

2Cor 26-10-25a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace & Truth Bible Church. This is the 25th of October, 2026. We continue our study in 2 Corinthians.

We're going to see that there is actually 3 Corinthians this morning. Unbeknownst to the great majority of us, we have actually a separate, very important letter from Paul. And we will see that there are a total of 3 epistles to the Corinthians from Paul in our Bible.

Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study, and we'll begin. Father, what a relief, what a privilege, what a blessing it is to know that it is not by might nor by power, but by your spirit that we live our lives, that we are enabled to walk a supernatural path, one that is unique, that was blazed for us by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. We thank you for him.

We thank you for his tremendous work on our behalf, the fullest expression of love and self-sacrifice that enables us to have a bright hope, a purpose and meaning and definition for our lives. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together, that God, the Holy Spirit, will impress it on our hearts in a meaningful way, that we will be those who are constantly aware that we represent the Lord Jesus in this life, both to learn and grow and prepare ourselves for present and future service and function, and to reflect the light of your glory so that others will be drawn to you through the Lord Jesus. We pray these things in his name, amen.

What an interesting letter we have before us. This second Corinthian letter is a corker. We have in it a great deal of information at the beginning.

And it starts with the introduction that we've seen. We're going to do a quick review since we missed last Sunday. But the introduction in verses one and two tell us that Paul is an apostle by the will of God.

And this is something he's going to return to in a later section here in this first portion. But he says, grace to you and peace. And we talked about the wonderful gift that we have of that grace and peace.

It is a unique privilege. It is a heritage. It is a blessing from God that we have these things available to us.

Jesus said, peace, I leave with you. My peace, I give to you, not as the world gives. And you could sermonize on that all morning long, the attempts and the endeavors that people undertake to find peace, whether it's in relationships, whether it's in achievements, whether it's in social change, governmental change, economic prosperity, whatever it may be.

So many of us are on a search for peace, large and small, just peace in our own environment. Peace when I'm driving my car, peace when I'm at work, peace when I'm at home, peace when

I'm in conversation with others. But we have the peace of God that passes all understanding available to us.

We don't want to let ourselves be distracted or deflected or somehow entangled and enmeshed in the ways of the world and lose our peace. Peace is one of the measures of how well we are doing in the three primary Christian virtues of faith and hope and love. If we are hitting on all three of those cylinders, we will have peace.

It doesn't mean we won't experience tribulation, hardship, suffering, testing, that we will not struggle and engage in warfare against principalities and powers, rulers of the darkness of this age, a war against our own flesh with its desires and its constant pull toward the dark side, or that we will not, as we mature and become significant in God's plan and purpose, attract the attention of the dark side, the forces, principalities, and powers, and rulers of the darkness of this age. But as with any contest, when we are prepared and equipped, when we are confident that we have on the full armor of God, this is nothing to fear. This is something to enjoy.

This is something to celebrate and to be thankful that we are found worthy to represent the Lord Jesus in the conflict. And we need not be hesitant or fearful or reluctant to engage in the battle because we have been so thoroughly equipped for every good work by what God supplies through His word and through His spirit. Why should I fear what man can do unto me? Why should I fear what the devil can do unto me? Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

We just have to remember it and have confidence. So Paul blesses the recipients of this letter. Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is no other source of grace and there is no better source of lasting peace than our Father in heaven and our Savior, the Lord Jesus. You can bask, you can relax, you can be restored and renewed in that grace and peace. What e'er be tied.

That's the beginning line of a wonderful hymn. Be not dismayed, what e'er be tied, God will take care of you. Beneath His wings of love abide, God will take care of you.

Through every day or all the way, He will take care of you. God will take care of you. That is the introduction to this letter because Paul is going to navigate some difficult issues with the Corinthians, but he begins by reminding us all that our environment is grace, our heritage is peace.

Then he gives this analysis here of the comfort in times of hardship that comes to us from God. And we saw that in verses three through seven. So we had that given to us by way of reminder.

This is not a new idea, but it is certainly an important one. Comforts us in all of our afflictions and consolation in times of distress is another part of that peace, that grace that comes to us. So the

God of all comfort, comforts us in our tribulation so that we can comfort others.

