

Lesson One

(1:1-22)

SECTION I 1:1-2

1 Paul, 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 in the whole of Achaia:

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

V. 1 — The description of himself as 1) an apostle 2) by the will of God was done by Paul essentially because some saints at Corinth were challenging these facts. This facet is dealt with at length in Chapters 1-7 and 10-13. Timothy was apparently with Paul at the time of writing, and well-known to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:17) since he had spent time there, Acts 18:5.

Church of God — as clearly a name for the “church” as any other name given, and there are several in the Scripture (see Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 2:10). Of course, it is here quite appropriate because of the

effect it was intended to have upon those in Corinth.

saints — The common term in the New Testament for Christians; here including those in Cenchrea, Athens, etc. The term has in mind those who belong to God because they are in Christ Jesus.

V. 2 — The common but meaningful salutation. Grace is from God, who is the ground of all Christian existence. Grace, as a term, began its existence as referring to the property of a thing that would bring joy to the one possessing it. It grew as a concept to encompass the thoughts and acts bringing joy, especially since said thoughts/actions had no selfishness involved, being done simply because of the "heart quality" of the doer. Peace is the result of being in Christ (Rom. 5:11), and also the fruit of reconciliation (5:19). It denotes a state of mind wherein "all is well" since enemies have "kissed and made up."

QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think Paul described himself as he did in 1:1? Do his other epistles begin the same way?
2. How was the congregation in Corinth described? Is this a typical description in the New Testament?
3. Could you give a "thumbnail" sketch of "grace" and "peace"?

SECTION II 1:3-11

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. 6 If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. 7 Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. 9 Why, we felt that we had received the sentence of death; but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead; 10 he delivered us from so deadly a peril, and he will deliver us; on

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him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. 11 You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us in answer to many prayers.

V. 3 — **blessed be** — This is equal to "Praise be"

Father — It is well-recognized that such terms are "humanly" understood. Yet that is true of anything in the Scripture. It is the revelation of a God who is past our understanding to a very limited creation known as man. We as "man" are so restricted in our ability to comprehend a being so unlike ourselves in so many ways. Because this is true, God attempted to "bridge the gap" by relating what was unknown through means of the known (as any analogy is to do). Hence, he picked terms that are known to his creation, man, to help us comprehend our creator (God). Furthermore, he in his wisdom chose the terms that best present what is unknown. We do well then to remain as close to the concepts used as we can, even if there are limitations in them. We are limited, and any term we would choose would be limited. So, let us assume that God in his infinite wisdom reflected in his selection of words those which best present the truth to us who are finite.

mercies — Compassion is a good synonym. This word was very common in the Jewish liturgy. See also Romans 12:1; Philippians 2:1; Hebrews 10:28. It will be seen in vs. 8-11, where God's mercy allowed Paul to be spared death.

comfort — This English word is rather too "blah" to express the idea meant. The root is seen many times in this epistle (2:7, 8; 5:20; 6:1; 7:4, 6, 7, 13; 8:6; 9:5; 10:1; 12:8; 13:11; besides in our text) and often in the New Testament, since it is a name for the Holy Spirit (John 16:7) and for one who "comforts" another (Romans 12:8). It has more the idea of strength and sustaining help from someone with all the effects of such help. Hence, though "we" (v. 8) felt hope of living was gone, yet God gave us all the "life" we needed.

V. 4 — **affliction** — This word has the idea of pressure, intense and disruptive. The word is used in Romans 5:3; also Matthew 7:14; Acts 11:19; Hebrews 11:37; James 1:27. Evidently it is a general word somewhat equivalent to or inclusive of "sufferings" as in v. 5. Note Jesus in Hebrews 2:16-18.

comforted by God — At no time is the "saint" to consider that his/her life is to be lived only for self. Rather, as even is God, whatever we are or have, should be for the good of self and others also. In this respect, we are to be like God (see Matthew 5:44-48). So, though God comforted him, it was not just for his sake. We are to take note.

As this section develops, we will see that the specific point of strength in Paul's experience (vs. 8-10) was that God raised the dead. From this particular fact about God, all those with Paul (and Paul himself) found the courage to endure the prospect of dying in some unnerving (I so assume, since the idea of death, per se, did not seem to bother Paul, as evidenced in chapter 5, and Philippians 1:21-23) way. However, for the Christian, the sustaining power is that life lies beyond death.

V. 5 — Whether Paul means sufferings identical to or similar to those of Christ, the fact remaining is that Christians partake of such, and for a reason: to reveal the overflowing strength and sustenance from God. This, as v. 6 shows, has its purpose too. (See Rom. 8:17; Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:24; I Pet. 2:21-24.)

V. 6 — The Scriptures present the Christians as a body, spiritual in some ways, yet like unto a physical body (I Cor. 12; Rom. 12) which necessarily involves each member of that body. This verse shows how, in one way, such is true, as each member helps all other members.

patiently endure — The Greek term means to stand fast, or to be steadfast. See Romans 5:3-4; James 1:3, 12. The word describes the veteran, not the recruit, the bristlecone pine, not the Mimosa tree.

