

“Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians — Grace Reigns Through It All”

Introduction:

- ***It is our privilege today to open Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. This letter is truly special in several ways which we shall see today and in following studies here in God's word. The mark of Almighty God is on these inspired words open to us today. My goal is that we might see it and be blessed in a special way by that today and always. One sentence at a time, as is our habit here, will be opened for your benefit and blessing such as it was for the Corinthian believers so very long ago.***
- ***The overall purpose of the letter was to continue the message of the first letter since his objectives in that letter had only partially been reached. Other letters and messengers had told him what the several issues were and that motivated the writing of this one.***

One commentator (Thomas Constable, Plano Bible Chapel) tells it well:

- ***“Returning to Ephesus on his third journey Paul made that city his base of operations for almost three years (A.D. 53-56). There he heard disquieting news about immorality in the Corinthian church. Therefore he wrote a letter urging the believers not to tolerate such conduct in their midst. Paul referred to this letter in 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:9). It is not extant (still in existence) today. Then he heard from "Chloe's people" that factions had developed in the church (1:11). He also received a letter from the church in Corinth requesting his guidance in certain matters (7:1). These matters were: marriage, divorce, food offered to idols, the exercise of spiritual gifts in the church, and the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Those who carried this letter also reported other disturbing conditions in the church (5:1; 16:17). These conditions were: the condoning rather than disciplining of immorality, Christians suing one another in the civil courts, and disorders in the church meetings. These factors led Paul to compose a second letter to this church: 1 Corinthians. In it he dealt with the problem of factions, promised to visit them soon, and said that he was sending Timothy to Corinth (chs. 1—4).” (See Thomas Constable's commentaries for this and other valuable notes)***
- ***The central themes in the letter are these:***

- ***Paul the Man, His Ministry, and His Message***
- ***What it means to be a Christian, using himself as our example***
- ***Practically speaking, what Christian doctrine should mean to us all.***

- ***The emphases are, as Thomas Constable puts it in his excellent commentary available online:***
 - ***"These two epistles constitute the most telling condemnation of arrogance, self-promotion, boasting, and self-confidence in the Pauline corpus; conversely, they describe in practical terms the nature of Christian life and witness, emphasizing service, self-denial, purity, and weakness as the matrix in which God displays his strength. Perhaps the high-water mark is the emphasis on love as 'the most excellent way' (1 Cor. 12:31 – 13:13) all Christians must pursue."***

- ***Interestingly, Constable who is so well versed in scripture, leaves out the central term of the apostle in his description, the word "grace". JUST ONE VERSE FOR AN EXAMPLE IS THIS ONE FROM OUR TEACHING TODAY (HOW WONDERFUL IS THIS?)***

2 Cor. 1:12 For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.

Our Outline Today: "Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians — Grace Reigns Through It All"

- ***Paul's Salutation Says It All in Few Words, Grace Reigns!***
- ***The Apostle Was Comforted That His Sufferings Were for Our Sakes***
- ***His Sacrifices for the Truth Must Therefore Be Made Known to the Church***
- ***The Lord God Still Works Through His Word of Grace Today***
- ***The Ministry of Grace and Truth Rests In the Hands of His Chosen Ones***

I. Paul's Salutation Says It All in Few Words, Grace Reigns!

- ***Paul's own introduction to this letter used the words that were most important to the apostle:***