We've seen that in detail. And then in verses eight through 11, we had another double subject. There are pairs of subjects throughout this introductory section.

So you have tribulation and comfort in the section we just reviewed. Here, we have life and death, life and death in verses eight through 11. And we've seen that in detail.

You come down to verses 12 through 14, and we have simplicity and sincerity. And there is no subterfuge, there's no dissembling, there is no deceit, there's no subtle hidden motive or selfish ambition behind Paul's efforts. It is straightforward.

This is the simple gospel. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you're saved. The Lord Jesus Christ removes our guilt, removes our penalty, removes our separation from God.

He restores us, He reconciles us, He renews us. He achieved atonement for our sins. And because of that, we can live in godly transparency.

We don't need to hide. We don't need to deflect or do what so many politicians are doing in this election season and trying to run away from certain things and emphasize others that may or may not be based in truth, to present a narrative rather than the bare facts, spin a story, weave a narrative instead of simply being honest and forthright. Simplicity and sincerity.

Another pair of wonderful virtues, expressions of love, expressions of faith and expressions of hope. We don't need to be untruthful or less than truthful. We can be transparent.

That brings us to the section here that we have covered down through the end of the chapter, verse 24. And this is a beautifully symmetrical, symmetrical passage. When I say symmetrical, what do you think of? What is the best known symmetry in all the word of God? It is the shell within a shell within a shell structure, the chiasmic structure that has the outermost components corresponding, the next innermost corresponding and within that and within that until you come to the core at the center.

And in this one, as with so many, we will find the Lord Jesus Christ at the center. And that's where he belongs. I will point this out quickly.

We're not going to belabor it, but you remember that because people didn't have the ability to take notes or make recordings or go back and review, they had to store things in their mind. And so it was a common form of presentation in order to promote and encourage remembering what was said. So you travel in with a set of ideas and then you come back out in reverse order and it reinforces them and is a reminder and a nice little package of truth.

And right at the core, right at the heart, the soft, sweet center is the Lord Jesus himself. Let's look at this very quickly. And all you have to do, if you just have a pencil or a pen and you don't mind

marking the margin of your Bible, you will see that this has been pretty carefully constructed.

Paul put a lot of thought into this. And it begins here in verse 13 and 14. He talks about our celebration, our boasting, the testimony of our conscience.

We had no other purpose than achieving your benefit. That was the introduction in verse 12. But in verse 13 and 14, he says, we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand.

I'm not embedding a hidden message in this. What you see is what you get. What I am writing is what I intend for you to understand.

Don't try to find a subtext or an encoded different message. What you read, this is what I've said to you all along. This letter is another manifestation of truth.

You can take it to the bank. We are not writing any other thing to you than what you read or understand. And I trust you will understand with a view toward the end.

He's not talking about the end of the letter. He is talking about the day of the Lord Jesus. And this is something that we will see reviewed in this symmetrical structure.

So you have an understanding of us in part. We are your boast just as you are ours. We are privileged and we celebrate our association with you just as you are privileged and celebrate your association with us.

We get our teaching from a faithful messenger, the Apostle Paul. All of us as believers receive the word of God from the apostolic witness that is in the pages of these scriptures. And there are many pastors, there are many teachers who do a wonderful and faithful job of explicating, of exegeting, of drawing the truth out of these pages and making it clear.

There are many congregations, there are many shepherds because we're built differently. And there are some that can help us make sense of what God is saying more easily. Others, in the same way that we're not friends with every single person we meet, there are some, our souls just seem to be birds of a feather and we think alike, we understand alike, illustrations land with us because we're built similarly.

We think and observe and parse reality similarly. And God raises up pastors that are able to connect and to bring to life the living word of God effectively for a particular group. And it is no harm and no foul if we move into, through and beyond a particular group, shepherded by a particular pastor because we grow.

And elementary teachers don't teach high school, high school teachers don't teach college as a rule. College teachers pick a level, they're undergraduate, graduate or postgraduate. And we move through.

