

2 Corinthians 1:1-24

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Verse 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." There's a whole gamut of reasons Paul wrote, but what I'm going to do is, as we go through 2 Corinthians as we will tonight, I'm going to bring out the background of the text, and you'll understand why Paul said what he said. I would describe 2 Corinthians as the most autobiographical book Paul ever wrote. It's been called the letter of the apostle with his heart open wide. It's not like Romans, which we're going to start a week from Sunday, which is theological and laid out logically and systematically. It's kind of like Paul's last theological will and testament. It's just all emotion and all feeling and all personal issues that Paul is writing to win back their affection, to win back the love of those who are in Corinth who were turning away from him. So, not only had they been influenced by these false teachers attacking Paul, which they were doing so they would undermine the gospel, but they were actually themselves believing that and turning away from Paul. This is a personal letter where Paul's writing to defend his apostleship.

In verses 1-2 we have the salutation. In many ways it's abbreviated, it's shorter than many of the other salutations of Paul, and it's interesting that there's no real rebuke but there's no praise or prayer for thanksgiving for them at all in the text that we find. The opening salutation beginning in verses 1 and 2 starts with his name, "Paul, an apostle," so we can spend the whole night talking about the great Apostle Paul. I do believe, and I'll talk more about it on Sunday morning when we start Romans, that Paul was the greatest Christian that ever lived. The greatest Christian that ever lived I personally believe was Paul the apostle.

Paul was first Saul who was persecuting the church. We know that he got converted on the way to Damascus in Acts 9, and then he changed his name, when he began to do ministry among the Gentiles, to Paul. His name was Saul, now it's changed to Paul. Saul means asked for, probably named after the first king of Israel, and Paul means little or small. He had a Greek or Gentile name that he adapted as he went out and began to preach to the Gentiles.

Now, Paul's called in verse 1, "an apostle . . ." An apostle is actually in this sense one who had seen the risen Savior and had performed miracles and had been directly commissioned by the Lord. There were the twelve apostles, and then Judas betrayed the Lord and they had to replace him with Matthias so there were twelve again. Paul actually said, " . . . as of one born out of due time," so he was the thirteenth apostle.

I don't happen to believe that there are any apostles in this primary sense still today. Sometimes you'll hear pastors call themselves "apostles." I don't think that should be done. I don't think it's biblical or scriptural. It's not the end of the world, but I think a lot of times they do that to try to get a leg up on authority over the believers as opposed to just being a pastor, which is an undershepherd. The original apostles were chosen by Jesus Christ, and the two qualifications, you had to have seen the risen Lord, and Saul saw him on the Road to Damascus. Other times

in the book of Acts, Paul actually saw Christ personally. At one time in 2 Corinthians 12, he is caught up into heaven and he no doubt saw the Lord in heaven, so Paul had a vision, he had an experience, he saw the risen Christ, and he was commissioned and sent by the Lord Himself.

The word “apostle” means one who is sent out and commissioned to represent another. We would use the word ambassador today for that. Sometimes people think that it is equated with missionaries who are sent out, and that’s kind of a secondary sense of being an apostle sent on a mission, and we’re all in a sense apostles that we’re all sent on the mission to share the gospel, but in the primary sense of the word these fellows had apostolic authority to speak the word of the Lord, and I don’t think that still exists today. A lot of cults claim to have the succession of apostles in their church today only because they want to promote their heresies and their false doctrine.

Paul, right off the bat, mentions his apostleship because, as I said, it was under attack. They believed because Paul suffered he wasn’t truly an apostle. They believed because Paul collected money for the church in Jerusalem the he wasn’t really an apostle. They just had all these crazy reasons why Paul wasn’t an apostle. Primarily, through the book of 2 Corinthians, it was because he was suffering, and no doubt I believe he was sick, so they just wrote him off as being a true apostle. So, he’s, “. . . an apostle of Jesus Christ,”—and he makes it clear in verse 1 —“by the will of God” You never want to be self-appointed in ministry. You certainly can’t be a self-appointed apostle, and you can’t be a self-appointed minister or pastor in the gospel.

I believe that a man who’s a pastor needs to have a call from God. It’s not a choice you make, it’s not something you pick or choose, it’s something that God does. He calls a man to pastoral ministry. I believe also that every one of us as believers can have a call on our life and a gifting that God gives us to what ministry He’s calling us to.

