

Standing Firm in Integrity for the Gospel (Part 1)

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[0 : 0 0] For those of you who have joined coming to our church in the last few months, so it was back! in October last year when I first started teaching through 2 Corinthians. Back in October, Jeff and Suzanne did a local, well not local, a national missions trip if you would up to Vermont for a couple of weeks. And some of you all know, went to see Justin Wirth and his family and Jeff ministered at their church. These are former members of ours who moved up north to Vermont.

And so I think it was the first two Sundays in October that I preached on verses 1-7, the God of all comfort. And so I thought, well usually when I'm filling in for Jeff or when it's just my time to preach and to give him a break, perhaps one of the more difficult things is just figuring out what to preach on. And so over the years I've been in Hebrews or did John or did Psalms. I love preaching out of Psalms. But last October I said, hey you know what, Jeff does series and we do, our church is expository preaching verse by verse and we just go through books of the Bible. So I figured, hey last October I'm going to start doing 2 Corinthians. Now it may take me, I may not live until I get to the end to 2 Corinthians, right? If I only preach once or twice, three times a year. But that's okay, that's okay. God's Word is rich and it's full and it has something for us to hear every Sunday morning. So more recently, right in March,

I think when Jeff and Suzanne took a one-week getaway, I did preach on verses 8-11 in 2 Corinthians 1. And that was, the name of the sermon, the title of the sermon was sort of what I emphasized as I read it, Rely Not On Ourselves, But On God. And for those of you who were there that Sunday morning, I had asked my brother Clyde to share how some of his personal experiences in his life from years gone by and even through today, where God is continuing to work on Clyde, to have Clyde rely on him and not himself.

You all can appreciate that, right? I think in some ways God works on all of us, right? And the circumstances of life draw us to him. We need that, right? I mean, we are such a forgetful people, right? We need to be reminded, whether it be a loved one or a friend or a circumstance in life, right? We need to be reminded that we are to rely on God, right, in all things and not ourselves.

And so that was, I'm not going to re-preach that. That was back in March, but I'm back today and I'll be here next Sunday. So we're going to move on to the next few verses in 2 Corinthians 1. Now, here's the thing. 2 Corinthians 1 verse 12 pivots from the first 11 verses. The first 11 verses were the overall greeting in typical Pauline style. And then verse 12 is when he starts getting down to business. And so in order to understand the context on the next few verses that we'll do today and next Sunday, I have to go back and go over some background about Paul's relationship and his interaction with the Corinthians. This is a must know to even understand these verses. As a matter of fact, going through the background of how Paul established the church in Corinth and the challenges that he went through actually is half the sermon, if you would. It'll help you understand the rest of the epistle in 2 Corinthians. And so I want to spend a good part of this morning going back and helping us understand why is Paul in the situation that he's in with the church in Corinth. And we're going to talk about what that situation is and then how Paul responds to it. And so I have several slides this morning to show you just to walk through the history and the background of Paul's interactions, if you would, with the church in Corinth. And then so we'll spend most of our time in that. And then we'll spend whatever time is remaining looking at detail with verses 12, 13, and 14. Now, don't worry.

[4 : 20] In my notes, I have certain break points, right? So I'm watching the clock. If we don't make it through verse 14 today, I'll stop at a reasonable place. And so we'll pick it up next week as well. That's the beauty of being able to preach two weeks in a row, right? So now next week, the pressure will be on, right, to finish up what I intend to share with you today, for next week. But as far as today, we will go through some background information and dive right in then to 2 Corinthians 1.

All right. So let me go to the next slide. Let's see what I got. All right. So here's some background. Now, I'm a note taker. And so I'm going to warn you, if you're a note taker, there's lots of text on these upcoming slides. You all know by now, I think, Jeff and I, we post all the slides on the internet. The sermon's recorded. But these slides, I would rather you put your pen down and not be distracted by hurrying and getting through the slide until I go to the next slide. Just if you're able to, sometimes I need to write just to stay focused. But I just wanted to let you know, it's probably more important just to understand the drama, the narrative, if you would, of what has led Paul into the situation where he writes 2 Corinthians. All right. So let's start off. So in Acts 18, if you go back, you don't have to turn there in Acts 18. But in Acts 18, we see that Paul is traveling in his second missionary journey, right? And he visits Corinth. And he's there for about 18 months.

And he actually establishes the church in Corinth. And again, you can read that account. Most of chapter 18 is about his time in Corinth, establishing the church and ministering there. So sometime later, so he leaves Corinth. He probably returns back to Judea, finishes up his second missionary journey.

