

**Paul's Opening Remarks to the Corinthians
2 Corinthians 1:1-2**

A long time ago I taught through the epistle of **1 Corinthians**. When I completed the study I always intended to move on to **2 Corinthians** and teach through that epistle as well. Today we will begin that study.

And where will this study take us? This study will take us deep inside the mind and heart of the apostle as he reached out and tried to help a very flawed, struggling and ungrateful congregation.

How deep will this study take us into the mind and heart of the Apostle Paul? It will take us very deep. In fact, there is no other Pauline epistle that will reveal to us more about the inner workings of Paul's mind and heart than this epistle.

What is my hope for this study? My hope is that after this study is over and when we in the future are confronted with difficult people under difficult circumstances that we will not quickly abandon them, but that we would strive with the strength that God provides to care for them with the mind and heart of Paul or perhaps better said with the mind and heart of Christ.

This is particularly true in respect to our dealings with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, must learn to care for one another even when it is not easy. And I believe that our study of this wonderful epistle, Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians, will help us to do this very thing.

We are now ready to begin our journey. And where will we begin? We will begin where Paul began. We will begin with Paul's opening remarks to the Corinthians in **2 Corinthians 1:1-2**.

So now let me read those verses for you. **“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 throughout Achaia: (2) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

So now let me ask you this question. What did Paul accomplish with his opening remarks in 2 Corinthians 1:1-2?

First of all, Paul, in his opening remarks, identified himself as the author of the epistle (2 Corinthians 1:1). Isn't this exactly the first thing that he did? Let me read for you the very first words of the very first verse. **“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.”** So, what was the very first thing that Paul did? The very first thing that Paul did when he began to write his second epistle to the Corinthians was to introduce himself as the author.

So let me ask you a question. Would Paul have always introduced himself in this way? And the answer is, of course, no! When Paul was born in the city of Tarsus to Jewish parents, who also happened to be citizens of Rome, he was given two names: a Jewish name Saul and a Roman name Paul.

And which of those two names did he choose to go by in the first part of his life? He chose to go by His Jewish name Saul.

He was referred to as Saul when he was a child. He was referred to as Saul when he was a youth, studying to become a rabbi under the tutelage of Gamaliel, and he was referred to as Saul as a young adult when he as a Pharisee had become the foremost persecutor of the church. But here in **verse 1** when he identifies himself as the author of this epistle he introduces himself as Paul and not as Saul. So obviously some kind of transition had taken place. So when did it happen? And why did it happen?

The transition began to take place after Saul, whom we know as Paul, encountered Christ while he was on his way to persecute Christians in the city of Damascus. And what happened during this encounter? Saul went from unbelieving to believing. He went from being an enemy of Christ to a follower of Christ. And not only this, but he according to **Acts 26:1-18** was appointed by Christ an apostle to the Gentiles.

So did this encounter with Christ and his appointment as an apostle to the Gentiles immediately lead Paul to refer to himself by his Roman name rather than by his Jewish name? And the answer is No! It did not. It was the necessary first step. It certainly set the ball in motion. But this was not the specific point in time when Paul started referring to him self exclusively by his Roman name.

So when was it that this transition actually took place? It actually took place 13 years after his conversion at the very beginning of his first missionary journey.

This is clear when we compare **Acts 13:9** with **Acts 13:13**. And what do we see when we compare these two verses? First of all, we see Luke, the author of the book of Acts, in **Acts 13:9**, referring to Paul at the very beginning of this first missionary journey as **“Saul, who was also known as Paul.”**

And where was Paul when Luke referred to him in this way in **Acts 13:9**? He was in a Gentile area on the island of Cyprus at the very beginning of his first missionary journey.

But even though Luke referred to Paul in this way at the very beginning of his first missionary journey this was the last time that he would do so in this way. In fact, the very next time that Luke refers to him in **Acts 13:3**, when he and his companions put out to sea from “Paphos,” the capital of Cyprus, he is referred to simply as Paul.

Let me now read for you **Acts 13:13**. **“Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos.”** So when Paul arrived on Cyprus he was Paul also known as Saul, but when he left he was simply Paul. The transition was now complete.

So now we know when this transition took place. But why did it take place? I believe the reason why Paul wanted to be known by his Roman name rather than by his Jewish name once he officially began his work as an apostle to the Gentiles was because he wanted to identify himself as best as he could with the people to whom he had been sent, and one of the ways he could do that was to use his Roman name, or his gentile name, rather than his Jewish name as he went into Gentile areas.

And who did Paul say was with him even as he was writing this epistle? He told the recipients of this letter that Timothy was with him. Let me once again read for you **2 Corinthians 1:1** but this time I will read a little bit further. **“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother.”** And who was Timothy? Timothy, according to **1 Timothy 1:2**, was Paul’s true son in the faith, who along with Paul was very

familiar with those to whom Paul was now writing this epistle, as we will shortly see.

So, what was the first thing that Paul accomplished in his opening remarks in **2 Corinthians 1:1-2**? Paul, first of all, identified himself as the author. So, what was the second thing that Paul accomplished in his opening remarks?

Paul, in his opening remarks, identified the Corinthian church and other believers in the surrounding area as the recipients of this epistle (2 Corinthians 1:1).

So let us now once again go back to **2 Corinthians 1:1**, but this time we will read the entire verse. **“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 throughout Achaia.”**

So let us begin by understanding a little bit about this church at Corinth and Paul’s relationship with them.

Paul first came to Corinth on his second missionary journey in AD 50 and remained there for 18 months. It was during this time that the church at Corinth was established (Acts 18:1-17).

