

## 2nd Corinthians Chapter 1- John Karmelich

1. Let me open with a question: How and why should Christians work together to help each other through tough times? That is an underlying theme of this opening chapter. Given the economic recession at this time, it is a good question to ask. With that question out of my system, welcome to my study of Paul's Second letter to the Corinthians.
  - a) Let me start this study by saying that although both 1st and 2nd Corinthians are written by Paul to the same group of people, the topics are different. First Corinthians focused on correcting wrong ways of Christian thinking. This second letter primarily focuses on personal relationships. That is one reason why I mentioned the idea of Christians helping each other through the tough times of life. Of all of Paul's letters, 2nd Corinthians is considered Paul's most personal in terms of describing his feelings and emotions.
2. As I do with the first lesson of every bible study, let me write a little on what was going on at this time and place and what caused Paul to write this letter in the first place.
  - a) The first thing to remember is what the city of Corinth was like at that time. This was a major city in Greece. It was destroyed by the Romans a relatively short time after this letter and was later rebuilt. Today the ancient city of Corinth is essentially ruins.
    - i) Corinth, like most major Greek cities had lots of temples to different gods. The major tourist attraction to Corinth was a large temple to the "Goddess of Love". There would be lots of temple prostitutes who would walk into the city to find customers to bring them back to the temple. Corinth had the reputation of an ancient Las Vegas in that it had a reputation as a "anything goes" party town.
  - b) Paul started this church. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was written a good time after starting that church. It dealt with correcting problems within this church. Despite their problems Paul still believed the Christians living in this city were saved. In other words, despite their problems (and there were lots), they never lost their salvation.
  - c) In between Paul's first letter and Paul's second letter, Paul made a visit to Corinth. There is a reference to this visit in 1st Corinthians, Chapter 16, Verses 3 and 5. Apparently at that second visit, Paul found other problems that needed addressing. There is a famous lost letter to the Corinthians that scholars called the "stern letter" as it apparently had stern warnings addressing the behavior within the Corinthians church. We will get to that reference to the "stern letter" in later lessons of this study.
    - i) This story about the lost letter teaches us that not everything Paul wrote was "Scripture". This lost letter was just that, a letter from Paul to the church.
  - d) This leads us to the Second Letter to the Corinthians. Apparently, Paul got a response from the "lost stern letter". The response was part of the motivation for Paul to write "Second Corinthians".
3. Let me state the "Who, what, when, where and why's" of this letter. It was written by Paul (with Timothy at his side), and delivered by a messenger to the Corinthian church. It was probably written from somewhere in "Asia Minor" which is today, Turkey. As best scholars can tell, it was written around the year 55 or early 56AD.
  - a) At this time, Paul was on his third missionary journey. The arrest and various trials of Paul leading to his trip to Rome have not yet begun.
  - b) The last question is the "why" question. That is the focus of most of 2nd Corinthians. This letter deals with relationship issues within the church. This included relationship issues between Paul and the church and issues within the Corinthian church itself.
    - i) The idea of this letter is it teaches us how Christians are to work as a team. The primary focus of the first chapter is on the issue of "comfort and suffering".

4. Let me give one more bit of background information before I start. Apparently between the time of Paul's first letter and Paul's second letter, the church in Corinth was visited by "Judaizers". These people believed Jesus was God, but also taught that in order to be saved, one also had to be circumcised and one had to keep all the laws of Moses.
  - a) Paul never taught that one is saved by keeping the laws of Moses. Obeying the central concepts of the law which are about loving God with all of one's heart and loving one's neighbor as oneself does help to live a happy life and makes a good witness for God. However, one's salvation is not dependant upon being "good enough" for God. One's salvation is solely based upon the concept of believing Jesus is God and the fact that He died for one's sins and God then raised Him up to eternal life and will do the same for us.
  - b) The reason I mention the "Judaizers" is that part of this letter will be Paul addressing the issue of his apostleship. Because of the influence of these other teachers in the church, some doubted Paul's authority as an apostle.
5. This leads us to Chapter 1. My title for this lesson (you knew it was coming eventually ☺) is "Comfort and Suffering". My goal is to maximize the comfort of this lesson and minimize the suffering. ☺ With that said, welcome to my study of 2nd Corinthians, Chapter 1.
  - a) Let's start with defining those terms: Webster's dictionary describes "comfort" as "to strengthen greatly" or "a feeling of relief or encouragement". The biblical idea of comfort is to help those who are hurting. The concept includes receiving help from God Himself as well as giving and receiving help from other believers.
  - b) The definition of "suffer" is: "to submit to or be forced to endure." The related idea is to "to put up with especially as inevitable or unavoidable".
