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THE SECOND LETTER OF PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS
2 Corinthians 1:1-7

INTRODUCTION

¹PAUL, AN APOSTLE OF CHRIST JESUS BY THE WILL OF GOD, AND TIMOTHY *OUR* BROTHER,
TO THE CHURCH OF GOD WHICH IS AT CORINTH WITH ALL THE SAINTS WHO ARE THROUGHOUT ACHAIA:

²GRACE TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

³BLESSED *BE* THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE FATHER OF MERCIES AND GOD OF ALL COMFORT, ⁴WHO COMFORTS US IN ALL OUR AFFLICTION SO THAT WE WILL BE ABLE TO COMFORT THOSE WHO ARE IN ANY AFFLICTION WITH THE COMFORT WITH WHICH WE OURSELVES ARE COMFORTED BY GOD. ⁵FOR JUST AS THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST ARE OURS IN ABUNDANCE, SO ALSO OUR COMFORT IS ABUNDANT THROUGH CHRIST. ⁶BUT IF WE ARE AFFLICTED, IT IS FOR YOUR COMFORT AND SALVATION; OR IF WE ARE COMFORTED, IT IS FOR YOUR COMFORT, WHICH IS EFFECTIVE IN THE PATIENT ENDURING OF THE SAME SUFFERINGS WHICH WE ALSO SUFFER; ⁷AND OUR HOPE FOR YOU IS FIRMLY GROUNDED, KNOWING THAT AS YOU ARE SHARERS OF OUR SUFFERINGS, SO ALSO YOU ARE *SHARERS* OF OUR COMFORT.

- **Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. (NIV)** Right from the start, Paul identified himself as *an apostle*. It was appropriate for Paul to mention his apostleship here, for his authority is a major theme of this letter. A group of false apostles (literally “pseudo-apostles”; see 11:13) had infiltrated the Corinthian church. This distressed Paul greatly because he had founded the church himself on his second missionary journey. To gain a foothold in Corinth, these false apostles had systematically discredited Paul’s missionary work. Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to defend his apostolic authority and to refute the false teachers and their accusations.
1. What does it mean to be an “apostle”? The Greek word *apostolos* literally means “one sent forth.” An apostle was “sent forth” by *Christ Jesus* with the mission to make disciples in his name (Matthew 28:18-20). The disciples—the Twelve who followed Jesus during his earthly ministry, learning from him and witnessing his miracles—became the apostles.
 2. Yet Paul was also included among the apostles because Jesus himself had called Paul to preach the Good News to the Gentiles. Although Paul had been a zealous Pharisee who persecuted Christians, Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road, calling him to a radically different life.
 3. Paul was an apostle *by the will of God* because God himself chose him for that work: “Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15 NLT; “Saul” is Paul’s Hebrew name). Jesus’ calling gave Paul the authority to establish churches throughout the known Mediterranean world and to teach the believers who gathered in these churches. Paul’s apostleship was confirmed by the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 9:28), and his message was confirmed at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-21).

And Timothy our brother. Timothy was Paul's assistant. He had grown up in Lystra, a city in the province of Galatia. Paul had visited Galatia on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:8-21).

- During that trip, he most likely met Timothy's mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois (2 Timothy 1:5). On his second visit to Lystra, Paul asked young Timothy to travel with him (Acts 16:1-5).
- Evidently, Paul saw in Timothy a willingness to cooperate with Christ's plan and an enthusiasm for the gospel. These were necessary characteristics for an early Christian missionary. Timothy agreed to join Paul and, subsequently, traveled all over the Mediterranean world with him, helping to establish churches wherever they went.
- Timothy courageously shared Paul's sufferings and ridicule. Although Paul had other helpers, such as Titus, he developed a special relationship with Timothy, calling him a son in Christ (Philippians 2:22).

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

A typical writer would write "greetings," in Greek, *chairein*—a word that functioned much like our word "hello." Paul Christianized this common greeting by using the Greek word *charis*, commonly translated "grace."

- Grace is God's undeserved favor. God's graciousness is preeminently shown by the fact that he sent his own Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross.
- At the same time God showers on people undeserved favor every day—by providing everything from rain for crops to sunlight for illuminating our days. His graciousness is even more pronounced to Christians, who enjoy his Spirit, who guides them to do what is right.
- The Greek word for "peace" is based on the common Hebrew greeting *shalom*. For Jews, *shalom* did not mean absence of conflict, as it does for us when we say, "there is peace in the Middle East."
- Instead, *shalom* connotes well-being, wholeness, and inner tranquility. Peace is "the way things ought to be." For Paul, Christ's death on the cross was the only event that restored true peace.

2 Corinthians 1:3 - 7 (NASB)

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

⁴who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

⁵For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

⁶But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer;

⁷and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are *sharers* of our comfort.

- **Affliction** translates the Greek word *thlipsis*, which literally means, "pressure." Throughout **all** the stress, persecution, and trials he experienced in his turbulent life, Paul experienced God's comforting, strengthening presence. The apostle's life was thus an amazing juxtaposition of **affliction** and comfort, a seeming paradox he expressed later in this letter:

BUT WE HAVE THIS TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS, SO THAT THE SURPASSING GREATNESS OF THE POWER WILL BE OF GOD AND NOT FROM OURSELVES; WE ARE AFFLICTED IN EVERY WAY, BUT NOT CRUSHED; PERPLEXED, BUT NOT DESPAIRING; PERSECUTED, BUT NOT FORSAKEN; STRUCK DOWN, BUT NOT DESTROYED; ALWAYS CARRYING ABOUT IN THE BODY THE DYING OF JESUS, SO THAT THE LIFE OF JESUS ALSO MAY BE MANIFESTED IN OUR BODY. FOR WE WHO LIVE ARE CONSTANTLY BEING DELIVERED OVER TO DEATH FOR JESUS' SAKE, SO THAT THE LIFE OF JESUS ALSO MAY BE MANIFESTED IN OUR MORTAL FLESH. (2 COR. 4:7-11)