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Called: Living for Christ in a Carnal Culture

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Compelled

*13-Week
Bible Study*

Compelled

*living a life
driven by truth*

Deborah
Spink

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Introduction

Corinth was a wealthy port city. It was renowned for its temple to Aphrodite, “the goddess of love,” with its 1,000 prostitutes. The Greek word *korinthiazomai* which is interpreted “to act the Corinthian,” came to mean “to practice fornication.” To act like a Corinthian was to be immoral—the city was known for everything sinful. This was the environment into which the church at Corinth was founded.

Acts 18:1–8 describes Paul’s time in Corinth during his second missionary journey. Aquila and Priscilla had recently arrived from Rome since Claudius had commanded all Jews to leave. Though they had been uprooted from their home, they still demonstrated hospitality to Paul in allowing him to share not only their home but their business. With his practical needs taken care of, Paul was able to teach and preach in the synagogue and “many of the Corinthians believed.” Paul remained in Corinth about eighteen months.

Second Corinthians is the fourth letter written by Paul to the church at Corinth. The first letter, confronting immorality in the church, is referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:9 but is lost to us. According to 1 Corinthians 7:1, the church then wrote Paul a letter asking for clarification on issues they faced. Paul’s response is the

book of I Corinthians, which is the subject of the Bible study *Called: Living for Christ in a Carnal Culture*.

Between the writing of I and 2 Corinthians, Paul made a “painful visit,” referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:1. He encountered animosity and disloyalty from the Corinthian believers, influenced by false teachers. He returned to Ephesus and wrote a “severe letter,” which is referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:4 and was delivered by Titus but again is lost to us. A short time later, Titus reported to him that the Corinthian church had received the letter with humility and repentance (2 Cor. 7:7). Paul then writes 2 Corinthians—a book of instruction, a defense of his apostleship, and a warning to be aware of false teachers.

These are the letters most likely written to the church at Corinth by Paul, also noting one of Paul's visits:

- ◆ Letter confronting immorality and carnality (lost)
- ◆ 1 Corinthians
- ◆ Visit by Paul
- ◆ Letter confronting disloyalty and false teaching (lost)
- ◆ 2 Corinthians

As we mature in our walk with Christ, we are to live a life changed by the Holy Spirit, committed to the true gospel, and compelled by the love of Christ.

LESSON 1

Compelled to Comfort

2 Corinthians 1:1-14

Suffering is a necessary part of life, but usually an unwelcome one. In 2 Corinthians the apostle Paul, who continually suffered for the faith, addressed suffering from a personal perspective. He did not delve into the whys of suffering but instead centered on its outworking: the good that can come out of it.

Sustenance in Suffering

Read 2 Corinthians 1:1-2.

Second Corinthians reveals that Paul's apostolic authority had come under attack. So Paul began chapter 1 by reminding the Corinthians of his credentials. In verse 1 he identified himself as an "apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." His role was not self-appointed but God-appointed.

To be an apostle of Jesus Christ, a man must have seen the risen Lord and have been commissioned by Him.

1. When did Paul, previously Saul, see the risen Christ and receive his commission (Acts 9:1-16)?

2. What two things did Christ say Paul would do (Acts 9:15–16)?

3. Paul did suffer many things for Christ's sake. What were some of the things Paul endured (2 Corinthians 11:23–28)?

We might say that Paul was an expert on suffering.

Though Paul suffered because of his faith and service for Christ, he often ministered with others. Second Corinthians 1 mentions that Timothy was present as Paul wrote this letter.

4. What do you know about Timothy? (See 1 Timothy 1:1–2; 2 Timothy 1:3–5; Acts 16:1–4; 18:1–5; 1 Corinthians 4:17.)

Here in 2 Corinthians 1, Paul used the same greeting as in 1 Corinthians, offering a blessing of grace and peace from the only true source of grace and peace, God the Father.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3–7.

Paul began with praise. “Blessed” in verse 3 means “praised.” Paul first praised God, for who He is.

5. What three titles did Paul give God in verse 3?

Paul identified Jesus Christ as the Son of God, an attestation to His deity. Paul also reminded the Corinthians that God is merciful, full of kindness and tenderness toward sinners. Finally, God is the ultimate source of every true act of comfort.

Next, Paul praised God for what He does.

6. According to verse 4, what does God do for us?

Paul's theme in this first chapter is clear from his repetition: A form of the word "comfort" or "consolation" is found ten times in the first eight verses. Both words come from the Greek word *parakaleō*, which means "to call near" or "one who comes alongside to help." The same Greek word is used in reference to the Holy Spirit in John 14:26.

The word "tribulation" means "anguish," "crushing pressure," or "burdens." God was with Paul in the midst of his sufferings to strengthen him and sustain his faith (vv. 9-10). Though we may never have to endure what Paul endured, we can be assured of God's presence, strength, and comfort in whatever trials we face.