    - i) What we are going to discuss in this lesson is that suffering is a part of human existence and Christians are not exempt from suffering. In fact, one of God's promises to the believer is that in this lifetime we will have to deal with suffering and even persecution. (See 2nd Timothy 3:12.)
    - ii) Suffering in this lifetime is inevitable. What Paul is trying to get across is that God provides for us far more comfort than any and all suffering we can have in this lifetime. God provides us with ways to help us cope with whatever we are going through at the present moment.
  - c) This lesson gets into the issue of why we suffer and how we are comforted through suffering. It is designed to teach us about having the right perspective and how to have comfort through whatever we are going through in our lives.
6. This leads to a related point of the opening chapter and that is to teach us that God is faithful.
  - a) What Paul wants to get across is that one can always trust in God to give us comfort through whatever we are going through.
  - b) In this chapter, Paul emphasizes the word "Yes" with God. That does not mean the answer to all our questions with God is "Yes". If we ask God for a fancy "whatever", the answer is not yes if we pray about it hard and long enough. ☺ What it does mean that when it comes to us being comforted by God through whatever we are going through, the answer is always "Yes" that God does provide us comfort in that one can have a sense of peace no matter how much pain one is dealing with in life.
    - i) On a related point, the answer is always "Yes" with God in that He does allow suffering to exist. A purpose of suffering is for Christians to work together to help each other through whatever suffering we are dealing with at the moment.
    - ii) In other words, God finds a way to use our suffering to be of help to others and vice versa. Most adults will tell you that the best relief from suffering usually comes from someone who has been through a very similar situation. God has this way of "matching up people" in our lives when we need them and they need us.
  - c) In summary, this lesson is about how to properly deal with both "comfort and suffering" through whatever we are going through in life.

7. OK, I've made you suffer enough with a two-page introduction. ☺ It's time to start the text itself.
8. Chapter 1, Verse 1: Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia:
- a) The letter starts with who wrote it, which were Paul and Timothy. Timothy was Paul's assistant. How Timothy helped in putting this letter together is unknown. Timothy is mentioned, as he was there to help start the church on when Paul first came to Corinth.
  - b) Paul gives himself the title, "An apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God".
    - i) When Paul was growing up and as a young man, Paul never had any intentions of being an apostle of Jesus Christ. Even after his "conversion experience", Paul could have been saved and then "gone about his merry way". The point is once Paul was saved, he had this "God given urge" to go be a witness for Christ.
    - ii) That in a sense leads to us. Most Christians do have a moment in time where they realized that Jesus is God and are saved. For some people this occurs more than once in their lifetime. For those who are lucky enough to be raised in a Christian home, it often comes at an early age and possibly again once they grow up.
    - iii) The issue is then "What do we do with the knowledge that Jesus is God"? Yes, we accept that concept, but that is usually the beginning of a journey, not the end. That's why it's called being "born-again" as it is the beginning of a new life. The key issue for our lives is what do we do with that information about Jesus.
    - iv) God put it on Paul's heart to go be a missionary for the rest of his life. God put it on my heart to write these bible studies among other things. Whatever God calls me to do is different from what God calls you to do. The answer is always that God calls each of us to something. To find out what one's "something" is, the answer is often try different things that and see where God leads us. I had no idea on "day one" or even as I taught in church that this ministry would happen. I just moved in different directions and eventually this study grew out of that.
      - a) One's ministry can be as straightforward as raising Godly children or taking care of an aging loved one. It can involve a role at one's local church or being involved in some sort of missionary activity. The point is God does lead us on the path He wants for us. It can change over time as well.
  - c) OK, before I started rambling I was in Verse 1. ☺ This letter is from Paul and Timothy to the church in Corinth. The last part of this sentence is that this letter is also for all saints (i.e., anyone who is saved) throughout "Achaia". That refers to the area around Corinth. In other words, Paul wanted this letter to be circulated.
    - i) Sometimes one wonders how some of Paul's letters became scripture and some were lost like the "lost letter" to Corinth sent prior to this letter. It has always been my view that people reading this "just new" it was special and different. Remember the canon of the scripture was not officially organized until the second and third centuries. Even with that said, I'm convinced people just knew certain letters were scripture and treated them and copied them accordingly.
9. Verse 2: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- a) This was Paul's standard greeting and is found in all of his letters. It makes me wonder if when Paul visited Christians, this was his tag line of an opening greeting. The important idea is that "grace" of God always comes before "peace". It is the grace of God being put on us that allows us to have peace with God and have peace with other Christians.
