

## WHY THE DELAY? 2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-2:11

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**S**peculations had grown. Why had Paul had not come to Corinth sooner? Was he afraid to come? Was he strong in words, but weak in presence? Or on a vacation? To dispel whatever misunderstandings had developed, he explained what had been happening in his life, how he had treated the Corinthians with integrity, why his plans had changed, and what his current plans were.

### GREETINGS (1:1-2)

**1:1. Paul** identifies himself as **an apostle of Christ Jesus** (compare Eph. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1; and esp. Col. 1:1), one of thirteen special emissaries Christ ordained as the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20). The title “apostle” gave him authority over believers (Matt. 10:40) and made it clear that this epistle was more than a mere personal note (compare 1 Cor. 14:37). Paul’s apostolic position came **by the will of God**, not by human authorization, a point he argued extensively in Galatians 1:1,11-2:10. Other apostles recognized Paul’s office (Gal. 2:7-9; 2 Pet. 3:15-16), but he was appointed directly by God.

With Paul was **Timothy**, their **brother**, who served the church in Corinth (Acts 18:5). Paul had sent him to Corinth earlier (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10), but apparently Timothy had returned to Paul in the interim between this epistle and the last. The designation “**our brother**” expresses not only Paul’s own affection for Timothy, but also the attitude he hoped the Corinthians would have.

Paul wrote **to the church of God in Corinth**, the Greek city to which 1 Corinthians was also addressed. The **church**, or entire congregation, received this letter, which was probably read aloud in church meetings (compare Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27). Although Paul sometimes used the term **church** to denote the universal body of Christ throughout the world (1 Cor. 12:27; Col. 1:24), here he designated a particular local **church**. As the body of Christ, the **church** belongs only to God, and therefore is the church **of God**.

Paul was chiefly concerned with the Corinthian church in this epistle, but made it clear that all the saints throughout Achaia should read his letter. “**Saint**” in the Old Testament occasionally refers to priests, but in the New Testament it designates all believers (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2). It basically means “holy ones” or “sanctified ones.” Paul did not have a special class of believers in mind. He wrote to every believer, irrespective of spiritual condition.

**Achaia** was the Roman designation for the southern province of Greece. The Cenchranean church was also in **Achaia** (Rom. 16:1), and Paul's words suggest that other churches also existed in the region. Corinth was the regional capital (see Acts 18:12). Paul expected this epistle to be passed among local congregations, and perhaps to be copied to or by these churches.

**1:2.** Paul offered one of his common benedictions as he began this letter, hoping for **grace and peace** for the Corinthians (see also Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Phil. 1:3; compare Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4). Paul began all his canonical letters with a wish of **grace** and **peace** for his readers (compare 1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Pet. 1:2; 2 John 3; Jude 2; Rev. 1:4).

Concerning God's grace, Paul proclaims that no one can gain salvation except by God's **grace** or unmerited favor (Acts 15:11; Rom. 3:24; 4:1-10; 11:5-6; Eph. 2:5,8-9; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:7). Yet, here Paul did not speak of the initial grace believers receive that leads to conversion. He focused on continuing grace, the mercy from God that is necessary to complete the Christian life. New life in Christ cannot begin with grace but continue by human merit (Gal. 2:20; 3:3,5).

Paul's use of "**peace**" derived from the frequent use of "peace" (*shalom*) in the Old Testament to mean "wellbeing" or "wholeness." He wanted the Corinthians not only to be redeemed from their sins, but also to receive the benefits of being in Christ. Peace with God and with other human beings is one such benefit (Mark 9:50; Luke 2:14; John 14:27; Acts 10:36; Rom. 5:1; 8:6; 12:18; 14:19; 1 Cor. 7:15; 2 Cor. 13:11; Eph. 2:14-18; 4:3; 6:15,23; Phil. 4:7; Col. 1:20; 3:15; 1 Thess. 5:13; 2 Thess. 3:16).

Both **grace and peace** come from God **the Father** and his Son **the Lord Jesus Christ**. This formula is not Trinitarian, but elsewhere, similar benedictions also include the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:13; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:1-2).

## IMPORTANT EXPLANATIONS (1:3-2:5)

Paul began to explain why he had delayed visiting them. His explanation divides into two parts: Paul's ministry of hardship (1:3-11); and Paul's delayed visit (1:12-2:5)

### Paul's Ministry Of Hardship (1:3-11)

Paul had not neglected the Corinthians. In the ministry of the gospel, he had suffered in ways that benefited them and honored God. He described these hardships to elicit sympathy.

