



2 Corinthians - Chapter One

Summary of Chapter One

Paul's opening greeting immediately establishes his apostolic authority and the intended nature of the church as the family of God in Christ Jesus.

He speaks openly of his trials and suffering, clearly stating that it was only by the grace of God that he had survived. Such a statement is not one of weakness but of strength, for reliance on God is the key to successful ministry.

Paul then addresses three apparent complaints that the Corinthians held against him: that Paul's letters were hard to understand; that Paul had reneged on his plans to visit them; and that he had a domineering attitude toward them and wanted to show who was in charge.

I. 2 Corinthians 1:1-7:16 - Paul's Defence of His Legitimacy as an Apostle

Paul's new covenant ministry reflects the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul addresses three main concerns:

1. His apostleship.
2. God's ownership of the Corinthian congregation.
3. The church as the family of God.

I.a 2 Corinthians 1:1-2 - Salutation

Paul's opening greetings expand on the conventional greetings found in ancient letters. The way he elaborates this typical opening provides an insight into his uppermost concerns at the time of writing.

The very lack of elaboration in comparison with Paul's other letters highlights this at the start. The 1st Century writer used this part of the letter to strengthen family ties and friendships. Paul is no different. This is clear through his references to Timothy our brother (v.1), together with all the saints (v.1), and our Father (v.2), by which he seeks to reinforce the idea of the church as the family of God.

In these opening verses Paul seeks to highlight both his apostolic and his family relationship to the Corinthians by calling on the witness of the broader community of Achaian believers and pointing to the filial bonds he and the Corinthians share. By making this most personal of letters public, Paul holds the Corinthians accountable to the church at large.

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

To the church of God that is in Corinth, including all the saints throughout Achaia:

2 Corinthians 1:1

An apostle of Christ Jesus. The Greek word for apostle is *apostolos*, i.e. ‘one who is sent’, and is derived from the verb *apostellō*, ‘to send out’, which was used in the Greek OT to designate those commissioned as authoritative representatives to act in the name of the one who sent them: <<*So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt*>> (Exodus 3:10), <<*the Lord sent a prophet to the Israelites; and he said to them, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt, and brought you out of the house of slavery*>> (Judges 6:8), <<*But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say, “I am only a boy”; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you*>> (Jeremiah 1:7), and: <<*He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day*>> (Ezekiel 2:3).

Timothy had been sent to Corinth shortly before Paul wrote his previous letter to Corinth from Ephesus: <<*For this reason I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church*>> (1 Corinthians 4:17). Paul had expected his return: <<*If Timothy comes, see that he has nothing to fear among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord just as I am; therefore let no one despise him. Send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I am expecting him with the brothers*>> (1 Corinthians 16:9-10).

To the church of God. The singular church, in contrast to the more commonly found all and saints, focuses attention on the unity of believers in the Corinthian locality. Of God emphasises divine ownership; an ownership that differentiates the church from a culture and society that were centred on idolatry.

Corinth was the main city in the Roman province of Achaia. For more information refer to the section ‘The Ancient City of Corinth’ in the series introduction.

Saints are literally ‘holy’ or ‘dedicated ones’, Greek *hagioi*, referring to the identity and way of life of all who belong to God. Refer also to 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 5:1-6:20, and 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1.

All the saints throughout Achaia. This directs the letter to the wider group of believers in the region and subtly calls on them as witnesses of Paul’s apostleship.

Paul's claim had been challenged from both inside and outside the Corinthian church, something Paul is at pains to defend throughout the letter.

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

2 Corinthians 1:2

Grace is wordplay on the normal Greek greeting. Whereas the Greeks said, 'Hello', Greek *charein*, the Christians said, 'Grace', Greek *charis*. It also links in with the Jewish way of writing where they would use mercy rather than grace.

Peace does not indicate untroubled circumstances but the profound well-being that comes from resting in God's sovereignty and mercy, a concept first expressed by the Hebrew *shalom*.

