

Today we begin our new series on Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth... And even though we know it as "2 Corinthians" it's not really Paul's 2nd letter to them at all – it's his 4th (at least: the 4th that we know about)... **Two** of his letters (over time) have gone missing, (I wouldn't be surprised if one of them was torn into pieces and burned [severe letter]) And so this letter, is the 2nd letter, of the 2 that remain today...

Now, I'm actually going to give a fuller introduction next week, but for now, I think it's important, that I do say this:

For us to really get a **feel** for this letter, in some way, we have to enter into a very real place of deep hurt,,,, And that place, is the broken heart of a pastor....

Paul, loved this church in Corinth – he loved them, deeply... He's the one who brought the Gospel to them; It's through Paul's preaching, that they came to faith... But when Paul moved on (to take the Gospel on to other regions [because that's Apostles do]), **others** who **called** themselves "Apostles", well, they moved in... And they elevated themselves as leaders, and they tried to usurp (take over) Paul's position in that church... They criticised Paul and slandered him and accused him of all sorts of things... And they brought false teachings to that church...

And it seems that it only took a few people, to come into that church, and it poisoned the whole place... It was a broken church – it was a church of factions (and we could see that as we studied Paul's **first** letter to the Corinthians [finished over a year ago])... And it wasn't only the church that was broken – Paul's heart was broken too... The things that were being

said about him, were untrue and so hurtful. But what hurt most, is that at least a few of his converts, **listened** to these false teachers, and they turned against him...

And as we read this letter, we're going to encounter some of that hurt – We're going to see the broken heart of this Pastor (Paul), coming through, in the words that he wrote...

- At times it almost seems like he's lashing out;
- at times, he's got his heart on his sleeve;
- at times he uses sarcasm;...

This is a very real, and a very emotional letter... You know, some people criticise the expression of emotion in Christianity, well I'm afraid Paul didn't get the memo on that... This is a very real letter; involving real people; with real emotions, ,, And we get to read their mail...

But you know what – when we understand the depth of Paul's heartache, it makes this letter, even the more amazing... He doesn't just have a good old cry and a whinge about how he's been mistreated – What he does, is he takes them back to Christ.... And the **depth** of his theology.... There are some amazing spiritual; gospel gems here.... *And just as a diamond is formed in a place of immense upheaval and pressure, so are some of the most amazing verses that we find in the Bible...*

I'm in awe... - That from his place of hurt – from the depths of his broken heart, he takes them (and us) to Jesus Christ, who is the healer of hurt, and who is the restorer, of all things broken...

Righto, so with that very **brief** introduction, to what is a rather complex letter, let's read today's reading.

Read: 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

Righto: Paul begins, his letter, by stating who he is, and by claiming his authority... Sort of like the letterhead of a professional today...

E.g.

During the week, Robyn had the first of what will be many follow-up appointments with her orthopaedic surgeon. And he gave Robyn a letter to take back to her doctors... And on the letterhead, was his name [Dr. So-&-So] and then it listed his qualifications

- *Honours degree [Bachelor Medicine & B Surgery]; and*
- *Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons [Orthopaedics]...*

This bloke has authority to tell our local doctors, about the state of Robyn's broken leg... And it's going to be 3-5 months until any weight bearing at all...

And that's what Paul does at the beginning of his letter – I'm Paul, and I'm here with Timothy... But then he gives his credentials – he lays down the authority he has, to be able to write this letter in the first place...

You know, I met a minister once, and this person told me that *they disagreed with some of what Paul teaches, and that when they get to heaven, they're going to take him to task...*...

Really... What's **your** authority? What's **your**

qualification??? You've been to Bible college... Big whoop... Paul wrote half the New Testament...

What gave Paul the authority to write this letter??? Well, he describes himself as an “apostle of Christ Jesus”.

Now **practically**, an apostle, is “one who is sent”... But biblically, an Apostle, is like a designated position of authority in the Church... The Apostles had a special position of authority. They were eye-witnesses to the resurrected Jesus, and they were the ones who were sent to take the Gospel message into the world... And for us, it is the testimony of these Apostles, that is now recorded in the Scriptures... The Apostles had the authority to teach what the Gospel is... They would uphold truth, and they would expose deception...