  - b) One has to remember that when Paul wrote this letter, he had problems with this church. Many (as in not all) Christians in Corinth disrespected Paul as an authority. We will get hints of that throughout this letter. My point is Paul does not start out by scolding. Instead he still treats the Christians in this region as his brothers and sisters in Christ. If you want a good model on how to deal with "issues and problems" it never hurts to start in a positive and welcome tone when greeting others.

10. Verse 3: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.
- a) In Verse 3, we start getting into the heart of the letter. Notice the repetition of the word "comfort". It is used three times in these two verses and the Greek word translated as "comfort" is used a total of ten times in this opening chapter. I stated that the title of this lesson has to do "Comfort and Suffering". My point here is that Paul doesn't waste time getting into that theme in this chapter. ☺
  - b) This sentence begins with praise to God the Father. Paul understood that the true comfort we have in life begins with God the Father and Paul opens with that fact.
  - c) Let me talk a little more about "comfort" here. We tend to think of comfort as a relief from suffering. It is as if something is "pressuring" us and the comfort causes the pressure to end. The term comfort does include the idea of ending whatever we are going through but it also includes the idea of helping us get through that situation.
    - i) Let me put it another way: God may help us in our "suffering of the moment" by bringing such suffering to an end. He may also help us through that suffering by giving us the strength to be able to handle the situation. That's my point: The idea of comfort is not just relief (as in ending the situation), it also describes the ability to rely upon God's strength to be able to mentally handle that situation.
  - d) This leads us back to Verse 3. Paul's point is that God is a "God of comfort" who has the ability to give us comfort through whatever we are going through at the present moment. (I put a heavy emphasis on the word "whatever"!) Paul's second point is that once we have that "comfort of God", we can use comfort to help "comfort others".
    - i) Does this mean that Christians who are suffering can only turn to other Christians for help through that situation? No. It does mean that since God has the ability to comfort us, we should use that ability to understand God's comfort to help others out who are dealing with suffering in one form or another.
    - ii) Sometimes when we are going through a particular situation, the best person (or the only person) we can relate to is someone or a group of "someone's" who has been through the same situation. Many painful situations require a lot of grieving. Such situations don't just go away in a moment of time. The best way to deal with such situations is to regularly meet with a person or a group of people who have already dealt with whatever situation one is dealing with at the moment.
    - iii) Does this mean that every bad situation in life is so God can use that situation for us to help others? No. It is a possibility, but it does not mean that every time we have to deal with suffering it is for us to help others.
    - iv) The bible teaches that everything that happens to believers does happen for a reason. (See Romans 8:28 on that point). However, the bible never states that we are entitled to a reason for everything that happens to us. Sometimes we discover a reason for that "suffering of the moment" over time and sometimes we don't.
      - a) Sometimes God allows us to go through suffering as a form of testing. God wants to see if we are going to trust Him completely (and Him alone) to get through that particular situation. Sometimes God allows us to go through suffering to guide us down a "certain path" of life.
    - v) My main point here is that we as people are not privileged to know the reason why we go through any particular "trial of the moment". All we do know is that we can trust God to comfort us through such sufferings and God encourages us to help comfort others when others are going through some sort of trial.

- e) So why does Paul bring up this topic at the opening of this letter? I believe Paul's "suffering of the moment" was a fear of loss of the Corinthian church! Based on either the situations as stated in the first letter to the Corinthians or based on things that happened in between the two letters, Paul was concerned for the "health" of this church.
    - i) Let me put it this way: Paul didn't want people to get saved so they could then go about their lives. Paul wanted to see Christians grow in their faith. Paul's burden was that the Corinthian church was burdened with their own suffering and didn't know how to deal with it in a "Christian" manner. (That means to be dependant upon God to comfort us in suffering and use that comfort to help comfort others.)
  - f) So how do we comfort others? Is it just a matter of telling them to trust God? No.
    - i) First of all, we can't help someone who doesn't want to be helped. We can offer to help someone, but they must first want our help.
    - ii) Sometimes the answer is "guidance". It may be a matter of praying with them and giving someone guidance on how to pray through a particular situation. Sometimes it is leading a person to another person (or group of people) who have already been through that situation.
    - iii) Sometimes "comfort" is just being willing to listen. One of the biggest problems with humans is we tend to talk too much (or write too much! ☺) and not spend enough time just listening. There are times in my marriage where my wife wants my advice to fix something. Far more often, she just wants me to listen as opposed to trying to fix it. My point is sometimes we can offer comfort by just being willing to listen or just "be there" for a person and let them talk out a situation.
      - a) I am "slowly learning" that the best teaching moments is when people figure out the answer for themselves as opposed to me explaining something. That also applies to the situation of just "being there".