**1:3-4.** Paul began describing his hardships on a positive, exuberant note. The formula **praise be to . . . God** derived from the Old Testament (Pss. 41:13; 65:20; 67:36; 72:18; 89:52; 106:48; 150:6), but Paul modified it to express distinctively Christian praise. Not only is **God** praised, but he is **the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**. This modification demonstrates that Paul saw Christianity as one with Old

Testament religion, but not precisely the same. Christ had become the center of true belief. New Testament believers relate to God as the one who sent Christ.

Paul added that the **Father** has **compassion** and **all comfort**. This praise also derives from the Old Testament (Ps. 103:13,17; Isa. 51:12; 66:13). **Compassion** denotes God's mercy and his concern for the plight of those who suffer (2 Sam. 24:14; 1 Kgs. 8:50; 2 Chr. 21:13; 2 Chr. 30:9; Neh. 9:19,27,28,31; Pss. 25:6; 40:11; 51:1; 69:16; 79:8; 103:4; 106:46; 119:77,156; 144:8-9; Zech. 1:16). **Comfort** is what God gives to those who suffer (Pss. 23:4; 86:17; 94:19; 119:50; Isa. 40:1; 57:18; 66:11). These terms were appropriate because Paul was about to describe his own **troubles** in suffering for the gospel.

Paul suffered and was comforted partly **so that** he could bring **comfort** to others **in any trouble**. His suffering in ministry was an act of service to the Corinthians. Having suffered and been comforted, Paul could **comfort** others with the **comfort** he had **received from God**.

Paul's use of the first person (**we**) suggests that he thought primarily about himself and his company in this passage, but the principle applies to all believers. God permits his servants to suffer, and then comforts them so that they may in turn comfort others (compare Luke 22:32).

**1:5.** Paul explained (**for**) how he knew this principle to be true. Christians are so intimately joined with Christ that experiences **flow** from Christ, to believers, through believers, and to others. The **sufferings of Christ** extend from Christ to his followers. **Believers "fill up . . . Christ's afflictions"** because "**the church**" is "**his body**" (Col. 1:24; compare Phil. 3:10). This was plain enough from the hardships in Paul's own ministry. Yet, just as Christ received joy (Heb. 12:2) and glory (1 Pet. 1:21) in his resurrection, and sent the Holy Spirit of comfort (Acts 9:31 NASB), **comfort** also **overflows** to believers **through Christ**. In union with Christ, we face the hardships sin and death, but also receive compassionate encouragement from God.

**1:6.** Because the Corinthians benefited when the apostles were **distressed**, Paul's experiences had been **for** the Corinthians' **comfort**. As he ministered at great personal cost, he brought **comfort and salvation** to those who heard his message. At the same time, when Christ comforted the apostles, they received the encouragement they needed to bring the Corinthians **comfort**. Whether Paul and other apostles experienced distress or comfort, the Corinthians and others received encouragement and comfort.

Further, the **comfort** believers received from Paul's suffering **produce[d] . . . patient endurance** in the midst of their own **sufferings**. Christians must remain faithful to Christ no matter how difficult circumstances become. **Endurance** (*hypomone*) describes how believers must continue in faithful service to the end (Rom. 2:7; 8:25; 2 Thess. 1:4-5; 1 Tim. 6:11-15; Heb. 10:36-39; 12:1; Jas. 1:3-4). Yet, **endurance** will not last unless it is **patient**. In this sense, patience is the ability to wait unwaveringly for Christ to return and end all suffering. **Comfort** enables believers to find relief and energy, which in turn makes them **patient** as they endure suffering.

**1:7.** The Corinthians faced trials, disappointments and conflicts. But believed that they had saving faith in Christ, and that they would patiently endure. He firmly hoped this because he knew that the Corinthians **share[d] in** the apostles' **comfort** as well as their **sufferings**. So long as Christ comforted the Corinthians, they would be able to endure their suffering to the end. Knowing this, Paul had great confidence in their salvation.

**1:8-9a.** Paul continued to assure the Corinthians of his intense affection for them (**brothers**; see also 8:1; 13:11) despite his delayed visit, and explained the delay. He did not want them **to be uninformed about the hardships** he **suffered**. Whatever they had heard, Paul had actually been in great hardship while ministering **in** the Roman province **Asia** (modern-day Turkey).