Paul was called an apostle. You might be called to be a pastor, a Bible teacher, a missionary; but whatever it is God calls you, we want to be faithful to that calling. We want to hear God’s voice and be obedient. Amen? You should pray and say, “Lord, what is Your calling on my life? What is the gifting? What are the opportunities You’ve given me?” and be faithful to the will of God for you.

Then, Paul joins his name with Timothy who was one of his traveling companions and he had sent to Corinth to check things out. The name “Timothy” means one who honors God, and Paul wrote his first and second pastoral epistles to this young man Timothy. He calls him “. . . our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia.”

Now, “. . . the church of God which is at Corinth” We’ve studied 1 Corinthians so I don’t need to belabor the point, but Corinth was a wicked, wicked, wicked city. Did I make myself clear enough? I hate to compare it to San Francisco or Las Vegas or wherever it might be, but it was bad. On the Greek stage, whenever they would be doing a theater act on stage and there was someone depicted on stage as being from Corinth, they were always depicted drunk or debauched. It was one of the most immoral, wicked cities in the whole Roman Empire. Isn’t it

fascinating that God has a church in Corinth, “. . . the church of God which is at Corinth . . .” We’re the church of God which is in Menifee. I don’t think we come that close to the corruption and immorality that was going on in Corinth, but God’s light shines brightest in the darkest places. Amen? Sometimes we want to go to the nice places to start a church or start a ministry and it’s interesting Paul went to some of the darkest places, some of the most wicked places to start a ministry. So, “. . . the church of God which is at Corinth . . .”

The “church of God” is a reference to the body of Christ, the ekkl 7>Ö à The Greek word church is ekkl 7>Ö Å and it means a called out assembly. Now, I do understand that the word itself was used in a secular sense for a political body or a group of political leaders or civic leaders. This is why, and bless his dear heart and I love and appreciate him and I thank God for him, he’s gone to heaven, but I did disagree with Charlie Kirk when he would many times try to encourage people to get involved politically by saying that the word ekkl 7>Ö means a political civil group of people. Yes, it did mean that, but that’s not how the Bible was using it. The word ekkl 7>Ö means called out assembly. The nation of Israel in the Old Testament was an ekkl 7>Ö à It was actually called out by God. In the New Testament, when it talks about the Church universal, all those who are believers are the called of Jesus Christ, and Jesus is the living head. In the local church, which is what Revival Christian Fellowship is, is an ekkl 7>Ö Å 6WB t group of people.

The term “called out” means we’re called out of the world—we’re called unto God, we’re called unto Christ, we’re called unto fellowship with one another—and then we’re commissioned and sent out. That’s not to say we shouldn’t be involved politically. I’m totally for that. I don’t really believe in this concept of separation of church and state that you as a Christian can’t be involved in politics, involved in political issues, or involved in those issues. That’s perfectly legitimate. But the word ekkl 7>Ö –â F†R &– le refers to all those that are called out unto God.

The word next to that in the text kind of ties in with it. Paul actually says, “. . . with all the saints which are in all Achaia.” Do you know what the word “saint” means? It means separated ones or called out ones. It means those who are set apart. We get our word “sanctified,” we get our word “holy” from it, and it’s a reference to all Christians. I know that if you’ve been around the church for a while you’ve heard me say that and you’re familiar with that, but some people don’t know and understand that. In the New Testament all Christians are referred to as saints. We used to say, “You’re either a saint or you ain’t.”

What do you have to do to be a saint? You’ve just got to be born again. Here’s what the problem is: We equate being a saint with being a person who lives a real holy, super consecrated, set apart spiritual life; and that can be true, but that’s not the concept of being a saint here in this text as we’re declared as Christian saints. This is true of all Christians—listen to me carefully—in spite of how spiritual they are in walking with the Lord, in spite of how holy they live. This is what’s called positional righteousness. Everyone who believes and receives Jesus Christ is declared righteous. That’s positional righteousness. That’s called justification—God declares you righteous. That’s what makes you a saint.

Then, the same word is carried over into the idea of now that we are positionally perfectly

righteous in Christ, all equally, and it cannot change, practically, we use the word “sanctification,” but it comes from the same root word. It means that we are now living a holy life, and that is progressional. It’s not positional, it’s progressional. We grow in our sanctification. From the time we’re born again to the time we go to heaven, we become more like Christ. We’re being more sanctified.