      - b) Remember if we are comforting other Christians, remember that God is working in their lives as well as ours. Give God a chance to work on them as opposed to thinking we have to be the one to solve their problems.
  - g) Before I finish, notice the word "all" in Verse 4. I have that word underlined in my bible.
    - i) The point is no matter what we are going through in our lives God can handle it. We can have confidence that no matter how bad things may seem for the moment, God can provide us with comfort through that situation.
  - h) Meanwhile, back to 2nd Corinthians, Chapter 1.
11. Verse 5: For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.
- a) Verse 5 starts with a point that requires a question. The question is, "How does the suffering of Christ flow over into our lives?" Does this mean we feel the pain that Jesus felt on the cross? No, that is a price Jesus bared alone and that price is fully paid.
    - i) To describe the suffering of "Jesus that overflows into our lives", I like to use the word "disappointment". Imagine if you have young children and you have a big surprise planned for them when you get home from work. You find out the kids have been naughty all day. You can't give them the surprise you wanted. All we can do is feel disappointed because of the "sins" committed by our children cause us to feel disappointment at the things we want to bless them with.
    - ii) In the same way, God wants to bless our lives and do great things with our lives. When we turn from God, it causes the "suffering of Christ" in that He wants to work His will through us and we are rebelling against Him. All God can do at that moment is in a sense, "feel disappointed". Does that mean God can't work through us in bad moments of our lives? No. God can do whatever He wants when He wants. Sometimes I have watched God work through sinful lives in amazing ways, often to help that person get back on the right tract in life!

- iii) My point here is I'm convinced there are times in our lives where God wants to do something for us, but He will not as we have turned from Him in some way. There may be a sin issue or something as simple as not doing what God wants us to do. All God can do in that situation is feel "disappointed".
  - iv) Does this mean the "suffering of Christ" is limited to the issue of disappointment? No. The issue gets back to the command to "show love for one another". That means we are to put others as priority over selves. When we see others suffering, we care about them and feel some of that pain. In the same way Jesus cares about those who are His and we feel the "suffering of Christ". I used "disappointment" as an illustration of how Christ suffers with us.
  - b) This leads us back to the verse itself. The point of the verse is that there is suffering in Christ that we can relate too. God may want to work through an individual or a particular group or church. All we can do for that moment is share in that "suffering". At that moment, we do share the suffering of Christ and desire things to be different.
  - c) What about painful moments in our lives? Is that too, the "suffering of Christ"? It can be, but the problem is we don't always know the cause of that pain. We do know that God is a God of comfort who wants us to be comforted through the situation of the moment.
    - i) I'm reminded of something my wife tries to teach my kids every now and then: "You can't control the things that happen to you in life. All you have control over is your attitude during such situations." You usually can't prevent the bad things that happen to us in life, but we can control our attitude through those situations."
      - a) I'm not saying one has to artificially be happy when bad things happen. I am saying we can have the peace of Christ no matter what is happening in our lives. We can have the comfort to overcome whatever is the suffering of the moment by drawing upon God's strength for our comfort.
  - d) Getting back to the verse, just as the "suffering of Christ" has an affect on our lives, so does the "comfort of Christ". When we feel pain and suffering in our lives. God is there to provide us relief and we can count on Him to provide us relief from the suffering.
    - i) That does not mean that God immediately rescues us out of every situation in which there is suffering. It means that we can have the peace and the comfort of God to give us the mental relief through whatever we are going through.
12. Verse 6: If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. <sup>7</sup> And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.
- a) The essential idea of these two verses is that of "interaction". When we are distressed, we need to look to other believers to help provide relief from that stress. When we are comforted from God, we need to share that comfort with others.
  - b) This has nothing to do with say, seeing the right doctors or medical people to help with the physical pain. I don't have a problem seeing non-Christian doctors for medical help. I want the best physical care I can get for my family and myself. The issue at hand is not about getting the right medical help, but about dealing with the "stress" which is often far greater than the physical pain. Most people will tell you that getting medical relief or financial relief or "whatever" is much easier than dealing with the mental stress that goes with that situation. That is where the comfort of God comes into play.
  - c) Let me put it this way: Often, the best advice on "attitude" in such situations comes from people who have already been through a similar situation. Often we seek the counsel of someone who has been through something very similar to help us out. In the same way, if we have been through a major form of "stress", we can be of great service to someone else in the future who is currently going through that same situation.

- d) I'm reminded of a friend who lost his teenage son to cancer. That happened a good while back. The pain is something he still deals with. As a Christian, he is now involved with helping other people deal with the pain of the loss of one's child and providing support. That is an excellent example of what Paul is getting at in these verses.
