

# CHAPTER 1

After the introduction (v. 1, 2) the apostle begins with the narrative of his troubles and God's goodness, which he had met with in Asia, by way of thanksgiving to God (v. 3-6), and for the edification of the Corinthians (v. 7-11). Then he attests his and his fellow-labourers' integrity (v. 12-14), and afterwards vindicates himself from the imputation of levity and inconstancy (v. 15-24).

## 2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-2

### GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This is the introduction to this epistle, in which we have,

**I.** The inscription; and therein,

**1.** The person from whom it was sent, namely, Paul, who calls himself *an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God*. The apostleship itself was ordained by Jesus Christ, according to the will of God; and Paul was called to it by Jesus Christ, according to the will of God. He joins Timotheus with himself in writing this epistle; not because he needed his assistance, but that out of the mouth of two witnesses the word might be established; and this dignifying Timothy with the title of *brother* (either in the common faith, or in the work of the ministry) shows the humility of this great apostle, and his desire to recommend Timothy (though he was then a young man) to the esteem of the Corinthians, and give him a reputation among the churches.

**2.** The persons to whom this epistle was sent, namely, *the church of God at Corinth*: and not only to them, but also *to all the saints in all Achaia*, that is, to all the Christians who lived in the region round about. Note, In Christ Jesus no distinction is made between the inhabitants of city and country; all Achaia stands upon a level in his account.

**II.** The salutation or apostolical benediction, which is the same as in his former epistle; and therein the apostle desires the two great and

comprehensive blessings, grace and peace, for those Corinthians. These two benefits are fitly joined together, because there is no good and lasting peace without true grace; and both of them come *from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ*, who is the procurer and dispenser of those benefits to fallen man, and is prayed to as God.

## 2 CORINTHIANS 1:36

### PAUL'S SUFFERINGS AND CONSOLATIONS

After the foregoing preface, the apostle begins with the narrative of God's goodness to him and his fellow-labourers in their manifold tribulations, which he speaks of by way of thanksgiving to God, and to advance the divine glory (v. 36); and it is fit that in all things, and in the first place, God be glorified. Observe,

**I.** The object of the apostle's thanksgiving, to whom he offers up blessing and praise, namely, the blessed God, who only is to be praised, whom he describes by several glorious and amiable titles.

**1.** *The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: ho Theos kai pater tou Kyriou hemon Iesou Christou.* God is the Father of Christ's divine nature by eternal generation, of his human nature by miraculous conception in the womb of the virgin, and of Christ as God-man, and our Redeemer, by covenant-relation, and in and through him as Mediator our God and our Father, <sup><408></sup>John 20:17. In the Old Testament we often meet with this title, *The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob*, to denote God's covenant-relation to them and their seed; and in the New Testament God is styled *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, to denote his covenant-relation to the Mediator and his spiritual seed. <sup><406></sup>Galatians 3:16.

**2.** *The Father of mercies.* There is a multitude of tender mercies in God essentially, and all mercies are from God originally: mercy in his genuine offspring and his delight. *He delighteth in mercy,* <sup><308></sup>Micah 7:18.

**3.** *The God of all comfort;* from his proceedeth the COMFORTER, <sup><456></sup>John 15:26. He giveth the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts, v. 22. All our comforts come from God, and our sweetest comforts are in him.

**II.** The reasons of the apostle's thanksgivings, which are these:

**1.** The benefits that he himself and his companions had received from God; for God *had comforted* them *in all their tribulations*, v. 4. In the world they had trouble, but in Christ they had peace. The apostles met with many tribulations, but they found comfort in them all: their sufferings (which are called *the sufferings of Christ*, v. 5, because Christ sympathized with his members when suffering for his sake) did abound, but their consolation by Christ did abound also. Note,

**(1.)** Then are we qualified to receive the comfort of God's mercies when we set ourselves to give him the glory of them.

**(2.)** Then we speak best of God and his goodness when we speak from our own experience, and, in telling others, tell God also what he has done for our souls.

**2.** The advantage which others might receive; for God intended that they *should be able to comfort others* in trouble (v. 4), by communicating to them their experiences of the divine goodness and mercy; and the sufferings of good men have a tendency to this good end (v. 6) when they are endued with faith and patience. Note,

**(1.)** What favours God bestows on us are intended not only to make us cheerful ourselves, but also that we may be useful to others.

**(2.)** If we do imitate the faith and patience of good men in their afflictions, we may hope to partake of their consolations here and their salvation hereafter.