But he hears, he gets a report that there's immorality in the Corinthian church. Seriously, Greg, already they were just established, right? Paul was there 18 months making sure they were doing what they need to do. And not much time goes by. We don't know exactly time, weeks, maybe a month or two or three, where he's starting to get reports of immorality in the church in Corinth. So wherever he was at that time, whether he was finishing up his second missionary journey, or whether he had returned to Jerusalem, to Judea, he wrote a letter to the Corinthians. Now, this is not the letter. This is not 1 Corinthians, right?

This is a letter that since has been lost, right? So he wrote a letter to confront that sin of immorality in the church. Now, he alludes to this letter, even though we have no record of it, he alludes to this letter in 1 Corinthians 5.9. So in 1 Corinthians 5.9, he writes, I wrote to you in my letter, not to associate with sexually immoral people. He's addressing that particular sin. But you see in 1 Corinthians some evidence that he's referring to some letter that he had already written them, right? So we know that he wrote at least one letter. It's not canonized. We don't have it. It wasn't kept in history. But we do see that already he's communicating with the church in Corinth about sin. Not a great way to start out, right? Not a great way to start out. All right. So Paul embarks on his third missionary journey, including a three-year visit to Ephesus. All right. Now, let me put a map up here for you. All right. So second missionary journey is done. He's somewhere along the lines after he leaves Corinth. He writes him a letter to address some sexual immorality that's happening in the church. He embarks on his third missionary journey. And now he's in Ephesus for about three years. Well, where in the world is Ephesus and

[8 : 29] Corinth and all these other towns that we'll be looking at? So on this slide is a map. So third missionary journey, roughly 83 to 87 AD. And I'm going to zero in on the rectangular area. But I wanted you to see a zoomed out version of the Mediterranean Sea. There at the bottom is North Africa, right?

Egypt. Over on the right, on the east is Palestine, Jerusalem. And if you look at the red line, this particular map that I pulled, the solid red line is his journey out. And then the dotted red line is his journey back. Let me zoom in on the purple area to show you where Ephesus is.

Right. So if you follow that red line, you'll see some familiar references, right? You see Galatia on the right hand side, right? Galatia is not a city, right? It's an area, if you would, where there are several churches, several cities in Galatia, Galatians. But you see Lystra and Derbe and Iconium and Antioch. And as he makes his way west, you see Ephesus there in Asia Minor.

All right. So third missionary journey. Paul is in Ephesus for three years, roughly three years. Well, while Paul is in Ephesus for those three years, guess what? He receives more troubling reports about the Corinthian church. All right. Let me see if I have that. Yeah. He receives more troubling reports about the church in Corinth. So he receives further reports, including divisions among them. And if you were to look at 1 Corinthians 1.11, 1 Corinthians 1.11, you will see a reference.

For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. Right. So we see evidence. This is why we don't make this stuff up, right? We scour through scripture and we can see these clues to what's been happening to the narrative of Paul's interaction and dealings with Corinth. So in his letter to 1 Corinthians, the 1 Corinthians letter, he refers to reports he's received about divisions among the church. And then in 1 Corinthians 7.1, he writes, now concerning the matters about which you wrote to me. All right. So we know that the church not only somehow, maybe there was Chloe or someone, maybe someone traveled to Ephesus to tell Paul what's happening, but 1 Corinthians 7.1, in addition to that, he also received a letter from the church.

[11 : 08] And they sent a letter just asking for clarifications about a number of issues that we see when we read 1 Corinthians. So he composes a letter. This is the 1 Corinthians letter that we have in scripture.

Right. And he sends it to Corinth. All right. I think I have one more. Right. And he sends, also sends Timothy to Corinth. It's not 100% clear in scripture that he actually gave the letter to Timothy to deliver, but likely that that's what happened. And so for those of you who are familiar with 1 Corinthians, 16 chapters, at least, you know, in our scripture today, there was no chapter, you know, markings in the original. But you see all sorts of topics and issues and subjects that Paul addresses about divisions. There's a section in 1 Corinthians about where people inside the church were suing one another in secular courts, about being unequally yoked, all sorts of matters.

That, that their apostle Paul, the church of Corinth, that their apostle was helping them understand and work through as the church is growing and as the church is embattled in, in sin.

So, um, wanted to see where, just also wanted to show you where this fit into Paul's overall ministry. Like, great. Okay. 53 to 57 AD. Okay. I, that doesn't mean anything. All right.