There’s a third aspect to it, and that’s when we die and go to heaven and we get a new body. Guess what? We’re going to be perfectly, totally, completely sanctified. Amen? So, I’ve been sanctified, I’ve been saved; I’m being sanctified, I’m being saved; I will be sanctified, I will be glorified—I’ll be perfect, I’ll be in heaven, there’ll be no more sin. But the word here in the text is referring to all Christians. That’s, again, why I disagree with the Roman Catholic idea of there are people who are given sainthood—they could be prayed to and intercede for you. That’s not taught in Scripture at all. The Bible teaches all God’s people are saints—they’re saved, they’re set apart, and they’re sanctified—and one day we will all be glorified together.

Now, they are in Achaia, which is Southern Greece. Northern Greece is Macedonia, Southern Greece, which is on that little peninsula connected by the little isthmus there in the area of Corinth, is known as Achaia.

Paul wishes them the Greek greeting, “Grace . . . and peace,”—the Hebrew greeting shalom —“from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is a typical salutation during the time of Paul the apostle, but Paul Christianizes it. He uses the word *cháris*, which is God’s unmerited favor; and then he uses the Hebrew shalom, which is peace, which is being right with God and experiencing God’s righteous peace. Always, always, always in that order, never reversed, because peace is the result of experiencing God’s grace. When you accept Jesus as your Savior and you’re saved by grace, then the peace of God comes into your heart. You have peace with God, and then you have the peace of God. So, grace and peace come to us through, “ . . . God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Here you have the first two members of the Godhead and of the Trinity, God the Father and God the Son. The fact that He’s called “Lord Jesus Christ,” is also an indication that Jesus is God, “ . . . from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” The same grace and peace which comes from God the Father come also from our Lord, *kýrios*, our “ . . . Lord Jesus Christ.”

The difference between tonight and Sunday is tonight, beginning in verse 3, what I’m going to do is give you three reasons God allows suffering and trials and adversity and troubles and hardships and pain in our lives. Sunday I’m going to talk about ways we can turn our buffeting into blessing—what we need to do with our trials and our suffering. There’s three things I want to point out tonight that God does allow suffering for. First, if you’re taking notes, He does it so that we might comfort others, verses 3-7. By the way, this is a classic passage on the subject of why God allows us to suffer. Look at verse 3. He says, “Blessed be God,”—this a eulogy, by the way. He’s praising God. “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.” You get the idea this is about comfort already? You find the word “comfort” every verse.

Verse 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 stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.” This is by no way exhaustive. We’re going to be going through the whole book of 2 Corinthians, and over and over and over again we’re going to read about trials and afflictions and tribulation, but let me point a few out. In verse 4, you have the word “tribulation,” “trouble;” in verse 5, you have the word “sufferings;” in verse 6, you have the word “afflicted” and “sufferings;” again, in verse 7, you have the word “sufferings;” and it continues all the way through 2 Corinthians.

Paul starts back at verse 3 with praising “ . . . God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.” Something missing from Paul’s opening salutation in this early greeting, he didn’t pray for them. Normally he prays for the church that he’s writing to and gives thanks for them, but he does praise God.

Here’s an interesting point, and I won’t elaborate on it because I’m going to use it Sunday morning. When you are suffering, when you are being attacked—when you are being maligned, when you are being persecuted, when you are going through difficulties, adversity—remember to bless God and give Him praise. Do you want victory in times of suffering? Praise the Lord. Begin to give thanks to Him, begin to give praise to Him, begin to glorify Him, begin to worship Him. He blesses God, “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .”

Don’t miss this title for God the Father. He’s “ . . . the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort” Paul is blessing God. He’s praising God even though he’s being buffeted, persecuted, attacked. He’s going through difficult times. He’s blessing God, praising God, worshiping God. It reminds me of Paul and Silas when they were whipped and beaten in Philippi and thrown into prison. It says that at midnight they sang praises to God - right? - and the prisoners heard them. They didn’t sulk. If John Miller would’ve been there, I would’ve been griping. But Paul the apostle said, “Let’s sing,” and they started praising God. God sent an earthquake and delivered them all. So, let’s bless the Lord even in our trials and in our difficulties. Notice the key there that He’s “ . . . the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.” Bless God even in your suffering.