  - e) Over a year ago, I had something "significant" happen to me physically. I am now much better, but the one thing I never got from God (or from doctors) was a reason why it happened. For all I know, there may be a person coming in my life in the future who God wants me to witness to who will go through the same situation. As I stated earlier, the bible teaches that all things happen to believers for a reason. That is the principal behind Romans 8:28. That verse never says we are entitled to know why such things happen. We just need to keep an "eye out" as God may have put us through a situation to be of benefit to someone else in the future who will go through the same thing. It is not a guarantee it is to happen, but we should watch for it.
  - f) OK, what is my motivation to help others go through suffering? I have enough problems in my own life without looking around for strangers to help! ☺ For starters, Jesus says to put the needs of others above our own needs. That is what's behind the idea of "loving one another". Next, God knows we have our own needs to deal with and there has to be a balance. I have found that as we "give" to others, somehow, this helps us deal with our own "sufferings". This does tie well to these two verses. The verses say that just as we share in the sufferings of others, so we also share in their comfort. The point is just as others "feel better" or "get better", we do personally benefit from their comfort.
  - g) Like most adults, I have watched some pretty painful things that people have gone through. I usually find it's harder to deal with the pain of a loved one than one's own pain. Assuming we ask others how we can help and they don't respond with any physical requests, often all we can do is pray, which I do and it does help tremendously. I have often found that sometimes just "being there" is a great source of comfort for others as opposed to trying to find the right words to say. During times of suffering, just having others willing to be there is often a source of comfort.
  - h) Getting back to these two verses, there is more to it than just helping others get through the "sufferings" of the moment. The other benefit of giving comfort to others is that it helps to build our endurance. That word "endurance" is used in Verse 6. Having God give us comfort through a situation gives us the strength to move on to the "next thing".
  - i) I heard a pastor say a great line about "death" I want to share: "I don't fear death as much as I fear the part right before death! I'm positive I will be in heaven, so I don't fear dying. I do fear whatever happens prior to that moment as I can't stand pain."
    - i) That sort of summarizes a lot of our lives. Let's face it: As long as we are living in this life, we have to deal with pain and suffering. Yes life has its pleasurable moments, but it also has suffering as well. God wants Christians to work as a team to help us comfort each other through such times. The "rough part" is not death. It's what happens to us in life leading up to that moment.
13. Verse 8: We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.
- a) Now it is Paul's turn to give his example of the suffering he has been through. I can pretty much promise you that whatever suffering we have had in our lifetime is nothing compared to what Paul has been through. Yes I'm sure there are exceptions out there, but most of us have never had to deal with the type of suffering of "Paul's resume". We will get some of Paul's "suffering" resume in Chapter 11 of 2nd Corinthians.
  - b) Here, Paul is describing some incident in his life which commentators debate about "what it is". Whatever it was, it was so bad, that Paul was convinced he was not going to live through that event and they were going to die, and only could trust in God.

- c) Imagine being in a life-threatening situation where one is convinced that unless God pulls off some sort of miracle, one's life is literally over. Nothing we can do on our part can prevent "death real soon" from happening. That is what Paul went through.
    - i) I've personally seen or know of people on their "death bed" who ask God for relief. Sometimes God "relieves us" by taking our lives. Sometimes God does some sort of miracle to get us through it to live another day. What we have to remember is God is in charge and not us.
    - ii) Prayer is all about God's will getting done and not our will. I've accepted a long time ago that when God doesn't answer my prayer, then it is a case where God wants His will done His way as opposed to praying for my will. Since we don't know God's will in anyway situation, it is ok to ask for things not knowing what the results would be.
    - iii) Meanwhile, I keep interrupting Paul. ☺
14. Verse 9: Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. <sup>10</sup> He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,
- a) Paul is teaching by some past example in his life that we don't rely on our own ability to get through these things, but on the fact that God delivers us. Paul got saved from some sort of deadly peril by God and Paul trusts that God will rescue him again in the future.
  - b) Does this mean that in life threatening situations we should only rely on God for help and not the help of others? Of course not. For all we know, that helping person may be the way by which God is helping us through some situation.
  - c) Paul is describing some situation he went through where "for all intents and purposes" he thought for sure, he was going to die as opposed to get out of it. Paul's point here is God did rescue him out of that situation and we should never count our lives as over until it actually ends. We have to trust in God through the worst of situations as well as the best of situations and trust that He will deliver us.
  - d) Let me put it another way: Most (or many) people have been in situations so painful that we consider ending our life would be better than to keep going through that situation. When all other reasons to not commit suicide seem pointless, remember that it is God who determines the length of our lives and not us. Before taking that step, ask yourself, "Can I do this to God?" What I am saying is when we consider giving up remember that God is still there, He is still in charge and we have to put that stressful situation and our lives fully into His hands and not ours.