Paul's description of his sufferings revealed the depth of his heart and appealed to the Corinthians for sympathy. He had been **under great pressure**, and the problems had been **beyond his ability to endure**. The endurance necessary for Christians to embrace (1:6) had seemed to be slipping away from Paul during these times. We cannot be sure what hardships Paul had in mind, but we know that during his ministry he endured: riots (Acts 19:23-41); vicious attacks (1 Cor. 15:23); imprisonment (2 Cor. 11:23) and physical illness (2 Cor. 12:7-10). He may have had these or other hardships in mind. In all events, the problems had been so great that Paul had **despaired even of life**, losing hope that he would survive some of these ordeals. In his discouragement, he had **felt the sentence of death** in his heart (1:9a), almost succumbing to defeat.

**1:9b-11.** Still, Paul could see a brighter side. He reflected on past events in two ways: 1) God had permitted this suffering so that Paul and other apostles **might not rely on [them]selves but on God**. Paul recognized the temptation to be self-reliant with which believers constantly struggled. Only when circumstances had exceeded his own ability had Paul learned to rely **on God**.

Paul described God as the **one who raises the dead**. To be sure, he alluded to the fact that God the Father raised Christ from the dead as the firstfruits of a great resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20,23). But he drew upon this truth because his sufferings in the past had brought him to feel a sentence of death had been placed upon him (1:8-9). Through his trials Paul had realized that God's power to raise the dead had significance beyond Christ's resurrection and the general bodily resurrection of the last day (1 Cor. 15:52). God was able day by day to make the power of Christ's resurrection evident in believers' lives (Phil. 3:10).

Next, Paul praised God's past actions. God **had delivered** Paul and those with him from **deadly peril**. This declaration follows the Old Testament form of a traditional thanksgiving hymn (Pss. 18:2,3,18-19,27,35; 30:2,3; 32:7; 34:4,6,7,17-22; 40:1-3; 116:6-8). Continuing this traditional form of praise, Paul expressed confidence that God would **deliver** him in the future (compare Pss. 16:8-11; 22:22-31; 23:1-6; 27:1-6; 55:16-19,22; 62:1-2,5-8; 91:1-16; 121:1-8; 125:1-3; 131:2-3). Experiencing God's blessings makes one confident that God will protect and save in the future.

Turning toward the future, Paul stated that he and other apostles had put their **hope** in the belief that God would **continue to deliver**. **Hope** in this sense is the emotional strength to persevere in difficulty because of a heightened expectation of better things in the future.

Finally, Paul acknowledged the ultimate purpose behind his future sufferings and deliverances: God's glory. Paul drew the Corinthians into his perspective by acknowledging that they would surely **help** him in the future by offering their **prayers** to God. As a result (**then**), **many** would **give thanks** to God for God's response to their prayers. Many believers would be grateful **for the gracious favor** God would grant when he answered **the prayers of many**. The Corinthians were to have a right attitude toward Paul's absence by remembering that their sympathetic prayers helped him in his suffering and glorified God.

### **PAUL'S DELAYED VISIT (1:12-2:11)**

Apparently, Paul's delay had called his sincerity into doubt. Paul wanted the Corinthians to remember his integrity, and to accept his good intentions toward them despite this delay.

#### **Paul's Clear Conscience (1:12-14)**

Before explaining his altered travel plans, Paul defended his integrity.

**1:12a.** Paul claimed one thing about which he would **boast**. Not all boasting is wrong. Proud or arrogant boasting is sin, but here Paul merely meant that he had confidence. His **conscience testifie[d]** that he had ministered with **holiness and sincerity that were from God**. A person's conscience can condemn or justify his or her actions (Rom. 2:14-16; 1 Cor. 8:7,10,12), but that conscience cannot be the ultimate standard of judgment (1 Cor. 4:4). Even so, in this matter Paul's conscience was clear.

Paul had ministered with **holiness** and **sincerity** everywhere. "**Holiness**" here describes the life of a believer who remains separated from the world's corruption. "**Sincerity**" means "the absence of deceit and hypocrisy." These traits characterized Paul's service **in the world**. More importantly for this epistle, **holiness** and **sincerity** characterized **especially** his **relations with** the Corinthians. Unlike those who questioned his motives, he was above reproach.

**1:12b.** Elaborating on the integrity of his ministry, Paul asserted that he had not conducted himself **according to worldly wisdom**. In light of 1:13, this expression indicates that Paul did not use sophistry or worldly arrogance in his ministry. He did not trick or overpower anyone with the world's wisdom (compare 1 Cor. 2:1-5). Paul reaffirmed the antithesis he saw between the world's wisdom, so popular in Corinth (1 Cor. 3:18-23), and his own ministry that was **according to God's grace**. Paul's gospel ministry rested on Christ's death and resurrection, which even the simplest minds could understand (1 Cor. 2:1-5,15-16; 15:1-4).