Now, my advice to you, is to be very wary of anyone who claims to be an Apostle today, and some people do... And when they claim to be “apostles”, often they are claiming an authority for themselves, that they do not have the right to claim...

But if an Apostle is “One who is sent”, **who** sent Paul???

Who designated Paul as an apostle??? Paul didn't choose to be an apostle himself – in fact, he felt he was the **least** deserving to be an apostle (1 Cor 15) ... He **didn't** choose that position for himself. **God** did. It was **God** who chose him, and it was **God** who sent him...

And later on in this letter, we're going to see how Paul compares himself with his antagonists. His antagonists

claimed to be “apostles” **themselves** (but they were false)...
But Paul simply describes himself here, as an apostle chosen
by God...

So, that’s the letterhead... Next comes the address: **to the**
church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints
who are in the whole of Achaia.

Now, if Paul was writing to us, he’d probably address his
letter: to the church of God at St George ,,,, with **all** the
saints who are in the **whole** of the Maranoa and Warrego...

If he was writing to our brothers and sisters at Bongeen, he’d
probably address his letter: to the church of God at Bongeen,
with **all** the saints who are in the **whole** of the Darling
Downs...

He wouldn’t just be writing to BD (You see)... The Church
of God stretches across **all** denominations and across whole
regions...

We should never see the local church:

- as being our own little patch
- our own denomination;
- our own individual congregation
- our own family group **within** a church

Authentic disciples of Jesus – no matter where they worship –
no matter what denomination they are in – Authentic disciples
of Jesus, are our Brothers and Sisters in Christ... - we have
that connection...

And that's what Paul reminds us of – the way that the church of God is connected... And I reckon, the closer we are located geographically, the more connected we should be... If we don't fellowship with other authentic disciples of Jesus in our own district, shame on us...

BTW, "hot off the press", the Bongen Church of Christ (who use these messages every Sunday), are holding a church camp, up at the Bunya Mountains (August, this coming year [7-9 show long weekend])... And they've asked us if we'd be able to join them...

... And what a wonderful opportunity that will be, to fellowship together – to connect with the wider church of God...

And BTW, if anybody who listens to this on a podcast, wants to be involved, keep an eye on the BD website www.bushdisciples.church, because we'll get some details up there, and you're invited to join with us too... [7-9 Aug 2020]

The church of God is much bigger than our own little patch...

But I think Paul is making an important point (even in this introduction):

There's a fair bit of false teaching and a fair bit of error in this church in Corinth... And he's reminding them "Hey, it's not just about you... It's **not your church** – it's the church of **God**; and **as** the church of God, you cannot:

- decide for yourself what you're going to believe, because you're connected to something much bigger than that.

You cannot decide for yourself

- how you're going to behave; or
- what you're going to teach;

And what we will discover, as we go through this letter, is the truth, that the church of God, is something that shares a common faith; a common truth; a common fellowship; and a common teaching, because we have **one** Saviour and one Lord...

So, it's **from** Paul: an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God...

It's **to** the church in Corinth, but he reminds them that they are connected to **all** the saints (in the whole region);

And then he gives them a greeting, and what an amazingly simple summary, of the whole of the Gospel...

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

We could spend all morning, just unpacking those few words?

Grace... Grace and peace... Grace is the **action**; Peace, is what results **from** the action...

You know, many people desperately long for peace; Some even work for peace – they strive for peace... But it eludes them... World leaders travel the globe – peace envoys; peace

accords – we hear about them all the time... How long do most of them last...

You see, people are looking for the result – they're looking for peace, but they put the cart before the horse – there **is** no peace without “grace”,,, And it's not just any old grace – it's the grace and the peace of God...

Grace is the **action** of God; Peace, is the result, **of** that action... And that's what makes it so powerful... What makes Grace and Peace so effective, is because it's the activity of God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ....

Do you want to experience true peace with God? Well, I'm telling you, you won't have it, **until** you surrender yourself, completely to Him, and become a committed disciple of Jesus Christ...