Our Father brings Paul's greeting into the sphere of the familial – the exact way Jesus taught his disciples to address God in prayer (Matthew 6:9 and Luke 11:2). Yet, it is to be noted that while God is our Father, Jesus is not here spoken of as "our brother" but, rather, the Lord. *Kyrios* is placed first for emphasis. Therefore, grace and peace come from the Lord Jesus Christ. The concept of God as Father of the church and Jesus as its Lord captures too key distinctives of the Christian faith.

The expression peace had a much richer connotation than the English word does since it conveyed not merely the absence of conflict and turmoil but also the notion of positive blessing, especially in terms of a right relationship with God, and also, as a result, the idea that 'all is well' in one's life. This may be manifested most clearly amid persecution and tribulation.

I.b 2 Corinthians 1:3-11 - Paul's Thanksgiving after Affliction

Paul's prayers not only extol God but also introduce the main themes to follow. He praises God for the very suffering he experiences that his opponents use to call his apostleship into question. To support his praise for God as expressed in vv.3-7, Paul relates how God used his experience in Asia to teach him the same lessons he hopes the Corinthians will learn from him (vv.8-11).

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation,

2 Corinthians 1:3

Blessed be. This is a standard Jewish praise formula that introduces the tone and themes to come. However, it is markedly different from some of Paul's other opening addresses: <<*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world*>> (Romans 1:8), and: <<*I thank my God every time I remember you*>> (Philippians 1:3), providing a definite clue that the news he received from Titus about his spiritual children in Corinth was not entirely to his liking.

Paul begins by identifying the one whom he extols as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which recalls the OT Psalter and synagogue liturgy. These titles
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describe Yahweh's relationship to Jesus and Jesus' relationship to his people since Lord designates his absolute rule over his people.

Consolation or comfort is the overall disposition that comes from resting in God's sovereign and loving rule as manifested in Christ's lordship: <<*Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God*>> (Isaiah 40:1). Paul's experience is of a Father who is moved to compassion and a God who responds with the provision of comfort. It has a ring of truth about it that could be taken directly from the Psalms: <<*As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him. For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust*>> (Psalm 103:13-14).

Consolation or comfort, appears in one form or another ten times in five verses, and thus forms his opening prayer for the situation. The whole idea of the word is that of one person being with another, speaking words which change their mood and situation, giving them courage, new hope, new direction, new insights which will alter the way they face the next moment, the next day, the rest of their life.

The word Paul uses here, over and over again, does more than console people. It meets them where they are, and brings them right on to the point where they are strong enough to see new hope, new possibilities, new ways forward.

⁴ who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God.

2 Corinthians 1:4

In all our affliction. As with 'all consolation' in v.3, all stresses the absence of any exception; no matter what the situation, encouragement is at hand. The passage also indicates that it is not intended to be deliverance from trials but encouragement in such periods that will inevitably come.

So that we may be able to console. One of God's purposes in the suffering of Christians is that they would experience direct, personal comfort from God, and then from that experience be able to minister God's comfort to others. Suffering, then, is a training ground for service to the body of Christ. It equips believers so they can better minister to those who, for the sake of the Gospel, are going through trials and hardships. In this way believers mediate God's encouragement.

Us, our. Most of the plural first-person pronouns in 2 Corinthians, 'we', 'us', 'our', seem to refer to Paul himself (v.8), and: <<*For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted in every way – disputes without and fears within. But God, who consoles the downcast, consoled us by the arrival of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was consoled about you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more*>> (2 Corinthians 7:5-7), but these plurals at times, depending on the context, may also include Timothy who is named as a 'co-sender' of the letter in v.1, other ministry partners (v.19 and v.21), or Christians generally, such as in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10. In this verse, Paul probably uses the plural to indicate that he views himself as representing both the apostolic office and believers generally.

Affliction can refer to both outward circumstances: <<*For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure*>> (2 Corinthians 4:17), <<*but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities*>> (2 Corinthians 6:4), and: <<*for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part*>> (2 Corinthians 8:2); and inward states of mind: <<*For I wrote to you out of much distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain, but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you*>> (2 Corinthians 2:4), and: <<*I often boast about you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with consolation; I am overjoyed in all our affliction. For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted in every way – disputes without and fears within*>> (2 Corinthians 7:4-5).