And I think sometimes people out of a sense of loyalty, once they have kind of reached a plateau and aren't really learning new things from a given messenger are out of a sense of loyalty or habit or whatever, aren't willing to look for what God may be providing in terms of growth and progress in understanding of the word of God. So I say that to say, we understand that just as people move into and out of a group and we observe them come and go, we ourselves can come and go. As long as we're being fed, as long as we are going into the green pastures beside the still waters, if you come away from Bible class with something fresh, with encouragement, with something to chew on, a fresh desire to put things into application, you're in the right place.

If you feel like you're stagnating and you come away saying, but is there any word from the Lord? What you've covered is good, but I'm not advancing. We are here to advance. We are headed on the upward way.

So as long as we feel like we're learning and growing, we stick with it. Otherwise we can pray, we can ask God for bread, and he's not going to give us a rock, a snake, or a scorpion, he will provide. And in this age of digital access, there are so many places we can look for the faithful teaching of the word of God.

And there are many faithful teachers. Sometimes you have to look, but they are there. There are 7,000 that have not bowed the knee to veil.

So it's not a scarcity so much as sometimes a lack of visibility, but those who seek will find. It's a promise of God. Paul is the faithful messenger for these people in Achaia.

He and his team with Silvanus and Timothy, Titus, they are the ones that have brought the faithful word. They're not doing it for profit. They're not doing it because they've got the big head and they think that all knowledge will die with them if they don't share it.

They are faithful. And this is what Paul emphasizes here. And he says, our conscience is clear.

We conducted ourselves in the world, your world, in Achaia, in Corinth, in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God and more abundantly toward you. Another expression of that grace that he opened the letter with. This is our goal, that the grace of God comes into your life in a meaningful and effective way by communicating the word of truth.

That is the goal, both in the presentation and in the reception. We're not writing things that are obscure, that are hard to understand. I trust you will understand, even to the end, that you reach the goal, which is to be able to stand at the judgment and have a record of achievement, of progress, of production, of a field that has borne a hundredfold or sixtyfold or thirtyfold because the word of God has been sowed into it.

As also you have understood us in part, we are your boast just as you are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus. That is the end he spoke of in the previous verse. The day of the Lord Jesus, when

he comes back and we enter a whole new phase of God's plan, are we ready? Are we equipped? You can't point back and say, but look, I paid all my bills.

I kept my house straight. My lawn was mowed. I washed my car every other Sunday.

I talked with people and I read my Bible and I went to church. That is wonderful in and of itself, but will it stand at the judgment? What will we be evaluated on at the judgment? And it won't necessarily be a theology test. It will be an application test.

So in this confidence, verse 15, I intended to come to you before, but this section here in verses 13 through 15, we are writing and we intended to come to you. Now, Paul has introduced a subject. We, meaning Paul and Timothy, Sylvanus, Titus, we are communicating to you.

It is our privilege. It's our responsibility. It is our assignment.

We have been ordained and dedicated, anointed by God to do this job. And we're endeavoring to do it faithfully. That is what you could put out in the margin as section A. Paul has moved from introduction and reminding them that God is the God of peace, of grace and of comfort in times of hardship.

Now he's getting to his theme, to his point. And his point is we are communicating faithfully because you need it. And as you receive it, you celebrate the fact that you got it.

And we celebrate that you received it. You celebrate that we presented it. We celebrate you.

You celebrate us. It's a win-win. God's plan and purpose is being accomplished.

It's working. Praise God. That's his point here in point A. And in this confidence, I intended to come to you before.

Now we are getting into the issue with which this letter opens. There is an accusation against Paul. And we will see what it is as we move forward.

In this confidence, I intended to come to you that you might have a second benefit. I intended to come that you might have a second benefit. We've communicated to you in the past via letter.

I wanted to come to you again. Remember he was in Corinth previously. I wanted to come to you again to confer another benefit.

But it didn't happen. And there are two consequences of Paul's plans changing. He intended to come.

He planned to come. He was going to leave Ephesus and go to Macedonia. Corinth is sort of on the way.

So he was going to stop in Corinth and visit with them, then go to Macedonia. After finishing in Macedonia, come back through Corinth and then go to Jerusalem with his monetary gift. And we've seen the details of that in the book of Acts.

And he mentions it in several of his letters to the Gentile churches. Can you take up a collection? I will gather it. Your representatives can come with me.