Grace, is an undeserved gift... Just like Paul didn't deserve to be an apostle, I don't **deserve** to be a disciple of Jesus... It was while I was still a sinner, that God enacted His Grace... Even though you and I, rebelled against God, and put other things; other people (and even ourselves) as No.1,,,, - While we were still sinners, Christ died for us... While we were still enemies of God, Christ died for us... That's grace. We didn't deserve it...

And when we repent of our sin, and yield our whole self to God, that's when the result of grace kicks in:::: Peace.... It's a total regeneration... That's what being 'born again' is all about... The old sinful man – the man in conflict with God, is killed, and we're born again into faith in Jesus Christ (the Prince of Peace)...

Husbands and wives look for peace, and with a bit of counselling and a lot of hard work,, they might be able to improve things a bit... But the root cause of their conflict remains: Those who rebel against God and continue to reject God's grace, cannot possibly have peace with God for a start... And if you haven't got peace with your Heavenly Father (who is merciful), what hope is there for any significant, lasting relational peace with another sinful human???

Anyway, we could spend all day on "Grace" and "Peace", but we'd better move on...

Now, as we read the reading this morning, I don't think anybody deserves a prize for identifying the key word – it's pretty obvious... 10 times, in 5 verses, he uses the word "comfort"...

The key message for us today, is to be **comforted** – not **comfortable**...

- God's nature, is to be "merciful"...
- How does God express His nature???
- By comforting...
- **Who** does God comfort?
- He comforts those who are afflicted...
- Therefore, **who** gets to experience the mercy of God?
Who gets to experience the comfort of God???

- Those who are afflicted...

It's not those who are comfortable, who experience the mercy of God – it's those who are afflicted...

You know, the more I read the New Testament, and the letters that are written to churches in the New Testament, the more I continually get convinced, that the same old, is the same old. The same old errors that plagued the Early church, are the same old errors we find in the church of today...

....

As we study this letter, we can't jump to **too** many conclusions, but we **do** need to be mindful of 2 things:

- a) we're reading someone else's mail; and
- b) we're only getting one side of the conversation...

But even so, it's quite easy to tell, when Paul is mounting a defence... And that's what he's doing here. Why is Paul **defending** the fact that he's suffering??? Well, the most logical possibility, is "That's one of the accusations that's getting made against him"...

*"If Paul is a real apostle, then why's he suffering???
Look at us... We're not suffering, therefore God's
blessing is on us – we're prospering – we're the apostles
– not him..."*

And they were using the fact of Paul's suffering, as evidence that he wasn't a real apostle at all...

Now, let's bring this forward to today:

There are many; many, popular churches today, where the image of the pastor, is to project an image of what everyone else wants to be... He needs to project the image of:

- success;
- health;
- charisma;
- strength;
- vitality;
- prosperity;
- power;
- influence

It's all about the cult of the personality – he's happy, healthy, successful & prosperous (glamorous wife) – he's everything that we want to be.... He must 'have it altogether'... - that's gotta be a leader worth following...

And many people follow such a lead,,,, But the problem is, they're not following Christ...

And sometimes, I've had someone say to me (when they've considered the affliction that someone else is suffering) "Oh, it can't be God's will [what they're doing], because it's so hard... If that was god's will, it would be so much easier..." Paul would have none of that sort of talk...

In fact, suffering and affliction, are the way of Christ... And because that's the way of Christ, it's also the way of His followers...

And in fact, there's a pattern here:

- Christ suffered,
- and because Christ suffered, He is able to comfort those who suffer for His Name's sake;
- The Apostles suffered. And in their affliction, they received comfort from God, through Christ.

- And when **other** disciples of Jesus suffer, **they** are able to receive the comfort of God, as the Apostles comfort them...

Do you see the pattern here? We receive the comfort of God, and we can pass the comfort on...

And this is so much so, that Paul could say: “We suffer, so that we can experience the comfort of God, and then we can pass the comfort of God on to **you**, when **you** suffer...”

And yet, isn't that pretty-much the exact opposite, of what most of us desire... We seek to be **comfortable**. And when we're comfortable, we don't need comfort... And that's the image that our modern church is doing its best to project – “Come to Jesus and you'll be comfortable”... Come to Jesus, and your life can be as wonderful as our Pastor's ... They attempt to **hide** the suffering; They want to **hide** every hint of imperfection... Why? Because “That makes it look like we're not blessed”...