So this chart is a chart of all the epistles that Paul wrote. And so you see, if you look at the purple arrow, right, this is the reference to 1 Corinthians, right? So it's, it's happening during his third missionary journey, roughly 55 AD. He's in Ephesus when he writes that letter, probably sends Timothy with the letter and delivers it to Corinth. So notice it's still early in his ministry, right? I mean, he's been at it for a few years, but, but again, you know, in, in, in comparison to all these other letters that we're familiar with, right? All the prison epistles that that's in the future that hasn't happened yet. Good little reference as far as, uh, I thought it was helpful to see where this action is happening in, in the, in the overall view of his ministry. So this is his travel epistles. So he writes 1 Corinthians. All right. So he's in Ephesus, right? He, he, he sent 1 Corinthians probably with Timothy. Um, and so disturbing news reaches Paul of further difficulties at Corinth. All right. So things are actually not getting better, right? They're getting worse.

[13 : 50] So further difficulties at Corinth, but here's something that's interesting that, that is important for us to know as we study 2 Corinthians. Um, in addition to all the other sin that they're dealing with and immorality and divisions and backbiting, et cetera, um, there's an arrival of false apostles.

All right. And they're there attacking Paul's character. I mean, Paul's not even there, but they're attacking Paul's character to undermine Paul's credibility. Why? To persuade the Corinthians to abandon Paul and his teachings of the gospel. Why? In order that these false apostles would have the people in Corinth follow their demonic, worldly, false teaching. Okay. So that's what's happening.

So, so Paul is busy ministering in Ephesus, right? He's got his handfulls and hands full in Ephesus. And now he's got this problem church over in Corinth to the, to, to the West. And, uh, he keeps getting reports like not only is it now sin, but now we've got the infiltration of false apostles coming in and stealing basically my people away. How would you feel if you were Paul?

Yeah. Blow, blow it off. Would you get angry? Would you get mad? Now you love the church. You would die for the church if you're Paul. How would you feel if you see a church that he basically birthed, spent a year and a half of his life in, and then this church is having problems.

You know, Paul can't get to him quite yet. He's ministering in other parts of the world. He's writing letters, trying to encourage them, right? If you're a parent, right, you ache for a child like this, having trouble. And now they're influenced by, by ungodly influence. All right. So, um, Paul has, has to figure out what to do. So I want to go back a little bit and talk about before we move forward in the narrative. Um, when I say here that these false apostles are attacking Paul's character, well, Greg, what, what do you mean by that? What can you, can you give me some specifics about exactly what are they saying and what are they doing? And yes, scripture answers that question for us. And so I'm just going to give you a sampling of the things that these false apostles are doing.

[16 : 22] And not only the false apostles, but these false apostles are very likely gathering a following from the folks in the Corinthian church. They're being persuaded, perhaps some of these by these false apostles, right? So it's, it's hard to tell whether it's the false apostles that's, uh, that's, uh, you know, talking poorly about Paul and maligning him. If it's a false apostles or if they're starting to get a, uh, other people to follow their, follow their perspective. Um, but nonetheless, here are some of the accusations that we see as we read scripture and as we read first Corinthians and second Corinthians, number one, accusations of being a ministry failure due to his sufferings and personal weaknesses. You all know, just in reading scripture, Paul talks very openly, very openly about the many hardships that he endured for the gospel, right? We read that.

I read that this morning in, in, uh, in the first part of, of chapter one. Well, when they see that some of the Corinthian church were therefore likely concluding that Paul's suffering indicated some sort of failure or weakness in his ministry, or perhaps God was just chastening Paul for some sin that he was involved with. Sound familiar? Think about Job's friends. When Job was under persecution and things just weren't going well for him, losing his, his, everything that he had, what did some of Job's friends say? Hey, what, what, what, what sin have you gotten into, Job? Come on, you pray that God will help you figure that out, right? And so this is the same sort of thing, right? It, you can interpret Paul's sufferings as he's suffering for the gospel, right? But these false, these false apostles are coming in and saying, Hey, this Paul guy, he's a ministry failure. I mean, look, look at all the afflictions that he's in. Look, look at everything that's happening to him. I mean, there's no way that, uh, God appears to be honoring him and his work, right? You see how it can just be twisted and distorted. I mean, it's, it's sort of what we see today in politics, right? Anything to be twisted and distorted to something that's false. So that's one accusation, right? And then again, in, in second

Corinthians in chapter one, verses eight and nine, um, again, I read this earlier, but, but Paul wrote, you know, we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despise of life itself. Paul, you're a ministry failure. If you're, if you're to the point where you're despising what you're doing and you're despising of life itself, do that. You sound like a failure, right? Hey, that Paul, that apostle that was here several months ago, look at what happens to his life, right? Listen, you don't need to listen to him. He's a failure. He's a ministry failure. His life shows it, right? Another accusation, his weakness and his lack of rhetorical skill.