We will take it down and give it to the suffering and poverty stricken Christians in Jerusalem. That was his project. That was his goal.

So he's going to go to Macedonia via Corinth, come back from Macedonia via Corinth on his way to Jerusalem. But his plans changed. How many times do we have an intention? We have a plan.

I can point to recent events in our own periphery where we had one plan, things change, necessarily so, properly so. And now there's a different plan. And it may be in very short order, but it's okay for plans to change.

Our lives are fluid. Circumstances are in flux. And what we predict doesn't always come about.

I have talked to three different people who have surgeries that need to be done, whether it's a replacement of a joint or other medical procedures that take place to enhance health and function. And it was going to be then, but now it's going to be some other time. Whether the doctor's plans changed or the patient's plans changed, we set things up and it changes.

And in some cases, it can be a disappointment. Sort of had hopes built up, had expectations, laid in provisions or whatever, and then the plan changes. And we want to be careful to be flexible, to be relaxed, to maintain our peace, to look at changes as an opportunity rather than a hardship, to give the benefit of the doubt to those who are involved in the change, something's changed in their circumstance.

Because what we're about to see is, Paul has received a very serious charge of instability, of unreliability, of unpredictability on the part of an individual in Corinth. Paul said he was going to come, his plans changed and he didn't come. And this individual started raising a ruckus about it and saying, this man, Paul, you can't trust what he says.

And if you can't trust what he says about his personal plans, how can you trust his gospel message? He says one thing and does another. He says yes, and it ends up being no, as we will see. He's an unreliable messenger because he doesn't do what he says he will do.

It's unclear why this became such a big deal to a particular individual. This is one man in Corinth, but he was incensed that Paul didn't come to Corinth. And he began to bad mouth Paul and say the man is inconsistent and unreliable.

Now, what is the truth? Are we to analyze the personal life of messengers? Should they be above

reproach? Should they be the husband of one wife, able to rule well their own household? Are they prone to anger or drunkenness or inconsistency of various sinful and evil kinds? We have been through the pastoral epistles where Paul tells both Timothy and Titus, those who are going to minister to the group, whether in teaching or in administration, need to be examples of faithfulness, obedience, and stability. The charge here is that Paul is unfaithful, unstable, and unreliable because his travel plans changed. Paul is now going to defend himself against that charge.

He fully intended to go, that's what he says here in verse 15. But why are we even talking about this? We have to be careful as we look at one another and there is the potential for disappointment. We have an expectation of others in our periphery.

As with so many things we've seen recently, the pastor and congregation model here, this is the means by which this truth is conveyed to us, but it doesn't have to be a pastor and a group. It can be anyone who has an expectation of another believer and then that expectation is not met. People can disappoint us and it's not their fault.

They didn't capriciously or arbitrarily change their mind or change their plan. It isn't from a lack of consideration or a lack of love. It is such as is common to man.

It is the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. And in many cases, it is the action of God himself who has diverted the path, the itinerary. Man makes his plans, but the Lord directs his steps.

And we should look at these things in the realm of believers as from the Lord, either formally as being better for all concerned or as a good test of our character, our patience, our Christian love, our flexibility. We improvise, we adapt, we overcome. And in many cases, things work out even better than the original plan.

In this case, we have a letter or two of Paul that we would not have if his plans had simply gone forward. He wouldn't be writing this letter to the Corinthians because he would have visited and said things in person. Because he didn't go there, we have an entire letter in the word of God for our benefit.

The Corinthians couldn't see that. This man in Corinth that is going to level charges against Paul and begin to really bad mouth him, didn't see it, didn't understand it. Paul himself, I am sure didn't realize that some of these epistles that he was writing to individual churches were going to be preserved and serve as maps and guides for believers across centuries.

He's living in the moment, but God is using him in ways he may not even be aware of. So with that as a background, we're going to read this section with that understanding, listen to what Paul says, and you'll see that it really kind of lays down and makes sense. So in this confidence, verse 15, I intended to come to you before that you might have a second benefit to pass by way of you

to Macedonia, to come again from Macedonia to you and be helped by you on my way to Judea.