The phrase “Father of mercies,” God is full of mercy; He’s full of loving compassion. Mercy is God not giving us what we deserve, but the title “Father” conveys the idea of source. When you say, “I Fathered a child,” it means you generated that child or you’re the source of that child. The word is used that way in the Bible. He’s, “ . . . the Father of mercies” What does it mean? It means that He’s the source of all mercies and comfort. You want mercy, you want comfort? It’s going to be found in God. That’s the source. He’s the source of all mercy and comfort.

The word “comfort” is one of the words that’s used many times in this text. The word “comfort” actually has the idea of someone who comes alongside of you to strengthen you, to help you, to assist you, to “comfort” you. It’s not just God saying, “Now, now, now, don’t cry. Everything will be okay.” It’s God putting His arm around you and holding you up and helping you as you lean on Him and helps you walk through life. Jesus promised that when He left He would send another Comforter. It’s the same Greek word. The Greek word is *paráklētos*, which, by the way is the same word translated “advocate,” and we use it for a lawyer in a courtroom. If you’re in a courtroom and you need a lawyer, you want him right by your side, right? You want him in your camp. You want him there to help you and to bring you comfort and help.

Jesus is our *paráklētos*, and the Holy Spirit is our *paráklētos*. He’s our comforter who comes to us, wraps His arm around us, strengthens and helps us to walk along. So is the Holy Spirit, He’s the other Comforter—other of the same kind. You’ve got God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit all bringing comfort to the believer.

The comfort comes, verse 4, “. . . in all our tribulation . . .” This is where we get our word to thrash or the idea of tribunal where you’re being thrashed or beaten, so the troubles, the trials, the tribulation. Now, this is not the “Great Tribulation” that happens after the rapture and before the Second Coming. This is the tribulation that we as Christians have to go through in this world because of our following Christ. Jesus said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” When we are going through a time of suffering, tribulation, then we actually have comfort.

Now, it’s not because we’re being chastened, it’s because we’re being prepared for ministry, “. . . that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” Let me paraphrase that for you. God allows us to suffer so that we can experience His comfort; having experienced His comfort, we’re able to share that with others who are suffering, who need comfort. You know, it’s those who suffer that have the most to contribute to encourage and comfort others who suffer. We go through suffering for the very purpose that God is allowing it in our lives to equip us and to prepare us to be able to bless others and to comfort others.

You might say, “Well, Pastor, I don’t want to help others. I don’t want to comfort anybody else. I just don’t want to suffer.” That’s a shallow philosophy of life. You don’t want to be a blessing? You don’t want to be used by God? You don’t want to bless other people, encourage other people, help other people? The only way you can do that is to be broken. Out of your life then flows the sweet fragrance of Christ. He breaks you to use you for His glory. If you have not been broken or gone through suffering, then you’re going to be shallow and you don’t have anything to contribute or to comfort others with or to help others. So, bless God when you suffer and know always that it’s not chastisement, it’s preparing you to be a comfort to others.

When you preach the Bible, when you teach the Bible, when you share the things of God, if it comes out of a broken heart, a broken life, where you’ve found comfort of God and you’re sharing what God has done in your life, it’s powerful and it will help others. That’s why he says,

verse 5, “For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.” Which is saying that our identification with Christ means that we will suffer, but it also means we’re guaranteed comfort, we’re guaranteed consolation. God won’t let us suffer alone. He’s with us. He’s in control of what’s going on, and there’s a purpose behind it.

Verse 6, “And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation,”—in other words, we’re going through what we go through in order to minister to you—“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.” Again, he’s just saying basically, “We went through this time of suffering,” which the false teachers were saying disqualified Paul as being an apostle, he’s saying, “No, no, no, no. It’s what prepared me and equipped me and suited me to be able to comfort you and to minister to you.”

Verse 7, Paul says, “And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.” What God does for you, He will do for others. What God does in you, He’ll do through you and make you a blessing to others, but it comes through suffering. There’s no shortcuts. It’s the only way we can minister.