V. 7 — As Romans 5 says, hope comes from character, which comes from endurance in affliction. But more than that, all is produced because of God, the sustainer. Perhaps no epistle more clearly removes the Christian from the position of trusting in things mortal to things eternal than does this epistle. It will teach us well that our hope is only and ever in God.

you share — The Greek term is our "koinonia." See here Hebrews 12:3-11.

V. 8 — What the experience was is anybody's guess. It does not seem to have been just the thought of dying, per se, but rather some circumstances connected with such. It may be that others were involved, since Paul said "we." This particular event must be seen with 4:8-12 and 6:3-10 as backgrounds. Ref. I Corinthians 15:32; 16:4, 9.

V. 9 — The realization that those involved could no longer trust in themselves, but, being helpless, were driven to trust in God alone was the effect of that event. That God was a fit subject to trust in rather than oneself or others is because God raises the dead.

V. 10 — **so deadly a peril** — The Greek is "such a great death." Such verses as these, and others, are to lead Christians to think that death is to be viewed as something to see God in, and realize the importance of man in that God is vitally interested in every man. If he knows the hairs of our head (Matt. 6) he is verily concerned about the head!

V. 11 — Somehow, not explained here by Paul, nor necessarily

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anywhere in the Scriptures, prayer could play a part in his circumstance, and redound unto the benefit of many. Rather than try to explain just how prayer "works" for us, the Scripture just enjoins us to do so, and allow God to do as he knows best. As was illustrated in the lives of many people, in both the old and new histories of God's people, prayer played important parts in many varied circumstances.

many (1st occurrence) — The Greek term is commonly rendered "face." It sometimes means the person, and sometimes just the face or front. See 2:10; 3:7, 13, 18; 4:6; 5:12; 8:24; 10:1, 7; 11:20. It might be translated "out of many faces/persons."

QUESTIONS:

4. Why does God "comfort"?
5. How do you understand comfort?
6. Does God "make up" for sufferings?
7. How difficult was Paul's situation in Asia?
8. What did the circumstances cause Paul to do?
9. What was the basis of Paul's hope in God?

SECTION III 1:12-22

12 For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience that we have behaved in the world, and still more toward you, with holiness and godly sincerity, not by earthy wisdom but by the grace of God. 13 For we write you nothing but what you can read and understand; I hope you will understand fully, 14 as you have understood in part, that you can be proud of us as we can be of you, on the day of the Lord Jesus.

15 Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a double pleasure; 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 my way to Judea. 17 Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans like a worldly man, ready to say Yes and No at once? 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 preached among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No; but in him it is always Yes. 20 For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him, to the

glory of God. 21 But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has commissioned us; 22 he has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

V. 12 — **boast** — This word and the various concepts behind it will appear often in this epistle. There is, certainly, a line between what is a proper boast and what is an undue boast, which becomes aggrandizement. Here, Paul speaks concerning himself. As subsequent verses show, it is part of an argument on his part for his defense against those who were accusing him of deceitfulness. Much depends upon the motive for said boasting, perhaps even more than the boasting itself.

testimony — witness, and our familiar word “martyr.”

conscience — Paul will argue that his basis for judgment concerning himself, and his actions, was not like that basis which is “worldly” (v. 17) but rather as that of a Christian, whose life is guileless, and that because his god is of such nature.

The particular facet of man’s personality known as conscience is just one of the several facets of personality (or consciousness). It is, thus, a part of every personality, and like the rest of that personality, created by God. It is definitely fashioned to function upon the individual’s concept of right and wrong, whatever that may be. Hence, one’s conscience is quite subject to change as one’s concepts of right and wrong change. These are reasons why people can disagree about matters of conscience; their standards differ. It is, of course, possible to have a conscience that is based upon eternal truths, or entirely otherwise (so that it might well be said that such a person has “no conscience”). The conscience is thus a “creature of education” in the sense that the basis for its operation is provided by education.

It will be well to state that the same Greek term was used to denote both “conscience” and “consciousness” in respect to humans, with the last term being much more inclusive than the first. Such texts as Hebrews 10:2 and I Peter 3:21 would be as easily, if not more so, understood if the Greek term were translated “consciousness” rather than conscience.

we have behaved — K.J.V. will translate this word as “conversation” which then meant how one lived, and not what we mean by the word in our time.

holiness — Some versions will read “simplicity” since the Greek texts vary between two similar Greek terms. In either case, the argument is: “my conscience is clear!”

godly sincerity — The concept here is that Paul’s actions were unmingled and pure, thus godly in nature. See this word in I Corinthians

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5:8; II Corinthians 2:17; Philippians 1:10; II Peter 3:1.

earthly wisdom — wisdom of a fleshly nature (note v. 17). See the idea in I Corinthians 1:20; 2:6; 3:3, 19.

V. 13 — If we read between the lines of this text, there seemed to have been this accusation against Paul, that his letters, as well as his words, were capable of double meanings, and that intentionally so. This the apostle denied, saying that such was far from the truth. The whole epistle is an attempt to set the record clear.

understand fully — The same Greek term as just translated "understand." There is no particularly good reason to translate two different ways.