And Paul turns all that on its head... Authentic disciples of Jesus, and especially Authentic **leaders** in Christ's church, suffer... The Christian life (exemplified by the Apostles), is a paradox of affliction and comfort at the same time...

Alright, so God comforts us, in all our afflictions... But what sort of afflictions is he talking about???

- We know that God comforts us when we grieve
- Sick

- Things go wrong / Bit of bad luck
- Midst of drought
- Bullied...

But that's not the afflictions that Paul's talking about here. He's talking about when we suffer, for the sake of Christ...

We suffer, as Christ suffered...

Now, usually when we think about the sufferings of Christ, we just think about the cross, but Jesus suffered in many ways...

Here's just a few:

- Many people hated Jesus.

And many people will hate you too, simply because you're a Christian.

- Some thought He was crazy... Even His own family tried to have him sectioned... "Pay to attention to Him – He's beside Himself – He's out of His mind"...

And one thing's for sure, anyone who seriously follows Jesus (as a disciple of Jesus should), will be thought of, as crazy... - you're a zealot – you're a religious nut-job...

- Some people constantly watched Jesus, looking for the slightest hint of wrong-doing...

And as disciples of Jesus, we need to expect that... We **will** be targeted... And the world will judge us, far harsher than God ever will... And far harsher than what they judge themselves...

- Jesus suffered poverty... I mean, He had every opportunity to do well for Himself, but He was essentially homeless...

And as disciples of Jesus, wealth and prosperity, should be the last thing that motivates us... And as we follow the will of God, rarely does His will include financial prosperity.

- Jesus was mocked, made fun of, and ridiculed...

And as a disciple of Jesus, you will be too...

- But then of course, his suffering progressed.
 - He lost His freedom;
 - They gave false testimony against Him;
 - They tortured Him; and
 - They crucified Him...

And as disciples of Jesus, the commitment we make, may also include:

- Loss of freedom;
- Perjury against us;
- Torture; and
- Death.

That's what Paul faced...

And he didn't try and hide his suffering...

⁸ For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia.

At times, he thought they were going to die... But there was purpose in the affliction – It was so that they **wouldn't** depend on themselves. It was so that they would rely on God who raises the dead...

You see, that's where our faith takes us – **that's** where our hope lies – not in this life... The faith of Paul, is that God would save them, even from death... It wasn't that God would stop them from being killed, but even if they **are** killed, he knew, that the Power of God is to raise the dead...

And that's the hope that **we** have: God **will** deliver us... Even if I'm killed for following Jesus, I'm saved... Because in Christ, the dead are raised into His glory...

And in many places of the world, Christians are being persecuted for their faith (much more severely than here)... And of course, it's only a couple of weeks ago, when Ting left us to return to China, where they're **not** free to worship and preach the Gospel (as we are here)...

And a very practical application for us (who at this stage, aren't persecuted quite so harshly), is V11:...

¹¹ You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

You see, those in Corinth – at that point, they weren't suffering the level of affliction that Paul **was** suffering... But they could help Paul. How? By praying...

And **by** praying, **many** could give thanks... Who could give thanks? Well, while Paul remained alive, he was able to keep preaching the Gospel... And everyone who responded to the Gospel, could give thanks, because they got to hear it...

Have you ever considered, how important our prayers are, for the persecuted church??? We pray for them, that they would stand firm in the face of persecution, and that the Gospel would be preached, and many will be saved...

But we should **also** pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ here , and around us... We should pray, that when we are afflicted for the sake of Christ – no matter what form that takes – that we would receive the comfort of God...

So, my prayer for you today, is that you wouldn't be comfortable. I pray against our comfort... But I also pray, that as you suffer affliction and persecution, for the Name of Jesus, that you would be comforted by God...

And I hope you pray for me, because a little note that I wrote down on this Bible passage as I studied it, said this:

As a pastor, how I suffer, matters.

That's the challenge it's been for me... If I look for a comfortable life, I won't receive comfort from God (in my affliction)... And if I haven't experienced the comfort of God

(in my affliction), how can I give it to you when you're afflicted...

So, don't seek to be comfortable, but experience the comfort of God...