Now, the second reason that God allows us to suffer is that we might have confidence in Him and Him alone. He wants to equip us to be a blessing, and He wants to give us a dependence and a reliance on Him alone. Both of these are difficult. It’s hard to be suffering to be equipped to minister to others, and it’s hard to suffer and to learn, I must depend upon and rely upon and have trust and faith in only God. Verses 8-11, “For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia,”—he doesn’t tell us what trouble in Asia it was, but we know that he was actually really persecuted there by the silversmiths in this Asian area, and he was persecuted and ran out of town—“that we were pressed out of measure”—notice to the great Paul the apostle, again, this is why it’s called the epistle of the heart open wide, he’s telling us his inner struggles, his inner anguishes, trials that he was going through. He describes it as “ . . . pressed out of measure” That literally means under great pressure.

Have you ever felt like you’ve been under great pressure? Welcome to the club, so was Paul. He says, “ . . . that we were pressed out of measure,”—and it was beyond our strength, but listen carefully, not His strength. It’s beyond our strength but not beyond God’s strength. “ . . . insomuch that we despaired even of life.” Look at what Paul says, “ . . . that we were pressed out of measure, above strength,”—or our ability to cope—“insomuch that we despaired even of life: 9 But we had the sentence of death in ourselves,”—basically, Paul means by that was, ‘We thought we were going to die. We literally thought we were going to die.’ Some feel this is a formal legal kind of court proceeding where Paul was brought before judges and that he was afraid that he was going to get a death sentence. That’s very possible. He said, “But we had the sentence of death in ourselves,”—they thought, We’re not going to survive this. We’re not going to live, and he tells us why that took place, verse 9, “ . . . that”—here you have the reason or the rationale—“we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.”

Now, if God can raise the dead, He can be trusted. Amen? And if God can raise the dead, He

can help us through our trial. Amen? Paul makes it very clear here that we went through this so that we should, verse 9, “. . . not trust in ourselves . . .” This is one of the reasons, my dearly beloved, God allows His children to suffer because He’s trying to wean us from self-dependence. He’s trying to wean us from dependence on self and the world and bring us to a place of brokenness and dependence and reliance upon Him. That’s so important. That’s the secret of the victorious Christian life—not depending on your own strength but relying upon God’s strength. Out of brokenness comes blessing; out of brokenness comes faith, trusting God. So, He breaks us so that we would not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead.

Verse 10, Paul says, “Who delivered us”—notice the tenses here, past tense—“from so great a death, and doth deliver”—and He does deliver us, present tense—“in whom we trust that he will”—future tense—“yet deliver us.” Paul covers the past, the present, and the future. I love that concept. You look back and what has God done for you? Delivered you. Amen? You look around, what is God doing for you? He delivers you. What do we expect God to do in the future? Deliver us. So, remind yourself when you get discouraged and you’re looking around and you may not see the hand of God in your life, but He’s delivered you thus far, brought you to this point; He’s going to deliver you right now; and then there’s a future deliverance that will come to us. I think that’s marvelous.

Verse 11, Paul says, “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.” Again, I’ll talk about that Sunday morning. We pray for one another, we pray for others that are going through a time of suffering. We learn not to depend on ourselves, and we learn to pray and intercede for others that are going through times of suffering and trial. Paul, verse 11, was not above humbling himself asking for prayer. It’s a dangerous thing to say, “I’m okay. I don’t need to ask for prayer.” No, solicit prayer, especially in a time of trouble, a time of difficulty. Call friends. Have a prayer partner. Have prayer teams. Have people who will pray for you and intercede for you. That’s why it’s important to be part of the church, the body of Christ, because we need to pray one for another. Amen? And, we should be doing that.

Verses 12 to the end of the chapter verse 24, we see the third reason God allows suffering, that we might claim the promises of God. First, we can comfort others with the comfort God gives to us. Secondly, we can have confidence in God and God alone trusting God, not ourselves. Thirdly, that we might claim God’s promises found in His Word. He says, “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience,”—beginning at verse 12 to the end of the chapter, again, he’s going to be explaining some of the criticism he was getting that Paul promised to come back to Corinth and he didn’t come back, so “Paul’s fickle, and he says one thing and does another. He says yes, but he means no; he says no and he means yes.” They were accusing him of not being a man of his word. That’s what he’s going to be talking about here in these verses.