V. 14 — **you can be proud** — The Greek term is the same term as in v. 12. Perhaps the meaning is: some of you have stood up for me, as I for you; and the case is such that even when Jesus comes, our ground/reason for so doing will be both *unchanged and appropriate* (thus "You can boast"). Read Philippians 2:16-18; I Thessalonians 2:19-20.

V. 15 — This verse is probably to be understood in the light of I Corinthians 16:3-11; and then reading v. 16 of our text. As time went by, and circumstances changed, his plan changed. Evidently, some took this fact and used it against him.

V. 16 — The special offering for the Judean saints which was mentioned in I Corinthians 16:1-2 and II Corinthians 8-9, and is the occasion for these various comings and goings.

V. 17 — Jesus will teach that the Christian ought to be of such nature that his affirmation will not need additional confirmation (Matt. 5:33-37). Of course, the Old Testament idea is in the word "faithful" which implies that one's character is dependable. Hence, the Christian's "Yes" is to be understood as such, since it comes from a person of integrity (recall that Rom. 1:31 described some as "faithless"). Here, Paul had said something, and had meant it, even though he had had to change his mind later.

fickleness — From a word for "light" or not "heavy" (i.e., solid vs. erratic).

V. 18 — God's character is consistently pointed as in the words of James 1:17, where no variance in him is found. Here, faithful/trustworthy/credible/just is the idea to describe God, and then Jesus, and then the Holy Spirit, who is God's guarantee of Paul's character, in that Paul's plans were always based upon God's will, and not otherwise. Hence, if God so willed circumstances, Paul's plan might change. Moreover, if God did not reveal anything to Paul, and Paul's plans were made in the "normal" human way, then as events developed, different actions might be required. Either way, one's life might be

open to criticism, even if unjustly so. But further, the best-laid "human" plans might be discovered to have been based upon less than the best motives, which, when discovered to be so, would surely call for an examination of announced activities, and perhaps changes of said activities. All of us today need to keep these things in mind as we make our plans, or sit in judgment of others. God may will otherwise (James 4).

V. 19 — Paul had called God to witness for him, verse 18. He then established the fact that God's faithfulness was evident in Christ, v. 20. The Holy Spirit, v. 22, made the circle of testimony complete and also reliable. Upon this basis, the apostle argued that his word was likewise trustworthy (i.e., if God is a being of integrity, and I am like God, then I am a being of integrity).

V. 20 — **Amen** — This comes from the Old Testament word which meant reliable, trustworthy. The Hebrew word was used to characterize God in Deuteronomy 9:7; Isaiah 65:16. When the Jews translated the O.T. into Greek, the Greek word *ἀμήν* was used for the Hebrew term. So, in the N.T., Jesus often used it to preface important ideas, as in Mark 14:18, 25; John 3:5; etc. Hence, when our Hebrew writer (Paul) stated that Jesus was God's "Amen" he had this background in mind. God kept his promise/word in Christ. Our "amen" should convey the idea that the thoughts uttered are true and verifiable. Consider especially the character of God and Christ as truth (= the real thing!).

V. 21 — **establishes** — Some versions will have guarantee. The Greek term was a common term for that which made a transaction sure or certain. Note then v. 7, where it was used in reference to hope. See also Romans 4:16; 15:8; I Corinthians 1:6, 8; Colossians 2:7; Hebrews 2:2, 3; 9:17; II Peter 1:10. We should consider that Paul believed that if his character was impugned successfully, then his message would be disbelieved. The reason for this is that Paul would be considered as self-centered, and his preaching thus. Obviously, the center of his message (Christ) and creator/revealer (God) would also be involved. Therefore, attention has been directed from Paul to God, thence the God's Son, and back to the message, since all are integrally related. This is one reason why he used the Greek term to describe God: it is well-known, and conveyed the idea of believability, etc.

us — The people here would be Timothy, Titus, Silas and Paul. This idea that these men were all reliable will come up again in ch. 12.

commissioned us — The Greek term is a verbal form of the same word that is translated "Christ." Of course, Christ means "annointed" and thus sent, etc. Hence, in a subtle play on terms, the apostle

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argued that God had established/confirmed both the Corinthians and Paul's company by means of God's anointed one (Christ) whom God had sent as his "yes." From this idea, God is said to have also anointed/sent them all. It is a comprehensive argument, intended to allay any aspersions on his character, his apostleship, etc.

V. 22 — God is said to have placed his stamp of approval upon them all by means of the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is an additional thrust against those who were asserting falsehoods against him.

guarantee — The Greek term was a common word for that which would confirm an agreement, our idea of "down payment."

QUESTIONS:

10. Is boasting always wrong to do?
11. Did Paul want the Corinthians to boast about him?
12. Define conscience and its place in one's life.
13. What had Paul planned in regard to the Corinthians?
14. Upon what basis did Paul argue that he was not vacillating?
15. What part did Jesus play in respect to God's truthfulness?