

International Bible Lessons Commentary
2 Corinthians 1:1-12

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, August 3, 2014

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, August 3, 2014**, is from **2 Corinthians 1:1-12**. NOTE: Some churches will only study **2 Corinthians 1:3-11**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the **International Bible Lessons Commentary** website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is usually posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

2 Corinthians 1:1-12

(2 Corinthians 1:1) Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,
To the church of God that is in Corinth, including all the saints throughout Achaia:

As an apostle, Paul spoke for and represented Jesus Christ personally; therefore, his writings are included in the Bible as the Word of God. God chose and appointed Paul as an apostle when Jesus Christ appeared to him. He did not simply decide one day to become an apostle; nor was he selected by a church or church council to be an apostle. Paul had led Timothy to faith in Jesus Christ, and Timothy ministered with Paul, but he was not an apostle. Paul wrote letters, many of which he intended for all Christians, and all of his letters in the Bible will help all Christians. Notice that Paul addressed his letter to the “church of God” (not the church of Paul, or the church of Apollos, or the church of Peter), and he addressed some issues that particularly related to the church of God in Corinth that might apply to others. Most particularly, we can learn more about God the Father and the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit from his letters.

(2 Corinthians 1:2) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In his greeting, Paul asked God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ to bestow grace (undeserved favor, power, and other gifts) to the church. Particularly, he wanted Christians to continue to know by experience the forgiveness, the cleansing from sin, and the peace with God that believers in Jesus Christ can enjoy and also share with others as they represent Jesus Christ in the world. The Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are Persons in the being of God (along with the Holy Spirit, Who is also a gift of God’s grace to His people).

(2 Corinthians 1:3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation,

Believers bless God the Father and God the Son by their obedience to and worship of them. When God the Son came to earth, sent by His Father, He humbly submitted himself to God the Father and obeyed His Father in all things, just as all people should obey God. When Jesus spoke to Mary Magdalene, He said, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (John 20:17). With Jesus’ approval, Thomas called Jesus, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). Mercy, consolation, comfort, encouragement, and deliverance come from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus came into the world to save us from our sins because God is the Father of mercies, and Jesus brought (and the Holy Spirit now brings) consolation directly to all believers. In his Letter to the Colossians, Paul revealed “the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). And he wrote to Titus that “we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

(2 Corinthians 1:4) who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God.

Following Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is not an insurance policy against suffering or a guarantee that the believer will live a trouble-free life, quite the contrary. Sometimes, the followers of Christ will suffer “weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ” (2 Corinthians 12:10). God will comfort Christians no matter what they suffer for Jesus Christ, and God will do this constantly. Paul did not write that God would continually comfort those who are suffering the consequences of continuing to live in sin; however, when they repent and turn to faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior, they will receive the comfort of God in Christ. Christians can turn their suffering and the comfort God gives them into a learning experience that will prepare them to comfort others “who are in any affliction.” To comfort someone includes standing beside them and helping them when possible. From His throne in heaven, Jesus prays for and comforts believers. The Holy Spirit prays from within believers; and from within them He gives them comfort, empowerment and counsel. Christians can extend the comfort of God to others in a variety of ways as they pray for those in afflictions and for God’s guidance in how to console and help them in practical ways.

(2 Corinthians 1:5) For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.

Jesus Christ suffered abundantly for us when He died on the cross in our behalf to make God’s forgiveness of us just

and merciful. As we suffer afflictions or persecutions, our abundant consolation also comes to us through Christ. Those who repent of their sins and receive Christ as Savior receive these abundant blessings. His abundant grace, mercy, and comfort will always exceed our sufferings, and knowing this by experience will help us comfort others as the consolation of Christ flows through us to them.

(2 Corinthians 1:6) If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering.

As Paul preached the gospel, he was often persecuted and afflicted, but his preaching the gospel had the power to lead many to saving faith in Jesus Christ. When they listened to Paul and received Christ as their Savior and Lord, they also received the abundant consolation of Christ. Those who follow Jesus Christ must “patiently endure” when they suffer affliction and persecution just as Jesus said they would suffer: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:10-12). When Christians suffer, they have the comfort of God and the truth of the Bible to help them; therefore,

they have many good reasons to patiently endure until God delivers them.