Some in the Corinthian church were criticizing Paul's physical appearance and his speech. Did you know that? It's in scripture. Yeah. They accused him of being bold in his letters, but weak in person.

Second Corinthians 10, 10, Paul writes, for they say his letters talking about himself, for they say the false apostles, for they say his letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech of no account.

[20 : 03] So Paul's hearing what's being, what he's being accused of, right? This is God's word. It is true. We don't have to question whether Paul has a, you know, has a, some sort of misunderstanding of this.

He writes that later in second Corinthians, that he's hearing these things. So he's viewed as weak. He's viewed as having a lack of rhetorical skill of writing, of logic. All right. So he's a ministry failure. He's weak. Why follow him, Corinthian church? He's fickle. He's unreliable. Paul was accused of being fickle and unreliable because he initially planned to visit the Corinthians twice.

He planned to visit them on his way to Macedonia and then coming back from Macedonia, but he changed his mind. Well, he changed his mind as we know for a good reason that we may unpack later today or maybe next Sunday. Paul writes again in verse 17 of chapter one in second Corinthians. He says, was I vacillating when I wanted to do this, when I wanted to travel and visit you, you know, both ways, going to Macedonia and coming back? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say yes, yes, and no, no at the same time? He exclaims in chapter one of second Corinthians. So again, the fact that he changes his travel plans, the false apostles are going to pick up on that.

He can't be trusted. He's wishy-washy. He's fickle. How can you follow someone like that? How can you believe what he teaches if he can't even keep his own travel plans? You see how this can be persuasive over time, hearing this over and over?

Some accused him of being a false apostle altogether. Some in the Corinthian church questioned Paul's credentials and apostolic authority, claiming that he was not a true apostle compared to others like Peter or James. Okay, now wait a minute. Wait a minute now. Now you're talking about like the church.

[22 : 11] Or he's not a true apostle compared to some of the big, showy, flashy false apostles that came to Corinth.

Well, we see that Paul writes in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 in verses 5 and 6, he writes, Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super apostles.

So he's aware. He's aware of the comparisons. Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge. So he's putting up a bit of a defense there in chapter 11.

There's more. Accusations of being a money seeker. There were accusations that Paul was in ministry only for personal gain, particularly financial, and not genuinely concerned for their well-being.

Money is always there, isn't it? There's always going to be, when there's false accusations, there's going to be some sort of twist when it comes to money. Accusations of lacking spiritual power.

[23 : 20] Some in Corinth were questioning the authenticity of Paul's spiritual power as they were used to seeing more dramatic displays of power from other leaders.

So we've talked about maybe in stature, Paul wasn't all that. So this is sort of similar, right? So Paul's not too showy. You know, he probably lacks spiritual power.

And you're used to seeing the big, flashy, showy guys. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4, 2, But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways.

We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's Word. Oh, I got ahead of myself. That's the next one. Let me go to the next one. Manipulating the Gospel. Manipulating the Gospel. Paul defends himself against any suggestion that he might have manipulated the message of the Gospel for personal gain or to suit his own desires.

This could reflect accusations that Paul was not presenting the Gospel in its purest form, but perhaps in a way that catered to the audience or to his personal agenda.

[24 : 34] He refutes that in the verse I just read, 2 Corinthians 4, 2. We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's Word.

Going back to the previous accusation, right? Lacking spiritual power. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 13, 3. And remember, so he's referencing this, which is an evidence that this is what he's been accused of.

He says, since you, again, he's addressing this to the Corinthian church, since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. So we see that they're seeking proof that he has the spiritual power necessary to match his message.

And lastly, again, this is just a sampling of the things he's accused of. Lastly is accusations of being boastful, false humility, flattery.

Some of his critics might have thought that Paul was flattering or using false humility to gain their favor. Paul defends his sincerity in his interactions with them.

[25 : 41] And we'll cover that today in verse 12. Again, Paul writes, and we'll read this a little bit later, All right, so those are some of the sampling of what Paul is being accused of.