    - i) As to consulting others dealing with the pain of the suicide of loves ones, one has to start by remembering the only unforgivable sin is to deny Jesus as God. To commit suicide is a sin (taking one's own life is "taking a life"), but that is a separate issue from salvation. As to consulting, it gets back to asking how one can help and sometimes just "being there" is enough in such situations.
    - e) Let's end this discussion on a more positive note. The verses promise us that God will deliver us through whatever is the situation of the moment. Sometimes that means He will make a way for us to live another day and sometimes that means we get to go to heaven where life is better than where it is here. The main point is that God is in charge of our lives and not us. Take comfort in that fact.
15. Verse 11: as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.
- a) Paul ends this discussion with a reminder of the importance of prayer. Paul is convinced he was rescued due to the help of prayer. I'm convinced that many situations around me have made a world of difference to prayer. Never underestimate what a world of difference prayer can make for someone. The follow up point is that when we are rescued we can give thanks to God for answering those prayers.



- b) Before I can discuss Verse 12, it's time to pause for a moment and discuss, "Why did Paul start this letter with the issue of suffering and comfort? What is going on in Paul's life and the life of this church that it was necessary to start on that point?"
    - i) The underlying issue was the relationship between Paul and this church. Remember that Paul started this church. He cared about its health and growth.
    - ii) Remember that Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was full of issues that needed to be corrected about that church's understanding of Christianity.
      - a) Then there was also a "lost letter" to the Corinthians where Paul had to correct some other issues in the church.
    - iii) Paul didn't want his entire relationship with this church to be one of discipline and the correction of errors. He wanted to have a "love relationship" where He could be of comfort to that church and together they could share in each other's suffering and comfort one another. That is why Paul brought up the issue of comfort and suffering to open this letter.
16. Verse 12: Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.
- a) Paul is making the point that as a Christian he believes he has conducted himself in a way that is pleasing to God. It doesn't mean Paul was perfect or never made mistakes. Paul wanted this church to act in a way that pleasing to God and to model Paul's behavior.
    - i) The issue of the moment is that there were some Christians (or those claiming to be Christians) that were arguing against Paul's teaching to this church.
    - ii) This gets back to something I stated in the introduction in that there was a group of people known as the "Judaizers" who were teaching that in order for Christians to be saved, they had to obey the laws of Moses and be circumcised.
      - a) Paul's point is that if he could boast about the Corinthian church, it would be over the fact that they correctly believe they are saved by faith alone.
      - b) Paul is indirectly asking the Christians in Corinth to reject the concept of having to "work" in order to earn one's salvation.
  - b) What Paul is trying to communicate is that he acted in a way that is pleasing to God in all that he has done. Paul has not taught anything inappropriate for Christians and those false-teachers who teach that obedience to the law for salvation are wrong.
    - i) Paul's point is that he is not relying on "worldly wisdom" in his dealings with this church, but on what God desired Him to do and how God desired him to act.
    - ii) Let me try to explain the difference between "The world's way" versus "God's way" when it comes to God and salvation. The "world" wants to teach us to do things in order to please God. This gets back to the "Judaizers". They were teaching that in order to be saved, one has to do "x and y" in order to please God. The generally idea of false religion is that "God is not happy with you unless you do "x and y"". The "world's way" is all about trying to earn one's salvation.
    - iii) Understand that God wants a relationship with us and wants us to be saved. There are things God desires of me, and not you and vice-versa. That does not mean my way or your way is better. It just means that God desires things for each of our lives. Prayer and the bible is our guide as to how to be pleasing to God and not what other people teach us.
    - iv) As another example, if we fail to show "love to another" in some situation, it does not mean God loves us any less. It is simply a sin to be confessed.
    - v) In summary, "God's way" is all about trusting Him and not any person or human theory about how to live a life pleasing to Him.

17. Verse 13: For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that,<sup>14</sup> as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.
- a) I need to stop and share something I did about fifteen years ago. I got involved in learning about "letter patterns" in the Hebrew version of the Old Testament. This is a theory that one can find hidden messages in the Old Testament by counting (for example) every 12th letter or every 8th letter. In hindsight, some of it was interesting and a lot of it was a waste of time.
    - i) My conclusion after doing this is that "all it can do" is prove the bible is the word of God. Since I already believed that, it didn't add anything to my faith. I don't believe in any way, shape or form, it can give secret messages about our lives or the future. All it can do, at the best is validate the bible as the word of God.
    - ii) OK John, so what? Verse 13 says, "For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand." Paul is saying he does not write anything "secret" in his letters. Grant it, sometimes Paul speaks in run-on sentences and it is tough to understand. The point is there are no hidden messages in Paul's letters.
