own conscience and the Corinthians' knowledge of his conduct. So, he claims that in both church and world his conduct had been characterized by God-given purity of intention and openness and had been governed by the grace of God (v. 12) Then he asserts that in none of his correspondence -- the Corinthians had already received at least three letters from him -- did his meaning become apparent only by "reading between the lines." Rather his meaning, which lay on the surface, could be understood simply by reading (v. 13a).¹¹ Paul concludes by reminding his converts at Corinth that they had already begun to appreciate his motives and intentions, especially through the recent visit of Titus (see 7:6-16). He expresses the hope that they would reach the full assurance that he could give them as much cause for pride now (cf. 5:12) as they would give him pride "in the day of the Lord Jesus" (cf. 1 Cor 15:31; Phil 4:1; 1Thess 2:19,20). Paul's response is that he had interrogated his conscience (v. 12) in prospect of the day of the Lord Jesus (v. 14), when, as he states in **1 Cor. 4:5**, "the Lord will expose the motives of men's hearts." On that day he will be shown to have behaved well both in the world at large and towards the Corinthians with holiness and sincerity that are from God. These motives have been operative both in the former (not preserved) letter as well as in the present one. He had written so as to be understood, which in part he was; he now writes with the intention that the Corinthians will understand fully (v. 14). Their questioning of his motives is ill based. When the great and coming day arrives and everything is revealed he is confident that they will boast (glory) of him, as he of them.
- 5) If the Corinthians are honest with themselves, they must acknowledge from first-hand observance that his conduct in their city was marked by transparent genuineness. It was the same with his letters. They can trust the plain meaning of what they read; there is no *double entendre*, no subtle misdirection. What they read from him is not incompatible with what they know with certainty about him.
- 6) Already the shadow of this book is becoming apparent -- their acknowledgment of his integrity, founded on the assurance of personal fellowship, is but partial. They should ALL have complete confidence in him who is their divinely appointed Apostle, but the calumnies and insinuations of the false apostles who have invaded his territory have caused some to waver and others even to transfer their allegiance. He longs that all who are Christ's in Corinth should unanimously acknowledge him as their genuine Apostle -- not for the sake of his own

¹¹This is something which some moderns would do well to heed. Some would have us believe that we cannot read and understand the scripture. It must be done by scholars. The Bible may no longer be chained to the pulpit (in fact, it cannot be because the preachers do not belong to the intelligentsia), but it is chained to the professor.

reputation (as the whole of this epistle shows), but for their sakes and the Gospel's.

- 7) Paul may have also intended for them to understand that their knowledge of him, though certain, was partial in the sense of not being complete. There were still things for them to learn about him, for example, the truth about his "thorn in the flesh," (ch. 12). They must learn that physical weakness does not imply moral weakness. And the certainty of his integrity will be confirmed, not shaken, the more complete their knowledge of him becomes.

2. Charge of fickleness answered. 1:15-22.

15 And in this confidence I was minded to come first unto you, that ye might have a second benefit;

16 and by you to pass into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come unto you, and of you to be set forward on my journey unto Judaea.

17 When I therefore was thus minded, did I show fickleness? or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be the yea yea and the nay nay?

18 But as God is faithful, our word toward you is not yea and nay.

19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, [even] by me and Silvanus and Timothy, was not yea and nay, but in him is yea.

20 For how many soever be the promises of God, in him is the yea: wherefore also through him is the Amen, unto the glory of God through us.

21 Now he that establisheth us with you in Christ, and anointed us, is God;

22 who also sealed us, and gave [us] the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

- 1) Although Paul offers a personal defense, he turns quickly to defend against the charge that he misrepresented the Gospel. He is more concerned for the Gospel than for himself. To accuse him of breaking his word is one thing, but to accuse him of denying Christ is quite another.
- 2) **Vv. 15, 16** -- "In this confidence," that is, in the confidence that he was their glorying, their trusted and loyally acknowledged Apostle, Paul had formulated the plan of paying them a double visit: to come before proceeding north to Macedonia, and then to return to them from Macedonia. In this way they would have "a second benefit," which may mean that they would have had two opportunities, not one, of receiving spiritual communications from him in person. (Cf. Rom. 1:11). This intention was conceived when Paul was confident in their attitude, but subsequent news had reached him that shook this confidence and caused him to modify this project.¹² One result of this change of plan had been

¹²There was no question but that Paul had had a change in plans. In 1 Cor. 16:2-8 and in these three verses (1:15-17) we find the outline of two different itineraries. In the first it was Ephesus--Macedonia--Corinth--Jerusalem(possibly). In the second it was