For Paul, suffering is an inevitable part of the Christian life and an opportunity to learn how God goes about meeting a believer's every need. This is reflected in the central theme of vv.3-6 - divine provision of encouragement in the midst of suffering.

⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.

2 Corinthians 1:5

The sufferings of Christ refers not to Jesus' atonement for sin, which was unique to Christ: <<*But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life*>> (Romans 5:8-10), and: <<*The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God*>> (Romans 6:10), but to Paul's sufferings in imitation of Christ, which Paul endured because of his faithfulness to God and for the sake of God's people.

At the heart of Paul's prayer, and of the Gospel, is the fact that what is true of the Messiah becomes true of his people. This is a central principle for Paul, not simply as a powerful idea and belief but as a fact of experience.

Are abundant for us. Paul indicates that to identify with Christ is to identify with the suffering that was an essential part of his earthly ministry. Jesus had clearly stated that to follow him would include hardship and suffering: <<*He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me'*>> (Mark 8:34).

⁶ If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. ⁷ Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.

2 Corinthians 1:6-7

It is for your consolation. The opponents maintained that Paul's sufferings disqualified him as an apostle, but Paul maintains that his sufferings are the means God uses to strengthen other believers: <<**Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God**>> (2 Corinthians 4:15). Paul states an important but often neglected truth; service to the body of Christ results in personal gain rather than personal loss.

Our hope for you is unshaken. Suffering is not incidental or even accidental to the Christian life. Paul does not say that the Corinthians may share in his apostolic sufferings, they will share in them. This, however, results not in despair but rather in hope, a hope not in the Corinthians' ability to weather hardship but in God's ability to sustain and strengthen them.

You share in our consolation. A fundamental truth of Christianity is that Christ suffered and died, so those who believe in him suffer with him; and just as Jesus was raised from death, so too believers are raised to new life. Paul takes this further in a similar interchange between the apostle and the churches to whom he writes. When he suffers, the churches are comforted; when he is comforted, that comfort is passed on to them too. The idea of the isolated individual, living his or her own life in a sealed-off compartment away from the rest of the world, is totally foreign to Paul.

⁸ We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself.

2 Corinthians 1:8

We do not want you to be unaware marks a shift from the eulogy to the body of the letter.

The affliction we experienced in Asia may refer back to Paul's suffering and persecution in Ephesus: <<**If with merely human hopes I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would I have gained by it?**>> (1 Corinthians 15:32a), but the precise location and nature of the affliction are not certain.

That Paul was crushed, burdened, or 'weighed down, Greek *bareō*, and despaired in Asia points forward to: <<**We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair**>> (2 Corinthians 4:8). Refer also to the comments on 2 Corinthians 4:17-18. Paul's tone here indicates that whatever they had experienced, there seemed to be no way of escaping from it at the time of their clearly traumatic ordeal.

⁹ Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

2 Corinthians 1:9

Sentence of death. Paul's suffering was so severe that it seemed to Paul as if a death sentence had been decreed against him. However, the Greek phrase is not so much a sentence passed by a ruler or a judge; it is more like that of a person whose request for mercy had been denied and who was condemned to die. It is not known, of course, whether Paul faced a life-threatening situation or whether the stress of his persecution in general was the cause for this statement here.

So that we would rely not on ourselves but on God. Whatever their ordeal had been it had clearly resulted in the realisation to them, and now to others, that human strength is not sufficient in all situations: <<*Thus says the Lord: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord. They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord*>> (Jeremiah 17:5-7). Sometimes it is only reliance on God that will allow those afflicted to endure. His deliverance from the situation seemed to him like resurrection, i.e. God who raises the dead. In Jewish thinking, God is the creator of life and he will recreate all things, including life, to the way they were originally intended to be.

¹⁰ He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again, ¹¹ as you also join in helping us by your prayers, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted to us through the prayers of many.