## 2 CORINTHIANS 1:7-11

### PAUL'S SUFFERINGS AND CONSOLATIONS

In these verses the apostle speaks for the encouragement and edification of the Corinthians; and tells them (v. 7) of his persuasion or steadfast hope that they should receive benefit by the troubles he and his companions in labour and travel had met with, that their faith should not be weakened, but their consolations increased. In order to this he tells them,

**1.** What their sufferings had been (v. 8): *We would not have you ignorant of our trouble*. It was convenient for the churches to know what were the

sufferings of their ministers. It is not certain what particular troubles in Asia are here referred to; whether the tumult raised by Demetrius at Ephesus, mentioned Acts 19, or the fight with beasts at Ephesus, mentioned in the former epistle (2 Corinthians 15), or some other trouble; for the apostle was in deaths often. This however is evident, that they were great tribulations. They *were pushed out of measure*, to a very extraordinary degree, above the common strength of men, or of ordinary Christians, to bear up under them, insomuch that they *despaired even of life* (v. 8), and thought they should have been killed, or have fainted away and expired.

**2.** What they did in their distress: *They trusted in God*. And they were brought to this extremity in order *that they should not trust in themselves but in God*, v. 9. Note, God often brings his people into great straits, that they may apprehend their own insufficiency to help themselves, and may be induced to place their trust and hope in his all-sufficiency. Our extremity is God's opportunity. *In the mount will the Lord be seen*; and we may safely trust in *God, who raiseth the dead*, v. 9. God's raising the dead is a proof of his almighty power. He that can do this can do any thing, can do all things, and is worthy to be trusted in at all times. Abraham's faith fastened upon this instance of the divine power: *He believed God who quickeneth the dead*, <sup><del>Romans 4:17</sup>. If we should be brought so low as to despair even of life, yet we may then trust in God, who can bring back not only from the gates, but from the jaws, of death.

**3.** What the deliverance was that they had obtained; and this was seasonable and continued. Their hope and trust were not in vain, nor shall any who trust in him be ashamed. God had delivered them, and did still deliver them, v. 10. *Having obtained help of God, they continued to that day*, <sup><del>Acts 26:22</sup>.

**4.** What use they made of this deliverance: *We trust that he will yet deliver us* (v. 10), that God will deliver to the end, and *preserve to his heavenly kingdom*. Note, Past experiences are great encouragements to faith and hope, and they lay great obligations to trust in God for time to come. We reproach our experiences if we distrust God in future straits, who hath delivered as in former troubles. David, even when a young man, and when he had but a small stock of experiences, argued after the manner of the apostle here, <sup><del>1 Samuel 17:37</sup>.

**5.** What was desired of the Corinthians upon this account: *That they would help together by prayer for them* (v. 11), by social prayer, agreeing and joining together in prayer on their behalf. Note, our trusting in God must not supersede the use of any proper and appointed means; and prayer is one of those means. We should pray for ourselves and for one another. The apostle had himself a great interest in the throne of grace, yet he desires the help of others' prayers. If we thus help one another by our prayers, we may hope for an occasion of *giving thanks by many* for answer of prayer. And it is our duty not only to help one another with prayer, but in praise and thanksgiving, and thereby to make suitable returns for benefits received.

## 2 CORINTHIANS 1:12-14

### PAUL'S SINCERITY AND AFFLICTION

The apostle in these verses attests their integrity by the sincerity of their conversation. This he does not in a way of boasting and vain-glory, but as one good reason for desiring the help of prayer, as well as for the more comfortably trusting in God (~~scribes~~ Hebrews 13:18), and for the necessary vindication of himself from the aspersions of some persons at Corinth, who reproached his person and questioned his apostleship. Here,

**I.** He appeals to the testimony of conscience with rejoicing (v. 12), in which observe,

**1.** The witness appealed to, namely, conscience, which is instead of a thousand witnesses. This God's deputy in the soul, and the voice of conscience is the voice of God. They rejoiced in the testimony of conscience, when their enemies reproached them, and were enraged against them. Note, The testimony of conscience for us, if that be right and upon good grounds, will be matter of rejoicing at all times and in all conditions.

**2.** The testimony this witness gave. And here take notice, Conscience witnessed,

**(1.)** Concerning their conversation, their constant course and tenour of life: by that we may judge of ourselves, and not by this or that single act.

(2.) Concerning the nature or manner of their conversation; that it was in simplicity and godly sincerity. This blessed apostle was a true Israelite, a man of plain dealing; you might know where to have him. He was not a man who seemed to be one thing and was another, but a man of sincerity.

(3.) Concerning the principle they acted from in all their conversation, both in the world and towards these Corinthians; and that was not fleshly wisdom, nor carnal politics and worldly views, but it was the grace of God, a vital gracious principle in their hearts, that cometh from God, and tendeth to God. Then will our conversation be well ordered when we live and act under the influence and command of such a gracious principle in the heart.

**II.** He appeals to the knowledge of the Corinthians with hope and confidence, v. 13, 14. Their conversation did in part fall under the observation of the Corinthians; and these knew how they behaved themselves, *how holily, and justly, and unblamably*; they never found any thing in them unbecoming an honest man. This they had acknowledged in part already, and he doubted not but they would still do so to the end, that is, that they would never have any good reason to think or say otherwise of him, but that he was an honest man. And so there would be mutual rejoicing in one another. *We are your rejoicing, even as you also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus.* Note, It is happy when ministers and people do rejoice in each other here; and this joy will be complete in that day when the great Shepherd of the sheep shall appear.