He says, “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience,”—he talks about his integrity in verse 12—“that in simplicity and godly sincerity”—that’s being authentic or genuine. The word “integrity” would be taken from that word—“not with fleshly wisdom,”—in other words, ‘We

weren't in the flesh or just carnal wisdom as we conducted ourselves'—"but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation"—which is the way we live—"in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward"—or toward you. Again, this is why Paul's saying these words. They were accusing Paul of saying he promised he would come, he didn't come, he's a flake. They were even saying, "He's a liar. He doesn't speak the truth. He's two-faced," so Paul's explaining himself.

Verse 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; 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." So, Jesus is coming, and we will mutually rejoice together when we make it to heaven.

Verse 15, "And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before"—he's explaining himself, 'I had a desire to and planned on coming to you before,'—"that ye might have a second benefit"—or blessing with my visit. Verse 16, "And to pass by you"—I was going to go through Macedonia—"and to come again out of Macedonia unto you"—I was going to go in through Macedonia, come out at Macedonia, Northern Greece—"and of you to be brought on my way toward Judaea"—you were going to be able to accompany me back to Judea. He says, "When I therefore was thus minded"—in other words, when I made these plans, verse 17—"did I use lightness?"—was I being a flake? We would actually say, 'He flaked out.' He says, ". . . 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?" Notice that rhetorical question mark.

Verse 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"—or yes and no—"but in him was yea." So, when we preached the gospel, we preached the positive message of the grace of God that Jesus saves us by grace.

And here's the key text, verse 20, "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." Paul says, "I faithfully preached the good news, and the good news is God will save you by His grace, forgive your sins, and there were no ifs, ands, or buts about it. He didn't say one thing, mean another. He had no hidden innuendos or hidden meanings, he was honest and forthright and clear. "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." You can bank your life on the promises of God. You can build your life on God's promises.

Notice verse 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,"—basically, he's saying, 'God's my witness'—"that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth." He's actually telling them why he didn't come back, because he didn't want to come back and actually have to rake them over the coals. He didn't have to rebuke them. He wanted to come back in gentleness and love. He wanted to give them time to get straightened out, so ". . . that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth"—'It wasn't

because I was being fickle.’

Verse 24, Paul says, “Not for that we have dominion over your faith,”—‘It’s not that I want to control your faith or have dominion over your faith’—“but we are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.” He wasn’t going to try to control their faith, he wanted to be a blessing to them and lead them into trust and faith in the Lord.

Now, I want to go back to verse 22 and point out some important doctrine there and close, “Who hath also sealed us, and given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.” This is kind of a great little spot in this second epistle to the Corinthians where Paul writing to Corinth reminded them what God the Holy Spirit had done for them. This whole text we have God the Father, “. . . God . . . the Father of mercies;” we have God the Son, “. . . our Lord Jesus Christ;” and we have the Holy Spirit all involved in our salvation, in our sanctification, and in our glorification. But we are sealed, verse 22. The sealing of the Holy Spirit speaks of ownership and it speaks primarily of security. You cannot break the seal. God seals us, and it tells us pretty clearly in Ephesians, until the day of redemption.

Every Christian—listen to me very carefully—the moment you’re born again are not only regenerated and indwelt, but you are sealed with the Holy Spirit until the day of redemption. There’s a time frame there. God seals you, you’re being sent from earth to heaven, no one can break that seal. You’re secure in Christ. It lasts to the day of redemption. God is both the sender and the receiver. No one can break that seal, so you are sealed with the Holy Spirit. And then, verse 22, “. . . the earnest”—is the downpayment. It’s the Holy Spirit who is in our hearts who is actually the down payment, the earnest. The same word is used for a wedding ring. When you get married, you get a wedding ring. You put it on your spouse’s finger and you give them that ring in promise that, “You’re mine. We’re wed together.” It’s a commitment. God gives you an earnest, a down payment, a wedding ring, an endowment, and He’s going to keep you as the bride of Christ unto the day of redemption.

To this point Paul is basically saying, “God has allowed me to suffer, no indication that I’m not an apostle, it actually is preparation for me to be a man who can comfort others, teaching me not to depend upon myself.” Second Corinthians 12, the great thorn in the flesh chapter where Paul said, “I asked God to take away this thorn in my flesh. He said, ‘No,’ but said, ‘My grace will be sufficient for you, My strength will be made perfect in your weakness.’” So he said, “I had to learn to trust in God and then also I can serve the Lord and be a blessing to others. I can stand on His promises of His Word.” Let’s pray.