And again, does that make sense? Does that make sense how you just keep stacking up all the accusations and the false apostles keep repeating it over and over and over? Paul's not there to defend himself.

You would think that there would be some folks in the Corinthian church that would defend Paul. But wait, we'll get to that in just a moment. All right, so all this is happening, right?

Now, where's Paul? Where's Paul right now, physically? Where is Paul right now? In Ephesus. Which missionary journey? The third. Part of his third missionary journey. Three years in Ephesus. He's getting these reports.

He's written 1 Corinthians, the letter to him, right? Earlier, he wrote another letter earlier on. So he's in Ephesus. What's he going to do? He travels to Corinth.

[26 : 58] He temporarily abandons his work in Ephesus to go to Corinth. And in 2 Corinthians 2.1, this is referred to as the painful visit.

Painful visit. So 2 Corinthians 2.1 says, For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you. So this is in regards to his meeting them on the way to Macedonia and coming back by, right?

But he alludes to the fact that I'm not going to make another painful visit. Well, all right, English grammar students, right? If he refers to another painful visit, does that mean already one happened?

Yes. This is it. This is it. So Paul, in hearing all of this, goes west, goes to Corinth for what is referred to as a painful visit.

And it's not successful. It's not successful at all, according to the evidence we see from Scripture. Someone in the Corinthian church, either in the church or perhaps one of the false apostles, even openly insulted Paul.

[28 : 06] And the church did not stand up for him, did not defend him. So Paul returns to Ephesus. He returns to Ephesus grieved by the Corinthians' lack of loyalty to defend him.

He returns to Ephesus seeking to spare them further reproof. I mean, Paul has already reproofed them in the letters that he has sent, right?

In the instructions that he has sent. We don't know the interaction that took place in this painful visit. Again, we get some hints in Scripture about how he was insulted, how there was an offense.

We'll get to that in just a minute. There was some sort of offense, but it just was not a good, successful visit. Perhaps he returned to Ephesus hoping that time would bring them to their senses.

We don't know exactly his state of mind, but we can guess, probably have a pretty reasonable guess of how he's feeling. So he gets back to Ephesus.

[29 : 13] This is still part of his three-year visit in Ephesus. So at some point later, he's still in Ephesus. Guess what? He writes another letter. So first letter he wrote was to address immorality.

Second letter he wrote was 1 Corinthians, that we know. Third letter he wrote, this is not canonized either. Again, since it's been lost, there's no record of this letter.

But in Scripture, it's referred to as the severe letter. And you can see that in chapter 2, verse 4. Paul writes, To me, that makes sense.

He's hurt. He's disappointed. But he loves his church and he wants to protect his sheep there in Corinth. Tough love, maybe, right?

So he writes what's, again, it says in verse 4, right? He wrote out of much affliction, anguish of heart, with many tears.

[30 : 28] That sounds like a hard letter, a severe letter. Tough love. Laying it out for the Corinthians. He doesn't want to cause them pain, but his motive is to let them know the abundant love that he has for them.

So, let me pause for just a moment, because I think there's an application for us here. Right? Right?

You've just, Paul has just experienced an offense. Several months, if not a year or two, of frustration with this church that he established.

They're not listening to him. They're not living the gospel message that he preached to them. But what a beautiful verse here.

In tears and anguish of heart, he writes to them to let them know the abundant love that he has for them. Could that be said of you in a similar circumstance?

[31 : 34] I think I would have to confess and say, forget that. I wouldn't, as a pastor, I wouldn't do that to you all. Let this happen here. But just think about it.

Think about what seemingly is no hope, no encouragement from this church, this troubled church. Messy, messy, messy ministry. All right.

So, where is Paul? In Ephesus. All right. He went to Corinth. Painful visit. Sent him a letter. Severe letter.

All right. Here's next. Paul eventually leaves Ephesus after a riot that sparked by Demetrius the silversmith. So, if you're familiar with Acts, in Acts chapter 19, right?

So, Demetrius and some of his co-laborers are silversmiths. They're creating little idols to Artemis, I think.

[32 : 32] All right. Artemis. All right. So, making lots of profit, lots of money. Paul comes into town in Ephesus and says, uh-uh. No, there's no idol worship here. No, no, no. We don't do this.

It's costing Demetrius their livelihood. He starts a riot. You can read about it in Acts 19. But the bottom line is, after that riot that's sparked by Demetrius, Paul leaves Ephesus.

And he goes to Troas. One thing I forgot to mention in the previous bullet, that severe letter that Paul wrote and sent to Corinth, he sent it with Titus. All right.