So, what do we need to know about this church? Of all the churches founded by Paul, the Corinthian church proved to be by far the most demanding and the most problematic.

Problems among the Corinthians themselves and their relationship with Paul caused him to write not only the two lengthy letters that we have, but also two others, which we do not have. So when were these various letters written?

Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church, that we do not have, was written sometime between A.D. 52 and A.D. 55 was alluded to in 1 Corinthians 5:9. So, what do we know about this letter?

Apparently, shortly after Paul had left Corinth after 18 months of ministry, disturbing news reached him about problems that had arisen in the church. In

response to this news he sat down and wrote a noncanonical letter, which of course we know did not survive and therefore is no longer available to us. And how do we know this? We know this because Paul refers to this letter in **1 Corinthians 5:9**. And what was the point of this letter based on **1 Corinthians 5**? He wanted them to separate themselves from immoral people, not immoral people among the citizens of Corinth whose sinful practices were legendary, but rather he wanted them to separate themselves from immoral people who were among themselves within the church. This appears to be the primary reason for this first letter to the Corinthians. But this was not Paul's last letter. There was another.

Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church, that we do have, was written in A.D. 55 and is known as 1 Corinthians. Paul wrote this letter while ministering to the church in Ephesus on his third missionary journey. And who was it that delivered this letter? Timothy delivered this letter.

So why did Paul feel compelled to write this letter that was delivered by Timothy? He felt compelled to write this letter because even after he wrote the first letter to the Corinthians in the latter part of his second missionary journey things continued to deteriorate.

So, what were the circumstances that led him to do this? Paul, while in Ephesus on his third missionary journey, kept hearing of ongoing problems in Corinth.

Not only were there continuing divisions and quarrels among them, but far worse, the church was continuing to find it very difficult to detach themselves from the sinful practices of the city of Corinth, whose, as I have said, sinful practices were in fact legendary.

They could not understand, and perhaps did not want to understand, the words spoken by John in **1 John 2:15**, "**Do not love the world nor the things in the world.**" They not only wanted Christ but they wanted the sinful pleasures of the world as well. And, of course, this was not possible. So Paul wrote them the letter that we now call the letter of **1 Corinthians**.

While this letter apparently resolved some of the problems in Corinth, another very serious threat soon arose. False teachers, claiming to be apostles, arrived in Corinth. And the result, of their arrival in this very weak

and struggling congregation, was that congregation turned away from Paul and the truth.

This threat to the church resulted in Paul temporarily leaving the church at Ephesus to visit the church at Corinth, a visit that has become known the “sorrowful” visit (2 Corinthians 2:1). This visit did not go well. This visit did not go well at all.

When Paul was visiting the church at Corinth, he was confronted most likely by one of these false prophets who openly insulted him (2 Corinthians 2:5-8, 10; 7:12). And the Corinthians let him. This led to the third letter to the Corinthians.

Paul’s third letter, that we also do not have, is known as the “severe letter,” which was written very shortly after Paul returned to Ephesus after his “sorrowful visit” (2 Corinthians 2:1-4). And how did Paul get this letter to Corinth? Paul, rather than sending Timothy with the letter, sent Titus according to **2 Corinthians 7:5-16**.

Paul, after sending Titus to Corinth with this very severe letter, then left Ephesus to go to Troas where he was hoping to meet up with Titus with news from Corinth. But, unfortunately, Paul had to wait until he got to Macedonia to get a report about how the church at Corinth had responded to his last letter to them from Titus.

And what did Titus tell Paul? Titus reported that most of the Corinthians had repented and reaffirmed their loyalty to Paul, which of course brought Paul great joy as well as relief.

But Paul was not naïve. He knew that although the situation at Corinth had improved, the church was not out of danger. The false apostles were still there, and there were Corinthians who were still confused. He therefore chose to write another letter.

Paul wrote his fourth letter, which is known as 2 Corinthians, in A.D. 57. And why did he write it? He wrote it in order to prepare the church of God at Corinth and all the saints throughout Achaia, which is the area surrounding the city of Corinth, for an upcoming visit.

So where did Paul write this letter from? Paul wrote **2 Corinthians** from Macedonia, just north of Achaia and therefore just north of Corinth. And how did Paul seek to prepare them for his visit? Paul sought to prepare them for his visit by defending his apostleship, by giving them instruction regarding the collection for the poor believers in the area of Judea, and by confronting the false apostles and their followers.

But we are not done with Paul's opening remarks in **2 Corinthians 2:1-2**. Not only had Paul identified himself as the author, not only had Paul identified the recipients of this letter, but Paul also accomplished something else in his opening remarks.

Paul, in his opening remarks, greeted the whole of the church at Corinth and all the saints throughout Achaia (2 Corinthians 1:2). Let me now read again **2 Corinthians 1:1** but this time I will add **verse 2**. **“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 throughout Achaia: (2) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** Clearly Paul, in spite of over seven years of very difficult ministry in respect to the Corinthians, still wanted the very best for them. In fact, in 2 Corinthians 6:11 he told them that his heart was still open wide to them.

So let me ask you a question. Was Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church easy? And of course the answer is no! This church was filled with sinners who over a period of seven years caused him a great deal of heartache, but he never stopped loving them, he never stopped caring for them and he never stopped serving them, no matter what it cost him.

This was the mind and heart of the Apostle Paul, which hopefully by the grace of God will become our heart as well.

May God give us the grace to love difficult people with the mind and heart of the Apostle Paul.