    - iii) That fact of "no hidden messages" got me to let go of my study of "letter patterns". Even if the study (in Hebrew) found words (there is debate as to whether or not this is random luck or actual findings), the point is all it can do at the best is validate the bible as the word of God. Such studies can't add to our faith or our knowledge of what God wants of our lives. Further, Paul is making the point that you can't find anything like this in any of his letters.
  - b) Now that I've gotten that out of my system, ☺ let me talk a little more about these verses.
    - i) Paul's point is that he hopes the Christians in Corinth understand his views about the issue of "comfort and suffering". Paul is hoping he has made his point that Christians are to make a team effort to help each other through times of suffering and should share their comfort with one another.
    - ii) One of the main points of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is that despite their spiritual problems, they were still saved and Paul wanted to see the Christians there grow in their faith. Paul is making a similar point in these verses.
    - iii) Paul is saying in effect, I hope you grow in your trust in Jesus so that I (Paul) can be comforted by your faith when we get together.
  - c) Paul mentions boasting in these verses. Isn't boasting a bad thing for Christians in that it gets the focus on ourselves and not others? Generally, that is true. At the same time, what Paul is talking about here is not self-boasting but boasting about the faith of others.
    - i) In other words to brag about how others are growing in their faith is a positive type of boasting as it gets the focus on others and not oneself.
18. Verse 15: Because I was confident of this, I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice.<sup>16</sup> I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea.<sup>17</sup> When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, "Yes, yes" and "No, no"?
- a) Apparently as part of Paul's travel plans, he planned on making two visits to Corinth. One was on his way to Macedonia and another on the way back from Macedonia to Judea (i.e., Israel). That is what Paul meant by the Corinthian church having benefited twice.
  - b) Paul changed his mind and decided to write 2nd Corinthians instead of additional visits. Most likely the reason Paul changed his mind is due to the problems in that church and skipping live visits prevented Paul from having to come "down hard" again.
  - c) This leads back to all the talk about suffering and comfort. Paul wanted to see if this church could "correct themselves" without Paul being there.

- d) Let me describe this situation using the illustration of a sports coach. What a good coach looks for is "teachable moments". Sometimes it is best to back off and let the players on the team figure out for themselves what they are doing right and wrong. Then again, sometimes it is best to "come down hard".
- i) Paul was choosing the method of "only writing" here to see how they would do without having him visit and come down hard again for their faults. He wanted them to figure out the issues of suffering and comfort without his presence.
- e) Let me briefly discuss the expression "Yes Yes and "No no" as stated in Verse 17.
- i) Paul is making the point that he does not easily change his mind. Because Paul decided not to make a visit to Corinth that some people were saying Paul is untrustworthy in making and keeping his plans.
- ii) Paul responds to that charge by saying in effect he does not make plans lightly. He said he does not make plans in a "worldly manner". That statement does not mean we have to stop and pray prior to every decision we make in life. (That prayer idea wouldn't hurt, especially when it comes to big decisions.) It does mean that we should make plans based on the concept of "loving each other" in that we do our best to put the interest of others above our own interests.
- iii) Paul truly loved the churches that he founded and wanted to see them grow. Paul's intent was not to brag about what he has accomplished. His goal was to see Christians grow in their faith and trust in God in all situations. Paul had to make decisions about when to visit churches and when to write letters and what to say in either case. Paul's point here is that he "backed off" coming to Corinth as he did not want to come down hard at that moment and Paul believed that was God's will for that moment in time.
- iv) So how do we know what is God's will for any one moment in time? We don't. All we can do is use prayer and God's word for guidance as to how to live our lives and trust that God is guiding us. I usually find in hindsight, God's will becomes obvious. We simply have to trust that God is working in our lives and He is guiding us. Am I positive that what I am doing at this moment is God's will? No, but I keep moving forward trusting that God is working and if I'm going in a wrong direction, I pray and trust God will work it out to correct me. In other words, God loves me too much to leave me alone and I have to trust that He can work in my life and does so as He sees best.
19. Verse 18: But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No".
- a) One gets the impression that those in Corinth who didn't like Paul picked on the fact that he didn't show up for a visit. It would be like someone talking at the "donut table" after church saying in effect, "That guy who writes to us, he has powerful letters, but you can't trust him to show up in person".
- b) Paul's responded to the issue of not showing up by saying that the gospel message can be counted on. The idea is whether or not Paul shows up in person is irrelevant to what Paul is preaching. This is Paul saying in effect, "You can say what you want about me actually showing up, but that doesn't change the Gospel message I preach to you. We are saved by our faith alone and not anything added to that."