## 2 CORINTHIANS 1:15-24

### PAUL'S SINCERITY AND AFFECTION

The apostle here vindicates himself from the imputation of levity and inconstancy, in that he did not hold his purpose of coming to them at Corinth. His adversaries there sought all occasions to blemish his character, and reflect upon his conduct; and, it seemed, they took hold of this handle to reproach his person and discredit his ministry. Now, for his justification,

**I.** He avers the sincerity of his intention (v. 15-17), and he does this in confidence of their good opinion of him, and that they would believe him,

when he assured them he *was minded*, or did really intend, *to come* to them, and that with the design, not that he might receive, but that they might receive a *second benefit*, that is, a further advantage by his ministry. He tells them that he had not herein *used lightness* (v. 17), that, as he aimed not at any secular advantage to himself (for his purpose was not *according to the flesh*, that is, with carnal views and aims), so it was not a rash and inconsiderate resolution that he had taken up, for he had laid his measures thus of *passing by them to Macedonia, and coming again to them from Macedonia in his way to Judea* (v. 16), and therefore they might conclude that it was for some weighty reasons that he had altered his purpose; and that with him there was not *yea yea, and nay nay*, v. 17. He was not to be accused of levity and inconstancy, nor a contradiction between his words and intentions. Note, Good men should be careful to preserve the reputation of sincerity and constancy; they should not resolve but upon mature deliberation, and they will not change their resolves but for weighty reasons.

**II.** He would not have the Corinthians to infer that his gospel was false or uncertain, nor that it was contradictory in itself, nor unto truth, v. 18, 19. For if it had been so, that he had been fickle in his purposes, or even false in the promises he made of coming to them (which he was not justly to be accused of, and so some understand his expression, v. 18, *Our word towards you was not yea and nay*), yet it would not follow that the gospel preached not only by him, but also by others in full agreement with him, was either false or doubtful. For *God is true, and the Son of God, Jesus Christ*, is true. The true God, and eternal life. Jesus Christ, whom the apostle preached, is not *yea and nay*, but in him was *yea* (v. 19), nothing but infallible truth. And the promises of God in Christ are not *yea and nay*, but *yea and amen*, v. 20. There is an inviolable constancy and unquestionable sincerity and certainty in all the parts of the gospel of Christ. If in the promises that the ministers of the gospel make as common men, and about their own affairs, they see cause sometimes to vary from them, yet the promises of the gospel covenant, which they preach, stand firm and inviolable. Bad men are false; good men are fickle; but *God is true*, neither fickle nor false. The apostle, having mentioned the stability of the divine promises, makes a digression to illustrate this great and sweet truth, that all the promises of God are *yea and amen*. For,

**1.** They are the promises of the God of truth (v. 20), of him *that cannot lie*, whose truth as well as mercy endureth for ever.

2. They are made in Christ Jesus (v. 20), the Amen, the true and faithful witness; he hath purchased and ratified the covenant of promises, and is the *surety of the covenant*, <sup><812></sup>Hebrews 7:22.

3. They are confirmed by the Holy Spirit. He does establish Christians in the faith of the gospel; he has anointed them with his sanctifying grace, which in scripture is often compared to oil; he has sealed them, for their security and confirmation; and he is given *as an earnest in their hearts*, v. 21, 22. An earnest secures the promise, and is part of the payment. The illumination of the Spirit is an earnest of everlasting life; and the comforts of the Spirit are an earnest of everlasting joy. Note, The veracity of God, the mediation of Christ, and the operation of the Spirit, are all engaged that the promises shall be sure to all the seed, and the accomplishment of them shall be to the *glory of God* (v. 20) for the glory of his rich and sovereign grace, and never-failing truth and faithfulness.

III. The apostle gives a good reason why he did not come to Corinth, as was expected, v. 23. It was that he might spare them. They ought therefore to own his kindness and tenderness. He knew there were things amiss among them, and such as deserved censure, but was desirous to show tenderness. He assures them that this is the true reason, after this very solemn manner: *I call God for a record upon my soula way of speaking not justifiable where used in trivial matters; but this was very justifiable in the apostle, for his necessary vindication, and for the credit and usefulness of his ministry, which was struck at by his opposers. He adds, to prevent mistakes, that he did not pretend to have any dominion over their faith, v. 24. Christ only is the Lord of our faith; he is the author and finisher of our faith*, <sup><812></sup>Hebrews 12:2. He reveals to us what we must believe. Paul, and Apollos, and the rest of the apostles, were *but ministers by whom they believed* (<sup><48E></sup>1 Corinthians 3:5), and so the *helpers of their joy*, even the joy of faith. For by faith we stand firmly, and live safely and comfortably. Our strength and ability are owing to faith, and our comfort and joy must flow from faith.