[READ] 2 Cor. 1:1-2

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

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

- “Paul, [an] apostle of Jesus Christ”: ***The manuscripts here read simply: “Paul, apostle of Jesus Christ”. There is much power in simplicity of speech and few words.***
- “by the will of God”: ***So the Lord God was his witness. He needed no other, as Luther said, “So help me God”.***
- “and Timothy our brother”: ***Timothy was Paul’s constant and faithful companion.***
- “unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia”: ***Written to the called out ones of God, the church which is his body, dwelling in Corinth and the surrounding area.***
- “Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ”: ***This is Paul’s classic beginning and ending and so it is here in this letter as in nearly all of his. He called this his “mark” (see 2 Thess. 3:17).***
 - ***Is it not clear that he is writing from a position of authority and power that we do not feel we have when we write a letter of encouragement and exhortation. But he did begin with “Paul, [an] apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God...”. So he is writing with the full authority given by the risen and ascended Christ, and he begins the letter in this fashion to set forth a major part of his reason for writing both of these letters, that his apostolic authority as apostle of the Gentiles has been challenged and that that challenge shall not be allowed to stand.***
 - ***Take note of the wording here, a salutation that is common to Paul’s letters and therefore so well known, but perhaps not taken to heart as to its actual meaning and intent. Have you wondered what Paul meant in writing these words? Have you ever written anything similar to this? Perhaps you may have written “grace and peace to you”. But he adds something extremely important, “... from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” What was his intent here?***

- ***My exhortation to all hearing me today is that you take this to heart. For many do not and will not receive Paul's teaching as the word of Almighty God. It was true then as well and that is one of the reasons he wrote this letter. Many do not receive Paul's apostleship or message as it truly is stated here so clearly as the will of God for us Gentiles under grace. Some in the assembly in Corinth were of this sort and it grieved the apostle's heart very much indeed.***

II. The Apostle Was Comforted That His Sufferings Were for Our Sakes:

- ***But, perhaps remarkably, at least to our eyes and ears, are the words that follow, words that we might not have expected at all considering how he had begun the letter. For these are words that would strike us to the core if we knew well the man Paul as surely the recipients of this letter did. I believe some were in tears as this letter was read to them. For they did remember well what he wrote of here concerning their shared history together:***

[READ] 2 Cor. 1:3-7

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

4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

6 And whether we be afflicted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation.

7 And our hope of you *is* steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so *shall* ye be also of the consolation.

- ***“Blessed be God who comforts us”, who is “the God of all comfort”: This is a most blessed statement indeed, and provides much comfort to those with heavy hearts as Paul knew so well. He is explaining here his position as the one to offer God's grace and peace and also comfort. Grace and peace may not always strike to the heart of those suffering but comfort surely always does for that is its blessedness indeed.***
- ***Paul had received this comfort and now possessed it, he testifies, to share with others. Do you hear this? It is really quite astounding when we think about it. When the Lord comforts us, then we have***

supply of that same comfort to share with others! But the next verse, verse 5 adds a foundational truth here that makes such a difference, "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ". He writes concerning the balance the Lord promises to provide if we will receive what he offers. This balance is between his suffering and the Lord's comfort and here he explains that the latter was directly proportional to the former! Now this is a profound and critically important teaching indeed for our understanding. And the rest of the letter will explain why this teaching is so very important. And that is due to the weight of that teaching yet to come here and the sheer burden of that for the apostle for those whom he held so dearly in his heart.

III. His Sacrifices for the Truth Must Therefore Be Made Known to the Church:

- ***To do this he must remind them of shared history and even more than they had shared with him, for his history regarding his care for the churches, his ministry of the Lord to sacrifice all for them:***

[READ] 2 Cor. 1:8-10

8 For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:

9 But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead:

10 Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;

- ***Now Paul provides the historical and biographical background that he does not want the Corinthians to forget though they surely knew it already so well, if they would only receive it fully:***

"This is, indeed, a theme which provides a key to the whole epistle. Is Paul assailed by anguish of spirit? It is God who always leads him in triumph in Christ (3:13ff.). 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.). Is the Apostle always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake? It is that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in his mortal flesh (4:10ff.). Is the outward man decaying? Yet the inward man is renewed day by day (4:16). ... The climax is reached in the twelfth chapter 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.). This was a principle to which even our Lord submitted in providing our

salvation, for He was crucified through weakness, but is alive through the power of God (13:4). It is a theme, therefore, which points to the unity of the epistle, and which in particular links the concluding to the opening chapter.” — Constable

- ***I do not often quote form commentaries but Constable’s is so excellent in many ways that I ask your forgiveness today as I quote more than once from them.***

IV. The Lord God Still Works Through His Word of Grace Today:

- ***Today, one might exclaim? But we do not share the same life experiences with the apostle and therefore his words see distant and perhaps even irrelevant. But we must refrain from ever thinking in this way. For God’s abundant grace IS STILL WORKING TODAY as it did then. Amen.***

[READ] 2 Cor. 1:11-13

11 Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift *bestowed* upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.