- c) You have to understand how hard it was for religious Jews to accept the idea of not being "saved by the law". Some religious Jews could accept Jesus as the Messiah, but they could not handle the idea of salvation by faith alone. The fear of the Jews was if one preaches that salvation by faith alone, then people will go out and "do whatever they want".
- i) The Christian response is if one wants to live a life pleasing God, one does it out of gratitude, not by trying to keep a bunch of rules. The history of Judaism is a "history of failure" to keep God's laws. The message of Jesus is preaching in effect, "Just follow Me and let Me be in charge of how one lives their life."

20. Verse 19: For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes."<sup>20</sup> For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.
- a) The idea of Jesus always being a "Yes" answer has nothing to do with God giving a "Yes" to every prayer request. It does mean is that we can count on the promises of God and He is faithful to keep His promise of eternal salvation to those who trust in Him.
  - b) The idea of "Yes" is that we don't have to "work harder" in order to achieve salvation. It is "Yes, we are saved by faith alone in that Jesus died for us and our trust that Jesus is God.
  - c) The idea of "Yes" extends to all the promises that the bible makes to us through the New Testament. Most Christian bookstores sell little books that list all of the bible promises. The point is we can count on the answer to all of those promises.
  - d) One of the things to accept about God is that He is perfect and He knows all things. People can change their minds about things, but God is incapable of lying or incapable of changing His mind. (See Malachi 3:6). If one can accept those premises, then the rest of God's promises come easy because they follow the principal that God is perfect and is incapable of changing His mind.
    - i) I am saved as I trust in those facts and trust in the fact the Holy Spirit is working in my life today despite my faults and shortcomings.
    - ii) Christianity never teaches one has to live a perfect life to be pleasing to God. The idea is to come to God just as we are, and let Him change us as He sees fit.
  - e) This does lead back to the verses. The main point here is we can trust in God. Paul emphasizes the word "amen" in Verse 20. The word "amen" literally means "so be it".
    - i) The idea behind "Amen" is that we agree with what is being said. As it applies to this verse, the idea is that we can count on God to fulfill His promises to us and we say "amen" meaning we agree to that concept.
    - ii) When we think of prayer, we tend to think of asking God for things. Sometimes prayer is just reminding ourselves of God's promises to us. We don't do that for God's sake but for our sake to help get our minds on a right focus. That is the idea behind the "amen" of Verse 20.
21. Verse 21: Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us,<sup>22</sup> set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.
- a) The point here in these final two verses is that we know we are saved because we know the Holy Spirit is inside of us guiding us on how to live our lives. That Holy Spirit is our "guarantee" of eternal salvation.
  - b) As someone (myself) who works in the real estate profession, I understand the concept of a deposit. When someone wants to buy a house one has to put down a deposit. If the buyer wants to change their mind, they will usually lose that deposit money.
    - i) What God is saying here is that He puts the Holy Spirit in us as a "deposit" to show that we as believers belong to Him. The difference between the Holy Spirit and a down payment on a house is that God is incapable of changing His mind. God keeps the Holy Spirit in us as a "down payment" on our future salvation.
  - c) If the Holy Spirit is living within us, why do we still sin? The answer is we still have free will. Just because the Holy Spirit is living within us doesn't mean we are always obedient to His will. As Christians we can count on the Holy Spirit guiding our lives, but we have to choose to obey His will at any given moment.
22. On that happy note, I can wrap up this lesson. Let me, of course, give a few closing thoughts. ☺

23. Most of this chapter focused on the issue of comforting one another through times of suffering. So back to the question of why did Paul switch issues in mid-chapter from the issue of "comfort and suffering" to the issue understanding that God can be trusted at all times and that the Holy Spirit is living in us? The answer is that it is through the Holy Spirit that we have the ability to comfort one another through all we go through.
24. If you get confused as to when "God the Father" is working as opposed to "God the Son" versus "God the Holy Spirit", you are not alone. I tend to use these terms interchangeably. Although all three are separate entities, each work as "one" and each is God.
  - a) Let me end this study with my favorite "proof verse" that all three are one. In the Gospel of Matthew, the great commission verse Jesus says in effect, "We are to go make disciples in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19). Notice the word "name" in that verse is singular. The verse does not say to make disciples in the names of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but just "name". That word implies unity of the three entities.
25. Let's pray: Father, help us to focus our lives on you and other believers. Help us to put the needs of others before our own, so we can share in each other's comfort and suffering. Guide us what to say or "not say" when encountering other believers and help us "as a team" make a difference for You in all that we do. Help us to remember the Holy Spirit is living with us and help us to be obedient to His will in our lives as compared to our own desires. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.