Makes sense, right? Verse 17, therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh that with me there should be yes, yes, and no, no? I say, yes, I'm coming on the way in to Macedonia. Yes, I'm coming by on my way out of Macedonia, but no, I didn't come on the way in and no, I haven't come back on the way out. Am I fickle? Am I unreliable? Did I just make these plans and tell you what I was going to do and then I just pulled the rug out from under you and did something different on a whim? No.

As God is faithful, our word to you was not yes and no. Why? For the son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, by me, Silvanus, and Timothy, was not yes and no, but in him is yes. The promises of God are faithful.

The word communicated by the Lord Jesus Christ is true. Jesus Christ, the same, yesterday, today, and forever. We live in a fallen world.

We come up against the unforeseen, the unanticipated. God in heaven is eternal. His son, the Lord Jesus Christ, was perfect.

Never sinned, never fell short of accomplishing all the will of God. When Jesus went to a village and ministered the word and healed the sick and exemplified the person and the glory of God, he did it for a period of time. Then he would leave to go somewhere else.

In a couple of cases, the disciples said, but Lord, look at the crowds. Why are we leaving? The Lord Jesus knew when to be in a place and when to leave. With him, it is always the perfect plan of God.

He never messed it up. He never failed. It is always in him, yes.

Look at verse 20. For all the promises of God in him are yes, and in him, amen. True, so be it.

Praise God, let it be so. Amen, it's the Hebrew word for that's true. Let it be so.

To the glory of God through us. And I will tell you that these verses, 19 and 20, are at the center of the chiasm, as you would expect. That's the heart.

Then you come to verse 21. Now, he who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God. That corresponds up with verse 18.

God is faithful. Because God is faithful, our word to you was not yes and no. My travel plans may have changed.

I told you I was coming and now I'm not. But our word to you, our preaching of Jesus Christ, isn't unreliable. It's not fickle.

It's not changeable. It is immutable. It is the unchanging, ever true, yea and amen, word of God.

So don't confuse the change in my plans with a change in my message. You see how it corresponds? God is faithful. And in verse 21, he who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God.

He has anointed and he has established. We will see in our summary of this chapter and the first part of the next, that there are these pairs of concept. There is comfort and consolation.

There is simplicity and sincerity. There is confidence and consistency. Was he making the plan lightly? He just said it, tossed off a letter and then changed his mind? No, he is working according to the plan and purpose of God who establishes and anoints his apostleship and establishes and anoints his itinerary.

So if you want to label these with the alphabet, the center there, the son of God, Jesus Christ, all of the promises of God in him being yes, that is F, that's Foxtrot. That is the heart of the chiasm. Above that, God is faithful and our word to you is faithful.

It's not yes and no. Our word to you is faithful. That was point E and you find down in verse 21, he who establishes with you in Christ and has anointed with us is God.

Did I plan according to the flesh up in verse 17? No, we are sealed and given the Holy Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. Verse 22 corresponds as point D with verse 17, D and D prime, right? It's not the flesh, it's the spirit. Then in verse 23, I call God as a witness against my soul that to spare you, I came no more to Corinth.

That is not a light plan. That was a very serious reason. The plan wasn't made lightly and discarded lightly.

It was made to bring a benefit and a comfort and it was abandoned for a very serious reason. I did not want to come and bring sorrow. So that's your C. We don't have dominion over your faith in verse 24.

We're fellow workers for your joy, your benefit. That was point B up above in verse 15, that you might have a second benefit. We are fellow workers for your benefit and by faith you stand.

So you don't have to get too entangled in the symmetry. The more you look at it, the more you will see that if you put Christ at the center, each of these outside brackets correspond. It's not the flesh, but it's the spirit.

It's not for sorrow, but it is for joy. Our plan may have changed, but our message has not changed. The Lord Jesus Christ is faithful.

That's something for us to remember as we travel through our ever-changing, ever-varying

circumstances. We're surprised, we're brought up short, we suffer and look to the God of all comfort to comfort us in that affliction. And we look for ways to comfort others when they experience affliction.

All of that is contained in this chapter. And it prepares us for what's coming up now in chapter two, which is going to go back to that section of verses 13 and 14 in chapter one. Paul is going to return now to the idea of what is he writing and why is he writing it? And that's what we'll see when we come back from the break.