**1:13a.** To justify (**for**) this statement, Paul reminded the Corinthians that he never wrote **anything** they could not **read or understand**. This statement should not be taken absolutely (compare 2 Pet. 3:16). Nevertheless, Paul's message was very clear compared to the sophistry and obscurity sinful human wisdom. Paul sought to make his teachings plain. His refusal to employ pretentious, worldly wisdom strongly evidenced his integrity.

**1:13b-14.** In fact, Paul was so sincere that he had **hope**. He believed that the Corinthians understood **in part** that he was a trustworthy leader. Still, he wanted them to **understand** this **fully**, so that they could **boast of** Paul **just as** Paul could **boast of** them. Again, "**boast**" did not connote sinful arrogance, but appropriate confidence. Paul wanted the Corinthians to take joy and confidence in their relationship with him. He himself planned to **boast** of them **in the day of the Lord Jesus**, the day when Jesus will return in judgment.

### **PAUL'S ORIGINAL TRAVEL PLANS (1:15-17)**

Paul continued to defend his integrity by explaining the sequence of events that led him to alter his original travel plans.

**1:15.** Paul had previously written that he would travel from Ephesus to Macedonia, and then to Corinth. He also had said that he might spend the winter months with the Corinthians, and that he did not want to see them simply in passing (1 Cor. 16:5-8). After writing 1 Corinthians, however, Paul evidently changed his mind, planning an additional but brief visit with the Corinthians prior to visiting Macedonia. He felt comfortable changing his plans because that his conscience in the matter was clear (**because I was confident of this** with 1:12).

Paul plainly stated two intentions that displayed the sincerity of his original plan. On the one hand, he had **planned to visit** the Corinthians **first**. They had been at the top of his list. On the other hand, He wanted his ministry to **benefit** them **twice**.

**1:16.** Paul had planned **to visit** Corinth **on his way to Macedonia**, returning to Corinth as he came **back . . . from Macedonia**. He hoped that after this second visit the Corinthians would **send** him on his **way to Judea** (compare 1 Cor. 16:3-6).

To understand Paul's explanation it helps to have an overview of his travel plans and arrangements:

1. Paul originally intended to spend time at Corinth after visiting Macedonia (1 Cor. 16:5-6).
2. For some unknown reason, he subsequently decided to include an additional but brief visit to Corinth prior to his trip to Macedonia and Corinth (2 Cor. 1:15-16).
3. This additional and brief visit to Corinth was so painful (2:1) that Paul probably never made it to Macedonia. Instead, he found his way to Troas, hoping to meet Titus there before the trip to Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:12-13).

4. Not finding Titus in Troas (2 Cor. 2:13), Paul went to Macedonia (2 Cor. 7:5; 9:2-4). Because his first trip to Corinth had been so painful, he determined not to return to Corinth after visiting Macedonia (2 Cor. 1:23). He probably prolonged his stay in Macedonia into the time period that he had originally planned for his return to Corinth (i.e. the winter [1 Cor. 16:6]).
5. Later, Titus met Paul in Macedonia and informed him that the Corinthians wanted him to return (7:6-7).
6. While still in Macedonia, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians (2 Cor. 9:2-4). In this letter, he expressed his desire to return to his original plan — he would visit Corinth after visiting Macedonia (2 Cor. 13:1; compare 1 Cor. 16:5-7). He hoped that the Corinthians would then send him **to Judea** with funds collected for the impoverished church there (8:1-7; compare 1 Cor. 16:1-6).

**1:17.** Even after Paul's short visit to Corinth that had gone badly, the Corinthians expected Paul to return to Corinth after visiting Macedonia. His determination to remain in Macedonia rather than to return to Corinth caused misunderstandings between Paul and the Corinthian church. It seems that someone had accused him of duplicity and frivolity. Thus, Paul rhetorically asked if he had **planned** his travels **lightly** or in a **worldly manner**. Had he simply followed his own thoughts as they crossed his mind, or had he sought the will of God for his ministry? To put it another way, had Paul said **in the same breath**, "**Yes, yes' and 'No, no.**"

This last expression parallels Christ's teaching: "Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'" (Matt. 5:37; compare Jas. 5:12b). Paul may have expressed himself in this way because his opponents accused him of violating this teaching of Jesus. After all, Paul had told them he was coming, but he did not.