So, Titus did go to Corinth with the letter in hand. Now, if you were in Paul's shoes and you sent that letter with Titus, right?

There's no email. There's no texting. There's no mobile phones. Wouldn't you be a little eager to know how they received that letter? That was a hard letter that Paul wrote. So, I would be very eager, right?

[33 : 30] So, in the meantime, he's distracted by this riot. And then he eventually says, okay, I'm going to go to Troas. I'm eager to meet Titus with a report from the Corinthian church.

All right. So, where's Troas? So, again, follow the solid red line. So, he's in Ephesus. Go north up to Troas. So, he's in Troas waiting for Titus for the report from his letter.

All right. No Titus in Troas. Paul departs Troas from Macedonia. So, what's up with, where is Titus during this time?

In chapter 2, verses 12 and 13 in 2 Corinthians, let me read what Paul writes. Paul writes, When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest, because I did not find my brother Titus there.

So, I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia. What do you think? I think that's reasonable.

[34 : 41] This is really showing the humanity side of Paul. Sometimes when we read about Paul and see what he writes, Paul is a super apostle. When you read it, he comes across as strong.

You think he can do, he's invulnerable. But 2 Corinthians is probably the most personal of all letters that Paul wrote. And we see a different side of Paul if we read closely.

Right? And we see all the ways that he's been accused. You know, we learn that maybe he's of not great stature physically. You know, he is so anxious.

Anybody deal with worry and anxiety? Listen, you're not alone. The apostle Paul was in Troas, so anxious, so waiting to hear back from Titus, that scripture says, the Lord opened a door of ministry in Troas.

But I was so fearful. I was so anxious. I couldn't do anything. I left. I left to Macedonia and see if I could find Titus there.

[35 : 47] Yeah, I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia. So, while in Macedonia, let's see. Oh, okay, I got ahead of myself. All right, so Paul departs.

Troas goes to Macedonia. He eventually meets Titus. And guess what? Finally, finally, he receives an encouraging report. Turn to 2 Corinthians 7.

I'm going to read this. Chapter 7, I'm going to read verses 5 through 16. You can follow along with me.

He eventually meets Titus there in Macedonia. And this is what we learn about that encounter. So, again, chapter 7, verse 5.

Paul writes, For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn. Now, Titus hasn't arrived yet, right? So we're still dealing with that anxiety and eagerness, right, to hear about the report.

[36 : 50] Fighting without and fear within. Verse 6. But God, who comforts the downcast, he comforted us by the coming of Titus. And not only by his coming, but also by the comfort in which he was comforted by you, Corinthians, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more.

For even if I made you grieve with my letter. All right. You all now know what that refers to, right? The severe letter. For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it.

Though I did regret it, for I see that the letter grieved you, though only for a while, as it is, I rejoice. Not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting.

Underline that. Highlight that. That is fantastic. If you're dealing with a hard situation right now and you're grieving something, maybe you're the offender, maybe you are working through some just besetting sin in your life, right, and you are grieved about that, the type of repentance that you are called to is this type.

You were grieved into repenting. No sort of pity party, right? As believers, we're filled with the Holy Spirit.

[38 : 22] No pity parties. We have the Holy Spirit in us. When we are grieved with our sin, we grieved into repentance. And that's what Paul writes about what is happening.

For you, Corinthians, for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, Corinthians, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment.

At every point you have proved yourself innocent in the matter. So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, that's probably the one who offended Paul, probably called him out when he was there during the hard visit, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, perhaps himself or perhaps others in the Corinthian church, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God.

Therefore, we are comforted. And besides our own comfort, we rejoice still the more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.

[39 : 49] This is a huge turnaround, right? It's like instead of the Corinthians grieving Paul and Titus and Timothy, Paul writes here that Titus' spirit has been refreshed by those troublesome Corinthians.

They're not so troublesome now, or at least some of them. For whatever boast I made to him about you, I was not put to shame. But just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true.

And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. I rejoice.

Ah, those are beautiful words from Paul. I rejoice. It's been a while since we've seen these words, right? I rejoice because I have complete confidence in you.

So a beautiful connection, a beautiful welcoming with Titus, with Paul in Macedonia. And so what happens next? So while in Macedonia, perhaps in the city of Philippi, Paul writes a fourth letter to Corinth.

[41 : 01] And guess what that letter is? Second Corinthians, right? The letter that we finally are getting to the point of wanting to study here. So that's 2 Corinthians.