2 Corinthians 1:10-11

He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us. In the 1st Century, suffering and death was still viewed as divine judgement against the individual and Paul's opponents would no doubt have seized on this to further their claims against him. Paul counters that these things come not because God is angry but because he wants his people to trust him more fully: <<*For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe*>> (1 Timothy 4:10).

Biblical hope, as the consequence and expression of faith, is not wishful thinking but an absolute confidence in God's promises for the future (v.10), based on his faithfulness in the past (v.9).

In helping us by your prayers. Paul ties his deliverance closely to the prayers of the Corinthians on his behalf, as did other churches: <<*for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will result in my deliverance*>> (Philippians 1:19). God has delivered and will continue to deliver, provided the Corinthians pray for him. The answer to their prayers will in turn cause thanksgiving to overflow on the part of believers everywhere for God's gracious dealings on behalf of Paul and his co-workers. For Paul, when human beings give thanks to God, something at the heart of the universe comes back into proper shape.

A request for prayer usually appears in the closing section of Paul's letters: <<*I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf*>> (Romans 15:30). The fact that he departs from his usual practice and includes it here is noteworthy. Paul's request for prayer highlights what is probably the sore spot in his relationship with the Corinthians, namely, a lack of reciprocity: <<*There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours*>> (2 Corinthians 6:12). There was a distinct cooling in the relationship between the Corinthians and Paul, a relationship that Paul wanted to rekindle.

I.c 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:17 - Paul's boast

Paul begins the body of his letter with a detailed defence of why he had changed his mind more than once regarding his earlier plans to return to Corinth:

1. An initial plan to visit Macedonia first, then Corinth as revealed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:5.
2. A plan to visit Corinth first, then Macedonia (v.15).
3. A decision not to make 'another painful visit' to Corinth, so that he went, by way of Troas, to Macedonia first (v.23 and 2:1).

I.c.i 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4 - The Postponement of Paul's Visit

The Corinthians were complainers as well and took the opportunity of Titus' visit with the severe letter to communicate a number of criticisms they had against Paul:

1. They said that Paul's letters were hard to understand (vv.12-14).
2. They claimed that Paul was fickle with regard to his plans to visit them (vv.15-23).
3. They thought he had a domineering attitude toward them and wanted to show who had the upper hand (1:24–2:4).

No doubt they were being egged on by visiting preachers who sought to displace Paul in the Corinthians' affections by pointing to his supposed character and ministerial deficiencies.

I.c.i.1 2 Corinthians 1:12-14 - The content of Paul's boast

Paul defends his conduct and integrity in his relationship with the Corinthians as he answers their first complaint against him.

¹² Indeed, this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God – and all the more towards you.

2 Corinthians 1:12

This is our boast. Paul refers to such boasting 25 times in 2 Corinthians, more than in any other NT document.

To boast is by no means a bad thing if the object of one's boasting is not oneself: <<so that no one might boast in the presence of God>> (1 Corinthians 1:29), <<For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?>> (1 Corinthians 4:7), and: <<not the result of works, so that no one may boast>> (Ephesians 2:9), but in or about God: <<through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God>> (Romans 5:2), <<In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to boast of my work for God>> (Romans 15:17), <<in order that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord'>> (1 Corinthians 1:31), and: <<'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.' For it is not those who commend themselves that are approved, but those whom the Lord commends>> (2 Corinthians 10:17-18). Paul boasts because he acted with frankness, simplicity and open uprightness: <<Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practise cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God>> (2 Corinthians 4:1-2), which, given human sinfulness, can be true only if God has changed one's life.

Paul has often been criticised for his boasting as some believe this makes him come across as arrogant and conceited. However, three factors need to be considered here:

1. Paul does not engage in boasting in order to make himself look good. He does it to respond to the attitude of those in Corinth who would undermine him in the church.
2. Paul speaks from the standpoint of his office, not his person, and phrases what he says in the plural we, not the singular I.
3. Paul uses the language of the courtroom when he wants to underline the veracity of what he is about to say. 'The testimony of our conscience' means he has a clear conscience that is open to both divine and human scrutiny, an assertion that few indeed could make then or now. This is no idle boast on his part, for he makes his claim before God, who will judge the truthfulness of his words 'on the day of the Lord Jesus' (v.14).