### **WITNESSES TO PAUL'S INTEGRITY (1:18-22)**

Paul responded to the charge that he had misled the Corinthians. He appealed to his track record, to God as witnesses to his integrity, and to his pure motives.

**1:18.** Paul began his response to the charge of duplicity with an oath: **as surely as God is faithful**. The charges against him appeared so serious that Paul felt the need to authenticate his claims as strongly as possible. His oath before God witnessed to his truthfulness and integrity.

Paul employed a type of argument common among Jewish Rabbis in his day. He argued from a much greater or weightier matter to a lighter or less important matter. He called the Corinthians to evaluate the accusation of duplicity in a small matter (his delayed visit) in light of his integrity in a great matter (preaching the gospel). Since he had maintained integrity in the greater matter, his integrity in the smaller matter should not have been questioned.

**1:19-20.** Paul supported (**for**) his oath by summarizing an important feature of what **was preached among** the Corinthians. He, **Silas and Timothy** had preached **the Son**

of God, Jesus Christ, and Christ did not waver between “**Yes**’ and ‘**No**.” There was no duplicity in Christ or in the message about Christ.

Paul added that in Christ his message had **always been “Yes.”** Paul knew this statement was enigmatic, so he explained (**for**) his meaning. **No matter how many promises God has made** throughout the history of the Bible, one thing can be relied upon fully: **In Christ . . . they are “Yes.”** Paul frequently reminded his readers of Old Testament promises God made to his people (Rom. 1:2; 4:13-21; 9:4-9; 15:8; Gal. 3:14-22,29; 4:23-28; Eph. 2:12; 6:2; Tit. 1:1-2). He knew that immeasurable blessings had been promised to Christians as heirs of Old Testament promises (Gal 3:6-29). In the Christian faith these promises were not partly affirmed and partly denied. On the contrary, the great covenant promises throughout the Bible are all fulfilled in Christ.

Of course, the Corinthians probably had no problem with Christ’s own sincerity. So, Paul drew a strong connection between himself and Christ. Since Paul represented Christ, Paul’s gospel ministry could be summed up as an “**Amen**” **spoken by Paul to the glory of God.** Put simply, Paul’s preaching affirmed the sincere and reliable affirmation of God’s promises in Christ.

**1:21-22.** To defend his ministry further, Paul reminded the Corinthians that God himself had anointed Paul and his company to their task, and had guaranteed their participation in the gospel promises. These assertions anticipated his statement in 1:23: “**I call God as my witness.**” Though he did not use that specific language in this verse, his sentiment was the same. The evidence of God’s **anoint[ing]**, **seal**, and **Spirit** proved Paul’s integrity. Likewise, the same **God** made the Corinthians, Paul, and Paul’s company **stand firm in Christ**, so Corinthians stood on no more solid footing, and they could not claim superiority over Paul.

While all Christians have God’s **anoint[ing]**, **seal**, and **Spirit**, just as all Christians **stand firm in Christ**, Paul applied these first three statements mainly to himself and to his company in order to defend their integrity. The logical connections among the terms “**makes . . . stand firm**,” “**anointed**,” “**set . . . seal**,” and “**put . . . Spirit**” have been widely disputed. For our purposes, we will simply treat each term separately.

First, God made them all **stand firm in Christ**. “**Stand firm**” (*bebaioo*) describes believers’ faithful devotion to Christ (1 Cor. 1:6,8; Col. 2:7). Instead of letting them waver or stumble, God had empowered Paul and the Corinthians to remain committed to Christ. The perseverance of those who were taught by Paul indicated God’s blessing, and validated Paul’s ministry.

Second, God had also **anointed** Paul and his company. In the Old Testament anointing rituals symbolized the offices of priest (Exod. 28:41; 30:30; 40:13,15; Lev. 4:3,5,16; 1 Chr. 29:22) and king (1 Sam. 15:1,17; 2 Sam. 2:4,7; 3:39; 5:3; 19:10; 22:51; 1 Kgs. 1:34,39,45; 19:15,16), and sometimes prophet (1 Kgs. 19:16). These Old Testament shadows anticipated the spiritual anointing that comes on all true believers. All those who are **in Christ** (the Anointed One) are themselves **anointed** with the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20,27) by virtue of their union with Christ. This anointing of the Holy

Spirit entails the Spirit's indwelling presence and empowerment (compare Rom. 8:9; 15:13; Eph. 3:16,20). The Spirit's anointing also empowers special service (see Acts; 4:31,33). Paul claimed this special type of anointing in connection with his preaching (Rom. 15:18-19; 1 Cor. 2:4; 1 Thess. 1:5), and also attributed it to Timothy (2 Tim. 1:6-7). The anointing to which Paul referred here was probably general (shared by all believers) because all believers also **stand firm in Christ**, and all receive God's **seal** and **Spirit**. Paul explicitly mentioned only "**us**" (Paul and his company) because he was in the process of defending his and their integrity. The Corinthians certainly assumed that they themselves had been **anointed**; Paul asserted, "So have we," proving that Paul's ministry was sincere and blessed of God.