In, let's see, wise enough. And so here's some of the impetus behind writing this letter. So wise enough to know that some rebellious attitudes still smoldered under the surface and could erupt again, right?

As I read it, I didn't want to make you think they lived happily ever after, right? You know reality. You know sin. You know that perhaps not all of them were all happy-pappy about that severe letter that Titus delivered.

So wise enough to know that, Paul writes this fourth letter from Macedonia that we know as 2 Corinthians. So in the letter of 2 Corinthians, Paul expresses his relief and his joy at their repentance.

We just read that. But also another purpose in writing the letter is to defend his apostleship against the assaults of those lying, deceiving, false prophets.

[42 : 09] And even those still in the church that are still persuaded by those deceivers. Paul's ultimate concern, of course, is to protect the Corinthian church from those deceivers.

We talked about that. He loves the church. He wants to protect them from these deceivers. He knows that his apostleship and the divine truth that he teaches, the gospel, is the only thing that's standing in the way of those false apostles and their false teachings.

Therefore, in addressing their outrageous lies and accusations in the letter, Paul seeks to expose the false prophets for who they really are and to regain the trust of the Corinthians, leading ultimately to reconciliation with them and their salvation.

So that, in and of itself, is sort of the background, the context leading up to our verses that we want to study today. Now, I'm watching the clock.

Y'all are watching the clock as well. So we're near the end of our time. That's okay. I've got built-in stop points. Or did I order pizza for lunch? Delivery. I may have had to do that. I didn't do that.

[43 : 20] So we see that things are turning around for Paul, right, when it comes to the Corinthian church. A lot of work's still there, right?

We don't read that all the false apostles left Corinth. There's probably some still there, right? So Paul still has some work to do, and he writes this fourth letter, 2 Corinthians.

So let me pause just a minute. So for those of you who are doing our Bible reading plan, right, I mentioned that in the announcements this morning. So last month, for those of you who are following that plan, we were reading chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4, right?

And then this month, we're reading chapters 5, 6, and 7. So hopefully, going through this sort of overview or background or context, hopefully that's helping you connect some of the dots as you read through these chapters over and over and over and over.

Now you understand the context behind the painful visit. Now you understand the context behind his comments about the severe letter, about reconciliation, about how he was going to travel and visit them twice, but then he decided not to.

[44 : 36] Now you understand the circumstances behind that. Now you understand some of the things, many of the things that he writes in the letter because they directly address the false accusations, the denigration of his character and his integrity that he is hearing about in the church in Corinth.

So hopefully that will help out a little cherry on top or whipped cream on top of the pie for those of you going through the Bible reading plan.

So we're set up now to cover verses 12, 13, and 14. I'm going to spend about five minutes just going briefly over 12, 13, and 14, and we'll do a part two next week having this in mind.

So let me bring up... Oh, here's the map. Do you see Philippi? So you see Macedonia on the far west? That area, Macedonia is an area, not a city.

But if you look up at the top of the body of water, you'll see Philippi right there. That's probably where Paul wrote from when he sent 2 Corinthians letter to Corinth.

[45 : 47] All right. So here's our verses for today. For the few minutes we have remaining. Let me read this. 2 Corinthians 1, 12, 13, and 14. For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behave in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom, but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you.

For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand, and I hope you will fully understand, just as you did partially understand us, that on the day of our Lord Jesus, that you will boast of us as we will boast of you.

Well, in these three verses, we basically see the theme statement for the whole letter of 2 Corinthians. Right? This is why I mentioned earlier, it's verse 12 that sort of pivots from his initial greeting.

This is the theme. This is the purpose that we see for 2 Corinthians. Paul hopes that the Corinthians will understand that he is their boast in the Lord.

Not the false apostles. That he, he is their apostle. That he is the boast in the Lord. And we'll see, I'm sorry, Paul hopes the Corinthians will understand that he is their boast in the Lord.

[47 : 06] And we'll see that they can and should be proud of him instead of believing the false prophets and consequent false apostles. I'm sorry. If I've said false prophets, I think I have a few times.

I mean false apostles. Just, you know, do autocorrect in your mind. All right? Right? False apostles. That they should be proud of him instead of believing the false apostles and consequently denigrating him.

Right? So that's one of the themes. Paul, it's about reconciliation. Right? Paul hopes that the Corinthians will understand that he is their boast in the Lord. This same theme is stated in chapter 5, verses 11 and 12.

Let me read that real quick because it's similar to what these verses here are, verses 12 through 14. But if you turn over to chapter 5, 11 and 12, same sort of theme.