So, too, Paul's godly sincerity explicitly refers to God as its source: <<Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth>> (1 Corinthians 5:8), and: <<For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence>> (2 Corinthians 2:17). Thus, Paul boasts in his conduct because it came about not by earthly, literally fleshly, wisdom but by the grace of God – a contrast between living according to the thinking and values of a fallen world that is in rebellion against its Creator and the believer living in accordance with the death of Christ: <<For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human

point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!>> (2 Corinthians 5:14-17), and the transforming presence of the Spirit: <<And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit>> (2 Corinthians 3:18).

¹³ For we write to you nothing other than what you can read and also understand; I hope you will understand until the end — ¹⁴ as you have already understood us in part — that on the day of the Lord Jesus we are your boast even as you are our boast.

2 Corinthians 1:13-14

I hope you will understand until the end. Paul extends the idea of clarity in writing to a desire for complete understanding and clarity in all matters pertaining to his relationship with the Corinthians. Through Titus' recent visit they have come to better understand something of Paul's motives.

The day of the Lord Jesus assigns to Jesus the role of judge attributed to Yahweh on 'the day of the Lord': <<See, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation, and to destroy its sinners from it>> (Isaiah 13:9), <<That day is the day of the Lord God of hosts, a day of retribution, to gain vindication from his foes. The sword shall devour and be sated, and drink its fill of their blood. For the Lord God of hosts holds a sacrifice in the land of the north by the river Euphrates>> (Jeremiah 46:10), <<For a day is near, the day of the Lord is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations>> (Ezekiel 30:3), <<Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes>> (Joel 1:15), <<Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light>> (Amos 5:18), <<For the day of the Lord is near against all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head>> (Obadiah 15), <<Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is at hand; the Lord has prepared a sacrifice, he has consecrated his guests>> (Zephaniah 1:7), <<Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes>> (Malachi 4:5), <<For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night>> (1 Thessalonians 5:2), and: <<But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed>> (2 Peter 3:10). Jesus' role as judge is a clear affirmation of his messianic identity and divine status.

We are your boast even as you are our boast. What Paul wishes for now is that they will have complete confidence in him, so that he might become a source of boasting for them, as they have become for him.

I.c.i.2 2 Corinthians 1:15-22 - The reason for Paul's first change of plans

Paul answers their second complaint and explains that his initial decision not to come directly to Corinth as originally planned: **<<I will visit you after passing through Macedonia – for I intend to pass through Macedonia>>** (1 Corinthians 16:5), was actually determined by his desire to bring more blessing to them and thus to be like Christ, in whom God's promises are fulfilled (v.20).

¹⁵ Since I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a double favour; ¹⁶ I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on to Judæa.

2 Corinthians 1:15-16

I wanted to come to you first, on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia. It is clear that Paul originally wanted to visit Corinth on his way to Macedonia then return to Corinth from there. However, he actually travelled this route in reverse, going to Macedonia from Ephesus, then to Corinth and back to Macedonia: **<<After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples; and after encouraging them and saying farewell, he left for Macedonia. When he had gone through those regions and had given the believers much encouragement, he came to Greece, where he stayed for three months. He was about to set sail for Syria when a plot was made against him by the Jews, and so he decided to return through Macedonia>>** (Acts 20:1-3).

Paul had visited Corinth briefly but had left due to the poor reception and difficulties he had encountered there. It seems he had communicated his intention to return to them but had not done so, causing them to accuse him of not keeping his promises.

Send me on to Judæa. Paul travelled to Jerusalem with the offering for the poor made by the churches in Achaia, Macedonia and Asia; **<<At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints; for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem>>** (Romans 15:25-26).