Third, God had **set his seal of ownership** on Paul and his company, just as people in Paul's day placed their seals on objects to indicate their ownership. This sealing accompanied the reception of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30). That Paul and his company belonged to God was evident in the blessings God had given to them, especially the blessing of the Holy Spirit manifested in the power of the gospel (Acts 1:8; Rom. 15:13,19; 1 Cor. 2:4; 2 Cor. 3:5-18; Eph. 3:16; 1 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 1:7).

Fourth, God **put his Spirit in their hearts as a deposit**. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of Paul and his company, as in the Corinthians' hearts, was a **deposit** ("pledge" NASB; "first installment" NRSV; "guarantee" NKJV) of the eternal reward they would receive at Christ's return (1 Cor. 3:13-14; Eph. 1:11-14; Col. 3:23-24; Heb. 9:15; 10:35-39; 1 Pet. 1:3-5; Rev. 22:12). This **deposit guarantee[d]** the full inheritance which was **to come** (compare Eph. 1:13-14). Because the Holy Spirit is a down payment, Christians never need to fear that the Holy Spirit will utterly leave them. Although life can become difficult and believers may quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19), the Spirit of God will remain with true believers as the proof of salvation to come.

## PAUL'S MOTIVATION (1:23-2:4)

Paul augmented his earlier explanation of his altered travel plans (1:15-17). He took a second oath ("**God as my witness**" [compare 1:18]), swearing that his motivations were pure (1:23-2:4).

**1:23.** Paul **did not return** in order **to spare** the Corinthians. He did not state explicitly from what he hoped to spare the church at Corinth, but we can infer from the following verses that he had some harsh rebukes to give them (compare 1 Cor. 4:21). He also mentioned in 2:1 that he had determined **not to make another painful visit** to the Corinthians.

Teaching and correction have to be timely as well as true. From Paul's perspective, the Corinthians had received enough rebukes from him for the time being. They deserved more reprimands, but the time was not yet appropriate. Therefore, Paul avoided confrontation by delaying his formerly planned return.

**1:24.** Even when Paul had corrected the Corinthians, he had not **lord[ed]** his

authority **over** their **faith**, ruling over or controlling them. On the contrary, he tried to **work with** them **for** their own **joy** (compare Phil. 1:25; 2 John 12). Paul desired happiness for the Corinthians, and he knew that they could **stand firm** in the blessings of Christ only **by faith** (Rom. 11:20).

**2:1.** Returning to his main idea, Paul elaborated further on 1:23. He determined **not to make another painful visit**. The pain of rebuke is necessary at times in Christian relationships but not always appropriate, even when sin and error persist in the church. Paul practiced what he told the Colossians: “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Col. 4:6).

**2:2.** Not only did Paul change his plans to spare the Corinthians (1:23), but also for his own sake. He feared that if he **grieved** the Corinthians further, he would have no one **left to make him glad**. Paul needed to be encouraged and strengthened by the church, and he depended on the Corinthians’ love. He did not need grief from the Corinthians added to his other difficulties.

**2:3.** Paul anticipated a potential question. If he needed to be encouraged by the Corinthians, why did he write so many harsh rebukes in his letter to them? Paul responded that he **wrote** to deal with problems from a distance **so that when he came** the church at Corinth would not distress him. Their proper role in Paul’s life was **to make him rejoice**. He had written previously about problems so that his face-to-face meetings could be positive. Once the Corinthians submitted to his written corrections, Paul had **had confidence** they **would all share his joy**.

**2:4.** Explaining further (**for**), Paul insisted that he **wrote** his letter of correction **out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears**. Paul did not like rebuking the Corinthians. He grieved for the harm they did themselves. He wrote about difficult things so that they could **know the depth of his love for** them. As the proverb says, “Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses” (Prov. 27:6).