- that certain persons intent on alienating the loyalties and affections of the Corinthians from him had used it as an occasion for denouncing him as fickle, unreliable, and insincere. Paul defends himself against these charges.
- 3) Paul thought it incredible that any at Corinth could really have thought that a change in plan pointed to a change in character. The formula which introduces the two-fold question in **v. 17** shows that the only possible answer is a negative: “Did I really show fickleness? Of course not! Do I really purpose according to the flesh? Of course not!” The cause of the change was really to be found in the Corinthians. They had at first said “yea” to Paul, but had admitted the false apostles into their fellowship who had caused them to say “nay” to Paul. Had they remained steadfast and loyal, the original plan would have been carried through. His change in plans had not come from selfish motives, but from concern for the Corinthians (v. 23).
 - 4) **Vv. 18, 19** -- Paul continues his defense, but turns from his written to his spoken message, which is, in summary, that God is faithful to his promises. This suggests that the import of their accusation went further than just to impugn Paul - it had the effect of bringing into question the faithfulness of God himself, who by revelation had entrusted His word to Paul as to a chosen vessel (cf. Gal. 1:11ff; Acts 9:15). But that God is faithful is a truth they cannot deny, for, as Paul reminded them in 1 Cor. 1:9, it was through God and His faithfulness that they had been “called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” When God speaks, His positive does not contain a hidden negative. The numerous promises of God, given through the mouths of many prophets at different times

Ephesus--Corinth--Macedonia--Corinth--Judea (now definite). Plan A disclosed his original intention; Plan B, made after the writing of 1 Corinthians, introduced two modifications: Paul now planned to visit Corinth twice--before and after Macedonia--and his plan to visit Judea was now settled. Not only did Paul have to explain these changes, his actual itinerary seems to have been Ephesus--Corinth (the painful visit)--Ephesus (Demetrian riot)--Troas (2:12, 13)--Macedonia (7:5, the place of writing). In other words, Paul made two plans, neither of which was carried out. Paul seemed to revert to Plan A after his painful visit to Corinth. To Plan A Paul had seemed to say, “Yes-No-Yes”; to Plan B “Yes-No.” The apostle had apparently provided his opponents with a convenient handle for a charge of fickleness. His detractors were shrewd enough to convert the charge into one of capricious vacillation, levity of character (*elaphria*, translated “lightly”). His arbitrary changing of travel plans, they urged, was motivated purely by self-interest, with no concern for broken promises or for needs at Corinth.

His critics conveniently ignored that Paul had qualified his plans with the word “if the Lord permits” (1 Cor. 16:7). When Paul’s plans called for a delay, this caused some to say that Paul took too lightly his promises to the church. When people have a contentious spirit they don’t need much excuse to find fault, but it still is bothersome to think of the petty criticism the great Apostle was subject to and the questions that were raised about the authority and integrity of his ministry.

- and places,¹³ all converge like so many lines at one point, in the Son of God whom Paul and his companions now proclaim. There is no ambiguity, Yes and No, about the Son of God.¹⁴ It is as if God is saying “Jesus Christ, my Son, is my “yes” to every promise I have ever made. He fulfils everything I have ever said.”
- 5) From God’s side, as well as from ours, everything is focused upon Christ and it is for this reason that the prepositions *in* and *through* are so important. Because God’s promises come true *in* Christ, we say the *Amen* (Hebrew, “It is true”) *through* Christ *to the glory of God* (v. 20). Christ is the “go-between.” God speaks to us *in* Christ and we, who have received the message, speak back to God *through* Christ. Paul is teaching that we may approach God by no other path and glorify him by no other means. Sin prevents us approaching God in our own right; but we may draw near *through* Christ.
 - 6) It follows that the concluding “Amen” of the Christian’s prayer in which he invokes the promises of God is also *through Christ*. The concept of through Christ or in his name is more than a mere formula or convenient formality; it is the true and profoundly significant foundation or keystone of all Christian prayer. The Hebrew word from which we get “Amen” conveys the idea of *firmness* or *reliability*, and the utterance of “Amen” in public or private worship after prayers and thanksgivings expresses confidence in the faithfulness of God and the certainty of His promises. It is, in short, the voice of faith, setting to its seal that God is true.
 - 7) Jesus employed the term in a unique manner when he placed it at the beginning of many of his most solemn statements, emphasizing the absolute authenticity and immutability of His teaching. The application of the term to Christ as a title in Rev. 3:14 is significant.¹⁵ The “Amen” is through him who himself is the “Amen.” There could be no greater assurance of the divine faithfulness than that.