A double favour or a second experience of grace, Greek *deuteran charin*, which literally means 'second grace' or 'second benefit'. Some think this refers to a second opportunity to contribute to the collection for the believers in Jerusalem, refer to chapters 8-9. On this interpretation, contributing to the needs of others is called **favour** because it is made possible by God's grace in the lives of those who give: **<<We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia>>** (2 Corinthians 8:1). The Corinthians are set free to meet the needs of others because God has met their needs in Christ: **<<For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich>>** (2 Corinthians 8:9); refer also to 2 Corinthians 9:6-11. Others see this as a reference to the added experience of various blessings from God that would come from another visit by Paul.

Have you send me on to Judæa. Paul was more interested in their moral and prayer support than any financial aid to cover the journey. This is expressed in his letter to the Romans: <<*But now, with no further place for me in these regions, I desire, as I have for many years, to come to you when I go to Spain. For I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little while*>> (Romans 15:23-24), and by John: <<*Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the friends, even though they are strangers to you; they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on in a manner worthy of God*>> (3 John 5-6).

¹⁷ Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to ordinary human standards, ready to say ‘Yes, yes’ and ‘No, no’ at the same time?

2 Corinthians 1:17

Do I make my plans according to ordinary human standards. Paul was not vacillating in his decision making but demonstrating that his ministry and travel plans were not made on a whim or out of human desire, but were according to the will of God. Paul frequently challenges his readers not to slip back into their worldly ways: <<*I ask that when I am present I need not show boldness by daring to oppose those who think we are acting according to human standards*>> (2 Corinthians 10:2).

‘Yes, yes’ and ‘No, no’. Because of his change in plans (vv.15-16), Paul’s opponents accused him of vacillating and being indecisive.

¹⁸ As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been ‘Yes and No.’ ¹⁹ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not ‘Yes and No’; but in him it is always ‘Yes.’

2 Corinthians 1:18-19

Silvanus is another name for Paul’s companion Silas, who accompanied him on his second missionary journey: <<*But Paul chose Silas and set out, the believers commending him to the grace of the Lord*>> (Acts 15:40), during which the three men were involved in planting the church in Corinth: <<*When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus*>> (Acts 18:5). He was also a companion of Peter: <<*Through Silvanus, whom I consider a faithful brother, I have written this short letter to encourage you, and to testify that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it*>> (1 Peter 5:12).

Paul can affirm that his word was not ‘Yes and No’; but in him, that is, Christ, it is always ‘Yes’ for: <<*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever*>> (Hebrews 13:8), and because Paul’s change of plan was in accord with God’s will: <<*I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles*>> (Romans 1:13).

God's faithfulness in and through Jesus was preached by Paul without any wavering or inconsistency, so that the consistency of his message ensured the consistent character of his motives and actions. As the Corinthians themselves could verify, there was no 'yes and no' about the Son whom Paul and his colleagues preached. His consistency in the greater matters ensured his reliability in the comparatively lesser matters of not, in their view, honouring his decision to visit them.

²⁰ For in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes.' For this reason it is through him that we say the 'Amen', to the glory of God.

2 Corinthians 1:20

Every one of God's promises is a 'Yes' can be understood in three key ways:

1. For more than 1,000 years the Jewish nation had lived on the promises that God had given to them and he had always proved himself as faithful.
2. God's ultimate promise was the provision of a solution to sin that came through the giving of his Son.
3. For those who have accepted the Gospel, God now says yes to them in affirmation of that acceptance, with encouragement to persevere until the very end: <<*Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him*>> (James 1:12), <<*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life*>> (Revelation 2:10b), and: <<*I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown*>> (Revelation 3:11).

God's promises find their fulfilment in Christ, indicating that the OT Scriptures should be read as pointing to Christ. Paul expresses his agreement, i.e. his Amen, the Greek form of the Hebrew word meaning 'to confirm', thus confirming what God has done through Christ, that is through him, not only by preaching Christ (v.19), but also by acting like Christ toward the Corinthians, including changing his plans in order to minister to them.

²¹ But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, ²² by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first instalment.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22

It is God who establishes us with you in Christ. Paul reinforces his argument by pointing to their joint possession of the Spirit, arguing that the God who gave them the Spirit to guarantee their common destiny is the same God who ensures the integrity of his conduct. So to doubt Paul's reliability in a trivial matter, such as travel plans, would be to also doubt the credibility of the Spirit's work in the Corinthians' own lives.