### **A BRIEF APPLICATION (2:5-11)**

When Paul mentioned the grief he avoided bringing the Corinthians, he remembered that he had earlier dealt with a case of sin in their church with uncompromising severity. He may have had in mind the case of a man cohabitating with his step-mother (1 Cor. 5:1-13) or some other severe sin. Whatever the case, Paul had insisted on church discipline, raising questions about his motivations. If Paul really cared about the Corinthians’ joy, why had he judged the sinner so harshly?

**2:5.** Paul explained his strong prior actions. The man had **caused grief**, not to Paul, but to **all of** the church in Corinth. Paul acted firmly against this man in reaction to the widespread trouble the man had caused in the congregation. Knowing that not everyone in the church had been incensed by the man’s sin, Paul quickly qualified the scale of this congregational trouble. He did not want to **put it too severely** or to overstate the

situation, so he said that all were grieved only **to some extent**.

**2:6.** Despite his firm stance in the past, Paul realized that the situation had changed. **The punishment** or church discipline had been **inflicted . . . by the majority** of the church, and the discipline had been effective (**sufficient**).

The New Testament instructs the church to exercise church discipline (Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:4-5,9-13; 2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Tim. 1:20). Here as in other passages (1 Cor. 5:4-5; 1 Tim. 1:20), the apostle made it plain that one purpose of church discipline is the restoration of the sinner. This purpose had been accomplished.

**2:7-8.** Apparently, having once decided to discipline, some within the church were determined not to grant relief or restoration. But Paul insisted that the church **ought to forgive and comfort** the man they had disciplined. Why? Paul desired to protect the church from too much grief. He did not want the man to **be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow**.

Sorrow should not always be avoided. In fact, it often leads to the positive result of repentance (2 Cor. 7:9-11). Even so, once repentance has occurred, a serious danger lurks for those who are not restored to good standing in the church: they run the risk of too much sorrow. Discouragement of this sort may actually lead the weakened believer into even worse sin. **Therefore**, Paul **urge[d]** the Corinthians **to reaffirm** their **love** for the disciplined man.

**2:9.** To avoid any misunderstandings, Paul explained that he had instructed the church to discipline the man **to see if** the congregation **would stand the test**, if they would **be obedient in everything**, i.e. even in difficult matters. Apparently, inflicting discipline had not been easy. It was a **test** of their faithfulness to Christ and to Paul. God calls on believers to face difficult choices obediently to prove the true character of their faith (compare Gen. 22:1,12; Exod. 16:4; Judg. 2:21-22; Jer. 20:12; Zech. 13:9; 2 Cor. 13:5; Jas. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:7; Rev. 2:10). The Corinthians had passed this test by disciplining the man (2:6).

**2:10.** Paul affirmed his intention to forgive the man in question. The NIV obscures the apostle's thought by inserting "if". More literally it reads, "The one you forgive anything, I also [forgive]" ("But whom you forgive anything, I forgive also" NASB; "Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive" NRSV; "Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive" NKJV). Paul was not waiting for the Corinthians to forgive the man before he forgave the man. He simply stated that as the Corinthians treated this man with mercy, they could be assured that he did as well. Perhaps some in the church hesitated to lift the discipline Paul had ordered for fear of trespassing against Paul. Paul assured them that forgiveness agreed with his apostolic authority.

Paul gave two reasons for forgiving the man. First, he forgave **in the sight of Christ** (i.e. in good conscience before Christ) **for your sake** (i.e. for the benefit of the Corinthian church). He desired their benefit and joy (1:3-7,23-24; 2:1-4), and so determined to restore the wayward brother.

Second, Paul forgave so that **Satan might not outwit** him (Paul), his company, and perhaps the Corinthians as well. Paul mentioned Satan ten times in his epistles (Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 5:5; 7:5; 2 Cor. 2:11; 11:14; 12:7; 1 Thess. 2:18; 2 Thess. 2:9; 1 Tim. 1:20; 5:15). He knew that Satan was clever, but here he acknowledged that Satan could be resisted and outwitted by careful believers. He suspected that Satan would find opportunity in prolonged discipline to discourage the disciplined man and to harden the congregation's heart. Paul's concern regarding Satan was justified (**for**) by the fact that they **were not unaware of his schemes**. In other words, he and his company, and perhaps the Corinthian believers, had experienced enough of Satan's temptations to take notice of this possibility. Paul probably intended his forgiveness of the man to encourage the Corinthians to forgive the man, and thus to thwart Satan.

Paul had not duplicitously delayed his visit. His forgiveness of this man demonstrated his good intention toward the church.