¹³**Hebrews 1:1-2** -- God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in [his] Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds;

¹⁴As proclaimers of the power of the gospel, it is important for people around us to know where we stand. They must feel confident that today’s “yes” will not become tomorrow’s “no.” Too many people are afraid to reveal where they stand on an issue without first conducting a poll on the question. Insecurity makes some people keep all communications vague in order not to upset people, and personal ambition causes others to take stands that will most advance their cause. An opportunist may appear to be successful, but he or she is building causes where “yes” sometimes become “no.” Ultimately this approach brings failure.

¹⁵**Revelation 3:14**-- And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God:

- 8) Since Christ is the fulfilment (God's *Yes*) to all of God's numerous promises, it follows that the Old Testament, where the promises are made, really makes sense only when read with Christ in mind. Christ is the end to which the Old Testament is pointed, the goal toward which it moves.¹⁶ To read the Old Testament without reference to Christ is like reading a mystery novel with the last chapter torn out. All the clues are scattered throughout the story, but without the finale no-one could be sure of the explanation of the mystery or the identity of the one in whom all interest has been aroused. The Gospel of the Son of God, as proclaimed by Paul, is the final chapter of God's story, which explains all, and without which everything which precedes remains enigmatic and "up in the air."
- 9) **vv. 21-22** -- The question of Paul's sincerity and reliability could easily have degenerated into an unprofitable wrangle with an exchange of accusations and recriminations, but Paul approaches it in a manner to place it on a far higher level.¹⁷ He goes beyond superficialities to the very heart of the matter, namely, the believer's status in Christ, and thus makes it plain that his concern is not simply with the opinion which others have about him personally. He does not lay claim to integrity as a personal achievement, but attributes it to God. It is God who establishes him and them in Christ, and seals it with the Spirit.
- 10) Paul turns from the promises of God in the remote past to the present experience of the Corinthians. If God has proved faithful to his ancient promises he has also proved faithful in his present dealings with the Corinthians. The word for *establishes* was used in business law to signify a seller's guarantee to honor a contract. God is the guarantee of our life-long relationship with the Son of God.
- 11) To suspect his reliability was to cast a shadow over their own stability, for it is a case of "us with you in Christ," not "us different from you." They are united in the unchanging Son of God.
- 12) What Paul looks forward to is the time when God will bring us into the physical presence of Jesus at the resurrection of all believers (4:14). The faithful God seals his promise with the Holy Spirit.
- 13) The *seal* in antiquity was an impression made on wax by a special instrument to indicate the ownership of a document.¹⁸ The presence of the Holy Spirit is also an

¹⁶**Romans 10:4**-- For Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness to every one that believeth.

¹⁷The approach that we take to subjects often determines the spirit in which they are discussed.

¹⁸The affixing of the royal seal gave an object complete security (cf. Dan. 6:17; Mt. 27:66); letters and legal documents that had been sealed were proof from interference and forgery (cf. 1 Kings 21:8; Jer. 32:10-14; Esther 3:12); so, too, God has set his seal

earnest. We should remember that we do not belong to ourselves, but to God.¹⁹ The guarantee in Paul's day was a deposit or down-payment in pledge of payment in full. In modern Greek the word is also used of an engagement ring, which retains the idea of a guarantee or pledge of some greater thing which is yet to come.

- 14) That which is to come is of the same nature. The spiritual life of the Christian is the same in kind as his future glorified life. The Kingdom of God is a present kingdom. Nevertheless, the present gift of the Spirit is only a small fraction of the future endowment. He is the earnest of our inheritance.²⁰
- 15) God had also anointed Paul, thereby declaring another respect in which he was closely bound to Christ, "the Anointed One."

upon those who are His: they are known to Him and in Him they are secure (cf. 2 Tim. 2:19). It is with the Holy Spirit of promise that they are sealed (Eph. 1:13). The bearing of the divine seal conveys a twofold advantage: identification and protection (cf. Rev. 9:4; 7:2ff.).

¹⁹**1 Corinthians 6:19-20** -- Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God? and ye are not your own; 20 for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body.

²⁰**Ephesians 1:13-14** -- in whom ye also, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation,-- in whom, having also believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 which is an earnest of our inheritance, unto the redemption of [God's] own possession, unto the praise of his glory.