To be anointed, Greek *chrío*, is to be set apart and gifted by God for his calling, symbolised in the OT by the pouring of olive oil as a sign of God's rich provision. It is also a play on the word Christ, which means 'anointed one', Christ's messengers, i.e. us, are also anointed. In the Septuagint *chrío* is a word used for

commissioning to a particular office, e.g. king or priest, or a task, e.g. prophet. It is also used metaphorically of the Spirit's equipping for mission or service: <<***The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners***>> (Isaiah 61:1), which Jesus quoted at the start of his earthly ministry. Refer to Luke 4:18. John concurs with the anointing: <<***But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge***>> (1 John 2:20).

His seal, Greek *sphragizo*, is a mark of ownership, and was often used by ancient kings to signify ownership. A seal made of wax, clay, or various kinds of soft metal would signify either ownership or authentication of an item or a document. It was used to secure money, goods and documents for delivery, and was a guarantee against tampering or falsification during transit. God has placed his mark of ownership on believers by sealing them with the Spirit. No one can remove them from his ownership until the day of redemption: <<***What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand***>> (John 10:29).

This theme of God's seal is an ancient one: <<***Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up, from the cherub on which it rested, to the threshold of the house. The Lord called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing-case at his side, and said to him, 'Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of those who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it'***>> (Ezekiel 9:3-4), and: <<***On that day, says the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, son of Shealtiel, says the Lord, and make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you, says the Lord of hosts***>> (Haggai 2:23). **It will continue until the end:** <<***I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage earth and sea, saying, 'Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads'***>> (Revelation 7:2-3).

A first instalment or guarantee is a financial term, Greek *arrabōn*, also meaning down payment or deposit, referring to the first instalment paid as a pledge of faithfulness to complete the purchase. The Spirit comes as God's pledge to complete, or pay in full, the final redemption of his people at the end of the age, and the Spirit's presence in Christians' lives now is a reliable sample or foretaste of this future fullness: <<***Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life***>> (John 5:24), which is one of the most striking statements in John regarding the present possession of eternal life. Eternal life begins immediately, in a partially realised but significant way, when one believes in Jesus. Those who believe can face the last judgment with confidence. Paul also wrote: <<***If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you***>> (Romans 8:11).

To sum up, the Spirit's role in the life of the church is that of a first instalment or down payment that guarantees God's indisputable relationship, commissions

and equips for service, secures against falsification or tampering, and preserves the 'goods' of this relationship until the day of redemption.

I.c.i.3 2 Corinthians 1:23-2:4 - The reason for Paul's second change of plans

Paul answers their third complaint and makes it clear that, just as his first change of plans was a Christ-like act in accordance with the promises of God, refer to the comments made on the sub-heading for vv.15-22, so too his decision not to come but to send them a tearful letter was an expression of God's love to them in Christ (2:3-4).

²³ But I call on God as witness against me: it was to spare you that I did not come again to Corinth. ²⁴ I do not mean to imply that we lord it over your faith; rather, we are workers with you for your joy, because you stand firm in the faith.

2 Corinthians 1:23-24

I call on God as witness against me. This is the ultimate authentication of Paul's apostolic authority. As both a Jew and a Christian, Paul would never make such a claim without the assurance of knowing that he was indeed acting faithfully. To do otherwise would have God witness against him: <<**Hear, you peoples, all of you; listen, O earth, and all that is in it; and let the Lord God be a witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple**>> (Micah 1:2).

To spare you. Just as Christ came first to save his people rather than to judge the world, so too Paul did not return immediately to Corinth, in order to spare them a taste of God's wrath. Like Christ, Paul is willing to judge those in Corinth who will not repent, refer to 2 Corinthians 13:1-10, but before judgment comes mercy.

I do not mean to imply that we lord it over your faith. This may have been a claim made by Paul's opponents but it was never his intention in asserting his apostolic authority. Peter gives instructions to other leaders to follow Paul's example here: <<**Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock**>> (1 Peter 5:3).