## DIGGING DEEPER

### Comfort (1:3-7)

Both the noun translated "comfort" (*paraklesis*) and the verb (*parakaleo*) carry many different meanings in the New Testament. In the NIV, they are often also translated "encourage(ment)" (Acts 4:36; 13:15; 15:32; Rom. 12:8; 15:4,5; Eph. 6:22; Phil. 2:1; Col. 4:8; 1 Thess. 3:2; 4:18; 5:11; 2 Thess. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:2; Heb. 12:5). The verb frequently also appears as "urge" (Acts 27:34; Rom. 12:1; 15:30; 1 Cor. 4:16; 16:12,15; 2 Cor. 2:8; 6:1; 9:5; 12:18; Eph. 4:1; 1 Thess. 4:1,10; 1 Tim. 1:3; 2:1; Heb. 13:19). In the NIV, they appear as "comfort" mainly in 2 Corinthians (thirteen times throughout 2 Cor. 1:3,4,5,6,7; 2:7; 7:6,7). Only five times outside this epistle does the NIV translate these words with the meaning "comfort" (Matt. 2:18; 5:4; Luke 6:24; 16:25; Acts 20:12).

Keys to Paul's meaning here may be found in 1:6, in which Paul wrote that **comfort** produced **endurance**, and in 1:4, where he wrote of comforting **those in . . . trouble**. He probably did not refer to comfort akin to "a pleasant and relaxed feeling." Instead, "comfort" should be understood as "consolation and encouragement" in the face of hardship, as when one "comforts" another in the midst of loss or suffering.

### Day of the Lord Jesus (1:14)

The Old Testament frequently spoke of the day of the Lord as the day when God would come as a warrior king to defeat all his enemies in a single day and to bestow incredible blessings on his people (Isa. 2:11,12,17; 3:18; 4:2; 13:6,9,13; 24:21; 27:12,13; 34:8; 61:2; Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1,11,31; 3:14; Amos 5:18,20; Obad. 1:15; Zeph. 1:7,14,15; Mal. 4:5). The blessings for God's people included the restoration of the Davidic kingdom to Israel in such a way that it would last permanently and perfectly.

In the New Testament the people of God maintained this hope in the day of the Lord, but they recognized that Jesus had been revealed as the Davidic king under whom the kingdom would be restored (Matt. 7:21-22; 10:15; 11:22,24; 12:36; 24:42; John 6:39,40,44,54; 11:24; 12:48; Acts 2:20; Rom. 2:5,16; 1 Cor. 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; Eph.

4:30; Phil. 1:6,10; 2:16; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Tim. 1:18; 4:8; 2 Pet. 2:9; 3:7,10,12,18; 1 John 4:17; Rev. 16:14). As a result, they trusted that Jesus would be the divine warrior leading the heavenly troops into battle to defeat God's enemies on the day of the Lord, and that the blessings of the restored kingdom would be realized in him. Thus, the New Testament properly identifies Jesus as the "Lord" in the phrase "the day of the Lord" (compare 1 Cor. 1:8).

## ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

1. To whom did Paul write this letter? What was his relationship with them like at the time? Why?
2. What tone did Paul take with his readers? Why did Paul take this approach? Is this the approach you would have taken if you had been an apostle dealing with a sinning church? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever been in situations similar to this one? Were you in Paul's shoes, or the Corinthians'? How did you respond in this situation? Will you respond differently in the future?
4. Why do believers suffer? Is suffering something for which we should be ashamed? What effect does suffering have in believers' lives?
5. How do Christ's sufferings flow over into our lives? What is the significance of this?
6. What did Paul mean by the word "comfort"? Does this idea seem very important to Paul in this argument? Explain your answer.
7. Is despair a sin? Defend your answer.
8. How effective did Paul think prayer was? How effective do you think prayer is? Does your own life reflect the importance you place on prayer?
9. Why did Paul boast in the Corinthians? From what you know of them from Paul's letters, would you have boasted in them? Why do you suppose Paul had so much trouble dealing with them?
10. How did Paul's reliance on God's faithfulness affect his attitude toward the Corinthians? How did he hope it would affect their attitude toward him?
11. Who makes believers stand firm? What confidence can you gain from this knowledge?
12. What motivated Paul to forbear disciplining the Corinthians and to respond to them as he did? What generally motivates your dealings with difficult personalities in the church?

13. For what reasons do you think church discipline ought to be employed? What is the church's responsibility after disciplining someone? Why? Does your church have a formal disciplinary process? If so, what is it? Have you ever seen it in action?
14. Does this seem to you to be a strange way to begin an authoritative letter? Having read this much of the epistle, what tone do you expect to find in the following chapters?