(2 Corinthians 1:7) Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.

The church in Corinth had believed the gospel of Jesus Christ because the gospel is the power of God for those who believe: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

Therefore, Paul’s hope for them rested on God and his hope for them had not been shaken by any of their experiences, good and bad, or by the disrespect they had shown for him or by their temporarily being misled by false apostles. Because they were all united to Christ, they all suffered; however, because they were all united to Christ they also shared in the comfort God gave them and in the comfort they could give each other as Christ worked within them and through them.

(2 Corinthians 1:8) We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself.

The Bible does not tell us the specific affliction that Paul suffered. We can only speculate; perhaps it was a severe persecution or illness that so crushed Paul that he felt he was going to die. The fact that Paul wrote “we” may mean

that he along with Timothy and others were close to being killed for being Christians, we do not know. Paul sometimes used “I” and “we” interchangeably in his letters; perhaps sometimes to better identify himself with his fellow Christians. Perhaps Paul was in prison at the very time he had planned to visit the church in Corinth, and knew he would need to delay his trip, before deciding not to go and bring them another painful visit. Even though he was an apostle, or perhaps because he was an apostle, Paul felt so crushed that he knew he could not do anything in his own strength to live. In spite of being crushed, Paul did experience the comfort of Christ and he entrusted his life, his ministry, and his future to Christ alone.

(2 Corinthians 1:9) Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

Paul did not say that he had received a sentence of death, but that his afflictions were so severe that he felt as though he had received a death sentence. He was so helpless that he could not rely upon himself for a moment. He rested on the truths he knew: he knew he could rely on Jesus Christ day by day, hour by hour, and moment by moment. Furthermore, he knew that if he did die that God would raise him from the dead; Paul wrote them: “Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at

home or away, we make it our aim to please him” (2 Corinthians 5:8-9).

(2 Corinthians 1:10) He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again,

Paul thought they would die unless God intervened; God did intervene and saved them. Paul also affirmed that God would continue to rescue them; and he placed his hope fully and only on God. Paul knew that when his apostolic ministry was completed that Jesus would come and take him to the place that He had prepared for him. Jesus promised all who follow him: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-3).

(2 Corinthians 1:11) as you also join in helping us by your prayers, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

Paul always stressed the importance of prayer! Paul thanked the Corinthian Christians for their prayers and acknowledged to them that their prayers had made a difference. When many pray, many will give thanks when they see how God answered their prayers. Prayer bound

the Apostle Paul to the Christians in Corinth and prayer bound them to Paul as members of the body of Christ. Prayer binds people to God and each other.

(2 Corinthians 1:12) Indeed, this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God--and all the more toward you.

This verse provides a meaningful transition between the verses that precede and follow it. Paul had revealed that they had suffered severe afflictions and thought they would die. This verse shows that their afflictions were because they were faithfully following Christ and preaching the gospel openly and honestly about the need for sinners to repent and place their faith in Jesus Christ (the crucified One that God had raised from the dead). They had not suffered because they had disobeyed God or had done something foolish; rather, their conscience (their ability to examine themselves according to the law of God) testified (as in a court of law and under oath) that they had done right and had demonstrated the grace of God to everyone. They had not preached worldly wisdom or philosophy but they had demonstrated the power of the gospel to save those who were lost in sin and wandering apart from God. They had also done everything in the midst of the Corinthians with “frankness and godly sincerity”—that also characterized Paul’s letters to them. Paul “boasted” that as an apostle of God he could be trusted.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. How can you bless God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you want to?
2. In 2 Corinthians 1:1-12, what does Paul say God does?
3. How did Paul describe his affliction?
4. What might you say to someone who was wondering why they were suffering after they had come to believe in Jesus Christ instead of having life easier?
5. When, how often, and why should we rely on God and not on ourselves?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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