Paul writes, But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. Conscience again. We are not commending ourselves to you again.

[48 : 12] Right? We are not being boastful of ourselves. We are not commending ourselves to you again, but we're giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance.

Who's he referring to? The false apostles. Right? Those are the ones who boast based on outward appearance. And not about what is in the heart. So again, in chapter 5, Paul sort of repeats the same thematic purpose of this letter.

We are not committing ourselves to you again, but giving you cause to boast about us. We're giving you cause. We're giving you reason. We're defending our apostleship so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance.

I want to equip you, church, to answer the false apostles and what they're saying about me, about my ministry, about the gospel, about the false teaching, the demonic doctrines that these false apostles are bringing in.

Right? So that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. Isn't that the root of it? What's in the heart?

[49 : 23] What's in the heart that Paul's referring to? So in many respects, the theme here, either in chapter 1, verses 12, 13, and 14, or here in chapter 5, verses 11 and 12, the theme is reconciliation.

And doesn't that make sense? Based on everything we've just went over, the drama between Paul and Corinth, reconciliation. If there's a single word that should come to your mind when you think of 2 Corinthians, it's reconciliation.

Now, there's a lot of details, right? There is a defense of Paul's apostleship. There is a... You'll see Paul's very emotional. We've read some of the emotions that he has.

But overall, it's about reconciling relationship. Paul's relationship with the Corinthians, the Corinthians' relationship with them, and then from a gospel message perspective, their relationship to their saving God, their saving Lord.

So reconciliation is the theme of this letter. All right, well, let me stop there. I didn't get quite as far.

[50 : 31] I didn't get quite as far as I wanted to. But I hope you found this helpful. This was a little bit less of a sermon, a little bit more of just sort of an exercise to understand the background and context of this letter.

My hope is that we are equipped now. Because next week, we don't have to go through that. You will start to understand. You'll start to connect the dots before I even get to them when we start going through verses 12, 13, and 14.

And we'll go through a few other verses. Actually, just reading this, right? Look at verse 13. For we are not writing to you anything other than what you have read and understand, and hope you will fully understand.

So what was the accusation that they were leveling against Paul? That he was duplicitous? That he didn't have good rhetorical skills? He couldn't make good logical statements?

That he was weak? And Paul says, Listen, y'all. I'm not yes, yes, and no, no at the same time. Right? We are not writing to you anything.

[51 : 33] We're not writing to you anything different than what I've written to you in the previous letters. Right? For we are not writing to you anything other than what you've read. I'm sending you the same things.

Going back to my first letter about how the church is supposed to deal with immorality. Just like what I wrote in the second letter, 1 Corinthians, about how to deal with doctrinal issues and Christian living in the church.

He's not then going around and writing something different. We see here, right, his conscience testifies to the fact of his behavior and then his writing.

And his hope is, as we see in these verses here, that they will understand to the point that on the day of our Lord Jesus, that they will boast of Paul and Timothy and Silas and Titus, and that they will boast of the church in Corinth.

So, you don't need me necessarily to go over these verses now, because again, understanding all these accusations and all the stuff that Paul was dealing with will make interpreting the rest of this letter so much more beneficial.

[52 : 39] And that's what I love. I love the equipping part of being a pastor and an elder. I would rather equip you and you learn these wonderful truths versus me just list them out for you.

There's so much more rewarding. God blesses each of us when he allows us to open our eyes, open our ears, open our minds to beautiful truths in Scripture. And so I pray that as you spend time in the Word and in 2 Corinthians, that you will be blessed with this background.

Let me pray. Amen. So, Father, I thank you, oh Lord, for this time that you have given us this morning. Again, I am so in awe of your Word, of your truth.

I'm in awe of the accounts, the detailed accounts, that you allow us to read and see. And as we learn about the Apostle Paul, a man that you call to carry your gospel into the world.

And we learn about you, Lord, about your grace and about your mercy. Father, thank you for teaching us many, many wonderful truths, more than we'll ever discover in the depths of your beautiful Word.

[53 : 59] Father, I thank you for my church family and I thank you for our guests and visitors here, Lord. Thank you for their attentiveness. Father, I pray that if anything today, Lord, that you have helped us to become a little bit more equipped to handle your Word rightly and to be able to understand your Word, again, so that we can learn and grow in you, Father.

Lord, thank you for your beautiful truth. Thank you for the privilege of reading it and learning from it. In Christ's name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.