7. What is the result of our having received God's comfort in our sufferings (v. 4)?

What a blessing it is to have the comfort of someone who can empathize with what we are going through. For example, when a woman loses her spouse, another widow can come alongside to offer encouragement and hope. Having a comforter who has experienced our pain makes all the difference. As we experience God's comfort, we are compelled to share that blessing with others.

8. What is the limit of God's comfort according to verse 5?

No matter the level of your suffering, God's gracious consolation will meet you there.

Paul was the voice of experience on God's comfort amid suffering. In verses 6–7, he provided perspective on his own sufferings. He viewed them as a means to comfort and encourage the Corinthian believers in their sufferings. Persecution was not exclusive to the apostles; many believers experienced it. Additionally, Corinth was an extremely corrupt city, and living for Christ was not easy. Paul assured the saints that their suffering would be matched by the comfort found in Christ.

9. Read James 1:2–4. Paul reflected on how suffering can result in knowing God's comfort intimately, and James told believers to "count it all joy" when they fall into various trials. What two benefits of suffering did James recount?

It is difficult to view suffering as a positive thing, but through it we experience God's presence and peace, as well as develop patience and maturity. When we value holiness over happiness, we can view suffering as a beneficial tool.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:8–11.

One of Paul's experiences with suffering brought him near death. He "despaired even of life," seeing no way out (v. 8). The word "sentence" in verse 9 indicates an official resolution, in this case the

death sentence. Though we do not know the details, Paul feared for his life.

10. According to verse 9, why did God allow the death sentence?

God sometimes allows suffering to bring us to the end of ourselves—to make us realize we are not in control. When we can do nothing, we will turn to the One that has been in control all along.

The song “The Point of Grace” by Dennis Jernigan says, “And I will meet you there where your striving ends, / I will hold you there in My embrace. / And you will find the place where true joy begins, / when you’ve reached the point of grace.” The God of all comfort desires us to cease striving and turn to Him in our suffering.

11. In addition to God Himself, what help did Paul credit for his deliverance (vv. 10–11)?

Paul understood the importance of intercessory prayer on his behalf—not only for God’s will to be done but for his own strength and courage. God may not always deliver us out of a tribulation, but He will give us the inner strength we need to glorify Him in the trial and to desire His will more than anything else.

12. Read 2 Timothy 4:16–18. How did God comfort and deliver Paul in that situation?

13. What did Paul say he was being preserved for?

14. Read the following verses and note their promises.

| *Psalms 37:1-6*

| *Proverbs 3:5-6*

| *Romans 8:28*

| *Romans 8:37-39*

| *Philippians 4:6-7*

| *Hebrews 13:5-6*

| *James 1:5*

Sincerity in Service

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12–14.

In these few verses, Paul was appealing to the church in Corinth to recognize his sincerity. False teachers and accusers had come into the church and assaulted his character. In chapters 10–12, he defended his apostolic authority and credentials. Here he reminded the church of his pure motives in writing to them.

15. In what ways did Paul say he conducted himself in the world (v. 12)?

The word “simplicity” means “sincerely, without dissimulation.” It is the opposite of duplicity. “Sincerity” means “clearness, purity.” Paul conducted himself not only in sincerity but in godly sincerity; his motives were godly, not selfish. He had no ulterior motives in his preaching, conduct, or letters to the Corinthian church. He also recognized that all glory goes to God, who gives us wisdom and grace.

16. Paul used the word “rejoicing” (NKJV—“boast”) in verse 14 to describe the church at Corinth. What did he mean?

Application

When you go through a trial, are you tempted to believe God has deserted you or does not care? Use His Word to speak truth to yourself during those times, and find comfort. Pray for God's overwhelming strength and peace as you give Him your burden.

Have you come through times of intense trial? Don't let your experiences with suffering go to waste. Use them to bless and comfort others going through something similar. Seek them out and share God's comfort with them.

You can help those going through trials by praying for them. Pray for God's will regarding deliverance but pray especially for inner strength and peace. Pray that God's name will be glorified through their suffering.

Be aware of your conduct and motives. Be sure you are serving the Lord sincerely, not selfishly, and depending on God's grace, not human wisdom.

Let the comfort of God that you experienced compel you to comfort others.

LESSON 2

Compelled to Forgive

2 Corinthians 1:15–2:17

Forgiveness is hard! When you are falsely accused, taken advantage of, publicly humiliated, or betrayed by someone you trusted, the hurt is real and not easily overcome. It takes God's grace and an outpouring of His love to move past the hurt to restoration of a relationship.

As believers in Christ, we are commanded to forgive those that wrong us. The first martyr, Stephen, asked God to forgive his murderers. He was being like Jesus, who when He was dying, breathed out forgiveness. Through His blood we have been forgiven of every sin ever committed, so how can we refuse to forgive? But before Paul addressed the church about forgiveness, he continued to defend his integrity.

Faithfulness Declared

1. What did Paul plan to do as indicated in 1 Corinthians 16:5–7?