12 For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.

13 For we write none other things unto you, than what ye read or acknowledge; and I trust ye shall acknowledge even to the end;

- ***Here the apostle mentions his testimony directly and his description of it is a model for our own, of course. That is his intention too, I am sure: “... that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.” These words state in a very short but precise, profound and powerful way what Paul wanted the recipients of the letter to remember well his ministry in their midst. They should all have been saying in their hearts (or out loud) “amen!” For they surly remembered so well what they had shared in their sacred history together:***
 - ***“Simplicity”: Simple words indeed but so was his testimony before them and they shared in that with him.***
 - ***“Godly sincerity”: Yes, it was just that important he reminds them.***

- “Not with fleshly wisdom”: ***No, never that! Fleshly wisdom will always come to nothing in the end.***
- “But by the grace of God”: ***Yes, always by grace! Never by fleshly wisdom with its evil works.***
- ***But what Paul is saying is that the gainsayers in the assembly, on account of which this letter his being written, in fact shared none of these with the apostle and the others. For they were the ones that Paul was especially concerned about for they were the ones that were leading the believers in Corinth away from his sphere of influence and in the direction the enemy would have it.***
- ***He then underscores this great division between the brethren caused by some with these words:***

[READ] 2 Cor. 1:14-16

14 As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus.

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

16 And to pass by you into Macedonia, and to come again out of Macedonia unto you, and of you to be brought on my way toward Judaea.

- ***These are interesting verses indeed, for apparently there had been another plan that did not work out for reasons unknown to us. Paul had changed his public plan and for private reasons perhaps known only to him had changed his plans to visit them. This had given an opening for those opposing Paul and his authority in their active opposition to him. But interestingly, he does not explain himself, he does not apologize really for changing the plan. He does not go on the defensive, in other words, but with power and great authority he proclaims to the brethren how all that had occurred had occurred in accordance with the will of God and with his power and in display of his glory!***

[READ] 2 Cor. 1:17-20

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

18 But as God is true, our word toward you was 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 Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea.

20 For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

- *Tis reminds me of what he wrote elsewhere in Romans 3:*

Rom. 3:4 God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.

- *He now concludes this introductory part of the letter with even more words of power and compelling authority:*

V. The Ministry of Grace and Truth Rests In the Hands of His Chosen Ones:

- *Now the grand finale and the chapter division is for once so properly made here:*

[READ] 2 Cor. 1:21-24

21 Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God;

22 Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

23 Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth.

24 Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.

- “Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts”: ***Again, here near the end of the chapter, Paul reasserts his essential and foundational unity with these saints and all of us by confirming what truly joins us all together, namely, the Spirit of God with his sealing and anointing, and even before these, our identification with our risen Lord Jesus. That these are eternal qualifications indeed, he writes that we have been established together by the Lord God! How wonderful indeed it is if we acknowledge these foundational qualifications. And now he explains why he did not follow through with his initial plan:***

- “Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth. Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand”: ***Here, at the very end of this section, the apostle makes the reason for the change of plans to be very personal. He wanted to spare them the challenges of such a visit at that time, preferring a later time perhaps as far better. He boldly calls upon the Lord God regarding his honesty and forthrightness in this as well as an additional assurance.***

But would they receive this testimonial? We are never told, actually. But so be it. Next time, onward to chapter 2 Lord willing!

Application / Conclusions: