

Dr. Ayo Adewuya, 2 Corinthians, Session 2, 2 Corinthians 1, Greetings, Prayer, Thanksgiving, and Travel Plans

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This is Dr. Ayo Adewuya in his teaching on 2nd Corinthians. This is session 2, 2 Corinthians 1, Greeting, Prayer, Thanksgiving, and Travel Plans.

We want to begin looking at 2 Corinthians.

We will be dealing with the text. You see, many times in life, we become entangled in a relationship of misunderstanding and distrust, in which there is no easy way out. We impugn motives, and we refuse to give those with whom we had disagreements the benefit of the doubt.

The atmosphere is permeated with distrust and suspicion. It could be in our families, at work, or at church. This is the situation that Paul finds himself in as he wrote 2 Corinthians.

What could Paul do to rectify the situation? How does he make it right? He had only one choice and the one choice was to explain himself to the Corinthians as best as he could and appeal to them for understanding and for love. So, we want to begin to look at 2nd Corinthians. We're going to read chapter 1. We start with chapter 1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God and Timothy, our brother, to the church which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the hall of Achaia, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let me stop there as we read those two verses. It's always good to know who wrote a letter. You see, the opening of the letter is very short, and it's to the point.

As is customary with Paul and with his letters, the introduction always gives a hint of the issues that Paul will later address in his letter. So, any time you pick the letter of Paul, and you want to read Ephesians or Galatians, 1 Corinthians or Romans, take time to read the introduction and think about it. As you leave the introduction and go to the body of the letter, you'll find out that there are hints and issues that Paul has already hinted at.

These issues will later be addressed in detail. One of the problems between Paul and the Corinthians is that his apostleship has come under question by some in Corinth. So, he begins by stating that he was not an apostle by the decision or desire of an apostle.

Now, listen. It's very important because he calls himself Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother. Now, let me make a few points before I explain.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. You see, we have a proverb back in Africa saying that you should never be afraid of the person to whom you are sent. Only be afraid of the person who sent you because your allegiance is to the person who sent you.

And therefore, you don't have to worry about the person to whom you are sent. You know what? Because, as we say in the West, the person who sent you has got your back. In other words, he's behind you.

I remember as a young man, I mean, as a very young boy, you know, young boys, your parents send you somewhere you don't want to go. You shake your head, and you either shake your head or you put your head backward. And I will do that.

I'm going to say, OK, I'm sending you. Come back here. You meet me here.

Or then you are afraid to go. And Dad will say, don't worry, I am sending you. I'm responsible.

And it is very important to know who sent you. It's always very good. If I may talk quickly, you remember the story of Moses in the wilderness.

He had problems with the children of Israel, and sometimes they were about to stone him. What does Moses do? Moses goes back to God, lying down on his face, and says, God, I didn't want this thing. You called me to this.

And God says, OK, I called you. It's always good to be able to go back because ministry is not a child's play. Ministry is difficult.

Ministry is hard. Ministry is filled with hazards. And you need to be able to go back to God and say, God, you sent me.

And God will say, yes, I sent you. But if you sent yourself, that's another thing. He said, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, that is, through the means God initiated my apostleship.

In other words, God called me. He was not elected into that office. It was not by selection.

I know denominations today that you become an apostle by promotion. You become a pastor, and then eventually, at some point, you become an apostle. Your paycheck increases and all that.

And then you become an administrator. Paul says, no, no, no. I was not voted into the office.

I was not an apostle by election. I was not an apostle by promotion. I was not an apostle by means of denominational rule or polity.

I'm an apostle by the will of God. In other words, he was not an intruder into the Corinthian church. Basically, he was the founder of the Corinthian church.

He came into the church as an apostle of Jesus Christ. This means that it is by divine appointment and not by human accreditation. If the Corinthians held him in low regard, he did not diminish his standing as an apostle before God.

And you know the implication of this. If the Corinthians were questioning Paul's apostolic authority, they were basically digging at the foundation of their own Christian existence because he led them to Christ. And if he led them to Christ, and they are now questioning the apostolic authority of Paul, they are questioning the very foundation on which their own Christian life is built.

And that's not a wise thing to do. Because if Paul was false, it means their belief is false. If Paul was wrong, it means their faith is wrong because he was the one.

And Paul says, I am an apostle, not by the will of man, but by the will of God. And here, you see, the whole book is about Paul's integrity as an apostle, which makes that statement a very important statement. Because the book talks about his integrity.

He was not voted into office. He was not made an apostle by jockeying for position. He was not an apostle by political maneuvers.

He did not choose this as a career. Not at all. He had an unforgettable encounter with God, who placed him there.

And that encounter is necessary for every minister who is called into ministry. Now, you don't have to go to Damascus Road anymore, but you can experience that encounter with God. He did not choose it as a career.

He had an unforgettable encounter that placed him there. As God's apostles, God is the ultimate judge of all that Paul does. He recognizes that God is the ultimate judge.

And now, here we go, he says to the saints, to the church of God that is in Corinth, including all the saints throughout Achaia. Now, before I go to that, isn't it interesting that Paul puts the name of Timothy there? Of course, it drops off at some point. We don't hear that anymore, but at least he puts his name there.

Now, why is that important? Paul was not afraid of whether Timothy would backslide or not, and therefore, the letter would become useless. I remember several years ago of a minister who wrote a book with somebody else, but after that, did not co-author any book with any other person again, and they say, what if that person backslides? Now, why should you assume the worst of somebody else? What if you yourself backslide? So, then, what happens to your writings? But Paul didn't have such a mind. He was able to put Timothy in his name.

May I talk about this a little bit? Even Paul shows us the importance of collaboration. Paul was not after who takes the credit. You know, in scholarship today, that doesn't happen quite a lot.

Does one person want to be known by everybody? No. This is very important. It's a teamwork.

Paul values the work as a team member. His work as a team member. So, he mentions Timothy.

Then, he calls the Corinthians saints. Wow. You ask yourself, saints in Corinth? What an unlikely place to find saints.

You see, we use the word saints today in various ways. You find saints here and there. We call them in the Philippines, Reboltos.

These idols, these little saints. And, of course, in a particular denomination, they have saints for everything. They have the saints for smoking.

They have the saints for stealing. They have the saints for adultery. That's not the saint we are talking about.

In another place, they have saints. Did you become a saint after you died? No, no, no, no. Paul says these are living saints.

He calls them saints. We use the word saints today. We feel that it appears to some super spiritual people.

Instead of those who are set apart by the relationship of trust in Christ Jesus. Who, then, is a saint? And what does it mean to be a saint? You see, number one, the word saint or saints, *hoi agioi* in Greek, is plural. And listen to me very carefully.

Paul does not use this word in the singular. He uses it in the plural. The mention of agioi in the New Testament is always plural.

Hoi agioi. That is saints together as a people. That tells us something.

It refers to all believers in Christ rather than a select few. You see that in Romans chapter 1, verse 7. It's there in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 2. In 2 Corinthians chapter 2, verse 1. In Ephesians chapter 1, verse 1. Philippians chapter 1, verse 1. And, Colossians chapter 1 verse 2. He calls them saints. Why are we called saints, then? We're called saints because of our relationship with Christ.

In the same way, Israel was called a holy people of God. Now, think about it for a while. Holy people of God, you know how they fought at Meribah.

They grumbled all the time. They complained any time. Every time there's no water to drink, they complain.

There's no food to eat, they complain. And then they complained about manna. They said the food of angels was not satisfied.

I mean, you talk about the children of Israel called holy people. Then you ask yourself, what does holiness mean at that point? I will be looking at it in different ways. That is holiness in the sense of belongingness.

They belong to God. By virtue of their relationship with God, by virtue of their being separated, they are called saints, holy ones. Believers are called saints because of our relationship with Christ.

As such, sainthood is not a status to be conferred on individuals due to some special work after death. You don't become a saint after death because of some special work you've done. And then, the word saint, although primarily denoting relationships, implies the ethical manner of life that is expected of those who are so designated.

In other words, if God has called us to be saints, then we need to live our lives in such a way. If you remember the story of David Ben-Gurion, the first Israeli Prime Minister, he was talking to somebody, and he asked the person, he said, are there Christians? He said I've read the Bible. Are there people who believe this? And the preacher told him, yes, I do.

He asked if there were more people like him. Where are they? I can't see them. Or you remember the story of Mahatma Gandhi, who was talking to a missionary and he said, and the person said, do you believe, I mean, do you believe these scriptures? And the preacher was telling Mahatma Gandhi, he said, why do you like someone or

a man so much and you don't like Christianity? And Mahatma Gandhi said, here's the problem. I like your Christ.

It's the Christians that I don't like because there's so much, unlike Christ. I like your Christ, but I don't like the Christians because there's so much unlike Christ. In other words, in a profession, there's a gap between, there's a credibility gap between beliefs and behavior.

And Paul calls them that you are saints, and as a saint of God, we are to reflect the love of God, we are to reflect the life of God, we are to mirror God's holiness in our lives. I remember the song we used to sing, let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me. All is wonderful passion and purity, all thou spirit divine, all my nature refined, till the beauty of Jesus is seen in me.

I want to be a saint for God. The word saint implies the ethical manner of life that is expected of those who are so-called. So, he said with all the saints who are in all Achaia, which shows that Paul intended his letters to be spread among churches.

This was not just for Christians in the city of Corinth but for all Christians in the region who might read the letter. The greeting that followed the addresses is Paul's normal greeting. He wishes his readers grace and peace.

You know, sometimes you wonder how do we greet each other today. Our greetings are meaningless. Hi there, hi there. What is the meaning of hi? Well, it is hi, I don't know what it means.

Hi is just, it's either hi stay there or hi don't come here. But Paul greets it with grace and peace. That is very much theological.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace is by which we are forgiven, and peace is the result of our reconciliation with God. Right there, Paul talks about the relationship between God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

You can read that as grace and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Both the Father and Son are the source of grace and peace, and they are given to believers. And then he goes on beginning to write to them.

Reading from verse 3 now, he said, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation who consoles us in all affliction so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction and with the consolation with which ourselves are being consoled by God. Just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so is our consolation through Christ. 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. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation. 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. 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. He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us.

We have set our hope on him that he will rescue us again. You also join in helping us through our prayers so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted to us through the prayers of many. Now, Paul begins to write, and he begins by talking to them about the afflictions he went through.

The first thing you will notice is this. Paul departs from his normal way of thanksgiving and prayer. Normally, in his letters, Paul will give thanks to God for the believers.

That's what he does. But he reverses that in 2 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 3. He gives, he says, blessed be God. Paul opens the letter by praising God, who has shown so much mercy and comfort to him.

This particular passage has a lot; you see so many things that Paul has to say about suffering in this particular book and in this particular section. Paul talks about the consolation or comfort in the passage. I mean, the idea behind this word is always more than soothing sympathy.

It has the idea of strengthening, of helping, of making strong. So, Paul praises God for divine encouragement in the midst of suffering. And that's very, very important to look at because when Paul talks about suffering, he says that suffering is for the sake of believers, which is very important.

Look at it again. So that we may be able to comfort those who are in affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. And Paul begins to talk about his afflictions.

And this is very important because you find so many words that Paul uses for suffering in 2 Corinthians. He uses the word Paschal, and he uses the word eclipses. It is interesting that when you look at the language of Paul, at least 29 occurrences of different words that are used for suffering.

And the interesting thing is that if I'm not mistaken, there are 58 of paraclases and comfort. So, for every occasion, for every mention of suffering, there's twice comfort. For every mention of difficulty, affliction, and trial, there's a double comfort.

That should be an encouragement to us. And Paul says here about the suffering that he suffered for the people. Look at it in verse 5. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, when he talks about the sufferings of Christ, that is the suffering he had for Christ.

As the suffering of Christ abandons us, so is our consolation through Christ. And then he makes a statement. If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation.

And I want you to stop there for a while. If you have been afflicted, if we have been afflicted, it is for your consolation. You know what happens here? Paul sees himself as a sacrifice.

Later on, he's going to talk about the aroma of suffering. He talks about the aroma of suffering, I mean, in chapter 2. He talks about that. Look at chapter 2. Let's look at chapter 2, verse 14.

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere, for we are the aroma. That's very, very important.

He talks about osmen in Greek, or osmen eudes. Let me take you back to Genesis. You see the first mention of that phrase, osmen eudes, in the offerings of Noah.

After the flood, Noah offered a sacrifice that was pleasing to God. It was osmen eudes, a sacrifice that is acceptable to God. Then, you go to Leviticus and begin to look at the offerings that were offered to God.

And the same language in the Septuagint is osmen eudes, a sacrifice, sacrificial offering. So, Paul understood his life as sacrificial. It's suffering, it's sacrificial, it's suffering in a sense.

Now listen, hear me right. Paul sees his suffering as redemptive in a way. When I say redemptive in a way, I'm not trying to put the Christ on the same level with the suffering of Paul.

That's not what we're saying. But Paul says that I'm not just suffering as somebody who is a criminal. I'm suffering for the purpose of getting some people to know Christ.

And so, in that sense, his suffering has value. It's redemptive, it's sacrificial, it's missiological. It's not suffering because it was just a truant or because he wanted to be obnoxious.

That's not the point, not at all. He said I suffered for your sake. If we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation.

Can you see that? It is for your consolation and salvation. He said we are comforted. Paul praises God for divine encouragement in the midst of suffering.

Suffering is a necessary part of the Christian life. And it helps us see how God meets our everyday needs. We are comforted so that we may be empowered to comfort others.

Now, let's come back to it again. It's for the people. It is communal.

God's comfort can be given and received through others. This is what Paul is trying to tell the people. A commentator, Adam Clark, puts it this way.

Evil spiritual comforts are not given to us for our use alone. They are like the gifts of God. They are given the opportunity to be distributed or become instruments of help to others.

When we suffer, we suffer for others. And when we are comforted, we are comforted not just to keep the comfort for ourselves but to bless others. In other words, a minister's trials and comforts are permitted and sent for the benefit of the church, not just for your personal benefit.

Somebody who is very close to me always makes the statement that if God allows it, he will use it. If God allows it, he will use it. If God allows you to suffer, he will use it.

He has a reason for it. You see, pride always keeps us from revealing our needs to others. So, we never receive comfort from others.

I mean, many ministers will want to appear, well, no, you got it all right. Ministers don't have problems. Everything is okay.

Everything is grand and dandy. It's a facade. It's not true.

But the suffering and comfort from others can be a blessing to you. What a miserable preacher must be, he or she who has all divinity by study and learning and nothing by experience. That's a miserable preacher.

You have everything by study but nothing by experience. You know, many people are writing books on evangelism, yet they can't lead a soul to Christ. Many people are reading about marriage, and you are never married.

I mean, the story is very good. So, how do you know something you've never gone through? The same thing in ministry. When we suffer, God allows us to use our suffering for others and for their comfort.

Because Paul's sufferings were the sufferings of Christ, Jesus was not distant from Paul. In his sufferings, Jesus was always near. You know, that's why when you look at the prison epistles, he will always call himself Paul, a prisoner of Christ.

Yeah, was it Christ who threw him into prison? Paul would say, well, yeah, ultimately Allah did. It's the political leaders who threw him in prison. It's the religious leaders who instigated people, and they put him in prison.

But he saw beyond the means, and he saw the ultimate thing: God. I am in prison because I'm doing the will of God, and God allows it. That's why you see that Paul could sing in the night when you hear about Paul and Silas singing at night.

Come on, revival in prison? Yes, because they knew they were there by the will of God. He was right there. He knew that Christ was right there, identifying with him, comforting him.

In other words, God had a larger purpose in Paul's suffering than walking on Paul himself. God was bringing consolation and salvation to others through Paul's sufferings. You know what? Paul's life is not focused on himself but on the Lord, on those whom the Lord has given him to serve as well.

When Paul suffers, it is so that God can do something good in the life of the Corinthian Christians. His comfort is supposed to be a means of blessing and encouragement to them. Suffering or comforted, it was not all about Paul.

It was all about others, not about Paul. You know, our children's Sunday school would sing, J-O-Y, J-O-Y, this is what it means, Jesus first, yourself last, others in between. So, if you want to have joy, it has to be Jesus first, yourself last, others in between.

But you know why many Christians don't have joy? Because they reverse the order. It is Y-O-J, or Y-J-O, which I can't pronounce. I don't know what that means, and if I don't, it means you don't, and probably that's why many believers don't have joy. It is not just about us, and it's about others.

Suffering or comforted, it was not all about Paul; it was all about others. Significantly, you know, Paul says the same sufferings. It is unlikely that the Corinthian Christians were suffering in exactly the same way Paul did.

I mean, see what he says. He said the same suffering, but they are not likely suffering in the same way. Probably not one of them could match the sufferings of Paul in 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verses 23 to 28, yet Paul can say that they are the same sufferings.

You see, you don't have to say, well, you are suffering; we don't begin to weigh our sufferings. I'm suffering more than you; you are suffering more than I am. God knows your load limit; He knows my load limit and therefore doesn't allow me to carry more than I can carry, and He doesn't allow you to carry more than you can carry.

So, we don't have to begin to compare our sufferings with one another and say, well, my suffering is big, your suffering is bigger, one is biggest. No, it's the same afflictions. He said you suffer the same afflictions.

You know, Paul did not minimize their suffering. Preachers today will say, well, is that why you are discouraged? That's a small thing. Paul could simply have said, that's a small thing that shouldn't bother you.

Is that why you want to quit? Is that why you want to give up? Paul doesn't say that. Paul says, yeah, you are not going through the same thing I'm going through, but your affliction is as important to God as mine is important to God. Your experience is as valid before God as my experience is valid; even though the experiences of suffering we are having are not the same thing when we compare them, they are important to God all the same.

So, as ministers, we need to be careful about the way we minimize people's hardships. I don't say, well, it means they're not mature. No, no, no, no.

It's not that. We learn from Paul. You know, I told you in the introduction that if you want to look at a pastoral epistle, this is the book to go to.

So, if you want, you won't want to know how to counsel. You come to 2 Corinthians and see the way Paul did it. Paul can say they're the same suffering. He recognizes that the exact circumstances of suffering are not as important as what God is doing and what God wants to do through the suffering.

There is a sense in which we all share the same sufferings. You see, the New Testament idea of suffering is very broad and is not limited just to one kind of trouble, that is, persecution. In verses 8 to 11, let's read it again.

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. You see the mark of good leadership. Here is the vulnerability.

Paul made himself vulnerable to his audience and said, look, we went through this. This is what we went through, and we wanted to know. He said we even despaired of life itself, which means that if it is possible, we would have died.

Now, some people will talk about Paul is not talking; they will talk about clinical depression. Paul is not talking about clinical depression here. Paul is not talking. Oh, we are so depressed.

This is not talking about depression because Christ was close. But he said it's much that we felt it is better for us to even die. That's Paul.

Listen to me. This is apostle par excellence. He said we even despaired of life because it was becoming unbearable.

We were unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. That's what he said. So sometimes we go through this in life, and the enemy whispers, well, maybe you are not a Christian anymore.

That's not true. It's not the devil who decides that I'm a Christian or not. I know that I am.

You have to know that when you are going through suffering, and the enemy is something to you, you know how to answer him back. He said we despaired of life. We were so utterly, unbearably crushed.

He said, indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we will rely not on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He will rescue us from so deadly and will continue to rescue us. So, what does he do? In verses 8 to 11, Paul goes on to mention without detail the afflictions that he and his companions experienced.

Listen. Paul made no parade of his trials. No.

The Corinthians were aware of the trials he spoke of, and he did not have to go into details to make himself popular. Sometimes, when we give testimonies, we can do it in such a way that the focus becomes on us and not on God the deliverer. Paul is not going to do that.

Paul says, you know. You are aware of the trial. He felt he had a sentence of death, a death sentence on himself, but he sees deliverance, and he uses a language of resurrection for his deliverance.

Paul is saying that God snatched us. God snatched us. You are aware of the trial, and God snatched us.

I mean, he delivered us. He snatched us from the jaws of death. Only divine intervention could rescue him.

Look. Suffering is not incidental or accidental in the Christian life. Now, we don't know the exact nature of Paul's trouble.

It was probably either some type of persecution or physical affliction that made his work hard as a missionary. At least five suggestions have been given. At least five suggestions.

Number one, 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 32, where Paul says we fought with wild beasts in Ephesus. In the second one, he suffered 39 stripes after being brought before a Jewish court. You know, the maximum punishment you could give to a Jew was 40 stripes.

39, normally, you would stop, but 40, if you give more than 40, is excessive judgment. And Paul said I have gone through that five times. Five times.

He was beaten five times. You know, when I teach 1 Corinthians, or when I teach Paul's letters, I have what I call Paul's resume, and I construct the resume, and I tell, well, do you want to hire this pastor? Then I tell you the resume of Paul. What does he call himself? He calls himself a jailbird.

He calls, what? He said I can't sleep. And then he said, suffering within, suffering without, in danger of this, in danger of that. And I found that my students don't usually want to hire Paul.

I mean, who will hire somebody who is in and out of prison? Who wants to hire somebody who is so nice that they are beating him five times, 39 lashes? That's how great he was. And then somebody who incites riots. In Acts chapter 19, I mean, he was not the one who caused it, but his presence there incites riots.

Do you want to hire that person as your pastor? We don't know exactly what he suffered, but these are suggestions of a particular persecution shortly before he left Troas in Acts chapter 20, verse 19. Others will say that he had a recurring physical malady. The truth is that we don't know.

It may be all of this, it may be one of this, it may be two of this, but at least we knew he suffered. He was tortured and all that. Whatever the problem Paul and his companions encountered, it was bad. He said they were burdened beyond measure, above strength, to the point of despairing even on life.

Because of this problem, Paul had to live with the anticipation of death, which could happen at any time. You know, once in a while, we always ought to live our lives that way. We have to live our lives; let me put it this way: we need to live our lives in light of eternity, and we don't know when that eternity begins.

But we need to live our lives in light of the future. Unlike the way Glover described, he said Christians are people who live for the future. I mean, we live for the future in the sense that we know that we have a better place we're going to. We live for the future and anticipation.

However, look at verse 10. I mean, a person who is going through all this, I want to read verse 10 to you again. He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us, and on him, we've set our hope that he will rescue us again.

You know, you see this past, present, and future. He rescued us, he's rescuing us, and if trouble comes again tomorrow, we trust that he will rescue us. And that looks like the scheme of salvation and Paul.

Generally, Paul talks about how we have been saved, we are being saved, and we shall be saved. So, there are these three aspects of salvation. He said he rescued us, and we trust he will rescue us, and if we have trouble in the future, he will rescue us.

I'm not giving up hope at all. I mean, Paul was somebody who was very hopeful, and his hope was in God. Look, Paul says we trust God.

It is important to note that Paul's confidence in God's deliverance was not only rooted in his personal faith. Now listen to this. It is linked to the intercessory prayers of others.

So, Paul was not an individualist or a pastor do-it-alone. That's why he could tell believers, pray for us, pray for us. You know, most of our preachers today don't say to the members of the congregation, pray for us, and if they say pray for us, it becomes an object of gossip.

They say, well, pray for us. The pastor said we should pray for him. Is he having family trouble? Are his children having problems? Is he running financially bankrupt? He said to pray for us, but Paul, and therefore pastors, never open up to anybody.

They never say pray for us because it becomes an object of gossip, but Paul was ready to be vulnerable and say, this is my problem. Pray for us, and this is what I want you to pray about. He was not a pastor do-it-alone. He never acted as a superman in ministry.

He did not only request for it, but he relied on the prayers of many people. You see, the Corinthian Christians were really helping Paul when they prayed for him. He needed intercessors.

We often think of the great things that God did through Paul, and we rightly admire him as a man of God, but do we think of all the people who prayed for him? Paul credited them with much of his effectiveness in ministry. Now, let's go to verses 12 to 14. Here, Paul begins to defend his integrity.

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 towards you. For we write to you nothing other than what you can read and understand.

I hope you will understand until the end, as you have already understood us in part, that on the day of the Lord Jesus, we are your boast, even as you are our boast. You see, the Corinthian Christians were probably so used to dealing with ministers who were very calculating and manipulative, and they figured out or thought that Paul must be the same way. You know, in 1 Corinthians chapter 16, verse 5, Paul already told them he was coming, but he did not show up.

And he did not show up, so they figured that, well, he must be manipulating them. If he didn't show up, what was the problem? Can we trust him? If this man says he's coming and he doesn't come, then we have a problem with him. But Paul says, no, you are wrong, I am not like that.

They berated him. They berated him because they said he was not coming. He claims he's shameless.

You see, Paul deals with two problems here in verses 12 to 14. General accusations. Number one, he acted shamelessly without integrity.

And that's why you see the answer in verse 12. And then they said he was insincere and that in his letters, he had shown worldly shrewdness because he was evasive by writing one thing and meaning another. Look at it now, verse 13.

For we write to you nothing other than what you can read and also understand. I hope you will understand till the end. Now, listen to me carefully.

Paul's letters are just one end of a telephone conversation. We hear what Paul is saying. We don't hear what the Corinthians are saying.

The only way we can know what the Corinthians are saying is to listen to the answer of Paul. So, listening to Paul's answer, then say, okay, this is what is going on. And this is what you find in verses 12 and 13.

Indeed, this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience. We have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity. You see, in that verse, there's a little textual problem.

Some people take aplotety or some people take hagiotes. I take hagiotes in this place, talk about godliness. In godliness, we've come to you.

We've behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom, but by the grace of God, all towards you, which means that there were two charges against Paul. Number one, general accusation, he acted shamelessly. Number two is letters you can't understand.

He says one thing in the letter, and he does another. And Paul says, no, these were baseless charges that Paul had to answer in the only way possible for him. How could he answer it? By appealing to the testimony of his own conscience and the Corinthians' knowledge of his conduct.

So, he claims that in both church and world, his conduct has been characterized by God giving purity of intention and openness of his correspondence. Is my intention right? And my correspondence with you is very clear. You see, the Corinthians have already received at least three letters from him.

I mean, they have already received three letters, and he's now telling them, you understand, I write nothing to you other than what you can read and understand. So Paul is telling them, he maintains that he and his companions have conducted themselves to the world and especially towards the Christians in holiness, and that's important—and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom, but in the grace of God.

You see, you know what Paul is saying? I don't change colors like a chameleon. What you see is what you get. I'm not a chameleon kind of Christian who would adapt to the moral and spiritual proclivities of the people with whom he associated.

So here, you know, people always say, when you are in Rome, you behave like a Roman. When you are in Rome, be like Romans. Then, when you are somewhere else, no, that's not Paul.

His life was consistent. A life of holiness is a life of consistent integrity, meaning what you say and saying what you mean, and being a person of your word. And Paul says, that's exactly the kind of person I am.

You see that in verses 12 to 14. He said, as you have already understood us in part, that on the day of the Lord Jesus, we are your boast, even as you are our boast. So Paul claims that in both church and world, his conduct had been characterized by God-given purity of intention and openness.

And his life had been governed by the grace of God. Then he asserts that in none of his correspondence did his meaning become apparent only by reading between the lines. When Paul talks, you don't have to read between the lines, trying to figure it out.

You know, many ministers, you have to figure them out. What are they really saying? I'm not sure I'm getting it. If they say come, it's likely to go.

If they say go, if they say go forward, you meet me forward, you better go back because they're going back. So, you want to read between the lines. But Paul says, when it comes to me, you don't have to read between the lines.

Rather, the meaning of his letters, which lay on the surface, could be understood simply by reading. Paul concludes by reminding his converts at Corinth that they had already begun to appreciate his motives and intentions, especially through the recent visit of Titus. He expresses the hope that they will reach the full assurance that he could give them as much cause for pride now as they will give him pride in the day of our Lord Jesus.

Paul then addresses the next problem he faces with the Corinthians, which is the change in travel plans. This is the difficulty. Change in travel plans.

In verses 15 to 17, since I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first so that you might have a double favor. I wanted to come to you first so that you might have a double favor. I mean, the old King James has it as a double blessing.

Now, let me tell you a little story about that double blessing. I was in my THM class several years ago, and my teacher in 2 Corinthians at that point, Colin Cruz, got to that place, and he said, well, the double blessing said, this is where the Wesleyans are wrong. That Paul is not talking about the double blessing of entire sanctification.

And wow, it's like my head exploded because I'm a Wesleyan, I'm a Methodist, and this is one of the verses we have held on to as a double blessing for sanctification as a second walk of grace subsequent to salvation. And it just, it's like somebody just

took, you are climbing a ladder, and somebody just took the ladder from under you, and you fell down and crashed. I was offended, and I'm sure you will be if you are.

I was offended because one of the things I've been holding on to has just been taking off me. But let me tell you what that it did for me. I made up my mind in that class that if God ever helped me to do a PhD, I was going to do it on sanctification.

Just because of that class, just because of that verse, I said, well, because of what was said, and truly the Lord helped me, I got on, I did a PhD, I did it on sanctification, and after I finished and passed, I wrote a letter to Dr. Colin Cruz, and I said, well, you better, you probably don't remember me again. I was your student. This is what you said in this class, and that became the motivation for me to study further on my belief in sanctification, and now I have a PhD.

And he wrote a gracious letter back to me. So that's my story about that verse. So, he was right that Paul is not talking about the double blessing of sanctification here.

Now, that does not destroy, and my sanctification does not rise or fall with Second Corinthians 11:5. At least I know very much better now. But Paul says, I want to come to you again so that my visit to you a second time will bring joy.

That's the double blessing, pure and simple. That's what he's saying. I'm coming to you.

I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia and get back to you from Macedonia. Have you sent me on to Judea? Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make plans according to ordinary human standards, ready to say yes, yes, and no, no, at the same time? Stop there for a while. Paul had planned to visit Corinth twice after he left Ephesus.

Upon his trip to Macedonia and upon his return before going to Judea. You see that in verses 15 and 16. However, for reasons which he later explains, he did not go directly to Corinth.

He explained that later. He did not go directly to Corinth but first went to Macedonia. Guess what happened? His detractors and enemies seized upon that, and they said, he is not to be trusted.

They charged him with fickleness and unreliability. It's interesting. They used a Greek word, *elaphria*.

Elaphria means lightly. He is light. He's fickle.

You see, they accused him of vacillation, a capricious vacillation, levity of character. They said you can't trust this man. His arbitrary changing of travel plans, they urged, was motivated by pure self-interest with no concern for broken promises or for the needs at Corinth.

They said this man does; he just makes promises. A promise is to be made and to be broken. And you know, it's unfortunate these days, people make promises to break them.

And the Corinthians have probably experienced that. So, they criticized Paul as a person who could not decide on a plan or who could not carry through on a plan. They also equated Paul's change in his travel plans with diminishing affection.

They said he doesn't love us. Verse 17: was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to ordinary human standards, ready to say yes and no, no at the same time? But they were wrong. They were wrong in trying to blame Paul.

You see, they were not wrong in being disappointed. I mean, because he told them he was coming. So naturally, they should be disappointed.

That's understandable. But they were wrong because they did not know Paul's heart, and they did not know his circumstances. That's a lesson for us to learn right there.

We should be very slow in impugning motives to what people do. Usually, we impugn motives very well. We come to the conclusion that, well, these people are not responsible.

You see, think about this: if you were a pastor and somebody came to your church and came late. And then the moment the person gets in, you say, those of you who come late to church, you are not serious, you are not committed to God, and you say all that. But you do not know the battle and the struggle that an individual has gone through before coming to church.

That morning, he doesn't want to come. And the devil did all he could to put him back. He dressed up, he sat down, he dressed up, he sat down.

But eventually, I'm going to church. Even though I'm late, I'm going to church. And therefore, he won the victory.

He came to church, but he came late. But here you are as a pastor, as that person comes in, all latecomers and you latecomers, you are not ready to go to heaven. And the devil says, didn't I tell you not to go? Now you came, you came late.

Didn't you just hear now that you are not going to heaven? And then discouragement sets in. We should be very careful when pursuing motives. We need to know all the answers.

We need to know all the details before we reach conclusions. We reach conclusions very fast. I mean, it's like the children of Israel, when you read the book of Joshua, and they have the tribe of God and Reuben, the tribe of Reuben and God, and have the tribe of Manasseh, who went to make an altar, and the children of Israel did not know.

And they were ready to go and fight them and kill them because they felt that they backstabbed them. And when they go, they say, listen, we did not make this altar in order to burn incense to God, but we just made this altar so that when our children ask us, we'll be able to tell them. If they ask us what the connection is between us and you, we'll be able to tell them this is a symbol of what is there that will belong to you.

And God prevented them from killing their brethren. In other words, be very careful before you impugn motives. And the Corinthians did not understand that.

So, they went ahead and blamed Paul. Sure, they were disappointed, and they were right to be disappointed, but they were wrong in trying to blame Paul for the disappointment. They needed to see the heart of Paul and God's hand in the circumstances.

And then you see from verse 18, as surely as God is faithful, I want to you has not been yes and no. Paul says, I want to you. Paul is so distressed by the charge that he is convinced; he tried to, he was convinced of his innocence that he solemnly invokes the unquestionable trustworthiness of God. And this is where integrity comes in.

He defends his reliability by presenting two arguments for his own trustworthiness. And he gave two reasons for changing his plans. His first argument is that his ministry of Christ requires him to be reliable.

He emphatically declares that his word, his change, his statement of plan, and his message were not at the same time yes and no. He supports this declaration by appealing to God's faithfulness. Paul appeals to God's faithfulness.

Who is that person you are so sure of, yes, yourself, that you can link your own integrity to God's integrity? Which is what Paul did. He linked his own personal integrity to God's integrity. I mean, this is very powerful.

And he is so distressed. He said, neither in proclaiming the good news to them nor in telling them of his troubled plans was his language an ambiguous blend of yes and no. He doesn't say yes and no at the same time.

No. He doesn't speak from both sides of the mouth as we say it. Not at all.

His message was yes or no. He knows what he's doing. How could a messenger of a faithful God vacillate between a reassuring yes and a disconcerting no? Or deliver a message that was not an emphatic yes? So Paul begins to elaborate.

He begins to tell them. He appeals to God's faithfulness. It is sad to say that in the world we live in now, we have little value in words.

Politicians easily change. They promised something today and that tomorrow would be gone. They forget.

They retract campaign commitments once they take office. And people swear in court to tell the truth, nothing but the truth, and yet they are lying. Put their hands on the Bible, and you tell the truth, nothing but the truth.

And they say it with a bold face. We can't have that in ministry. Some resort to falsehood for self-preservation.

It seems that for many people, promises are simply made to be broken, but not for Paul. It is difficult to know whom we can trust, but God's promises reveal his character. God's promises reveal his character.

God carries out every commitment he makes. The son of God whom Paul and his associates preached among the Corinthians, who these believers received, was not yes and no at the same time, but an emphatic yes. You know, we try to quote that passage as a promise.

God's word is yes and amen. Well, look at it in context. In context, Paul is not just talking about his own integrity linked with God's integrity; he's talking about his own integrity.

His own integrity links to God's faithfulness in fulfilling his promises. And Paul says, your salvation and your consequent, your sequential spiritual experience prove that the affirmative character of Christ and his work was so vivid to the apostle that it permeated his own life and ministry. You know what? Paul was dependable.

Paul could be trusted. His second argument for his reliability is his awareness of God's work in their lives, both the Corinthians and his own. You see that in verses 21

and 22, he calls attention to what God is doing with them now and to what God did at their conversion.

At the present time, God is establishing them. You see that in verse 21, he says, but it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and as anointed us. Paul then describes several things the Holy Spirit does in believers' lives.

Look at verses 21 and 22. But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us by putting a seal on us and giving us a spirit in our hearts as a first installment. The Holy Spirit anoints and empowers believers for Christian living and service.

The Holy Spirit also seals us and is our bond; the stamp, as the word suggests, is a mark of ownership. We belong to him. Moreover, the Holy Spirit becomes a pledge or guarantee of future blessings which lie beyond this life.

You see, Paul's awareness of these divine works caused him to be reliable. Both the reliability of Christ in fulfilling the gospel promise and the faithfulness in God in his operation in the lives of his people fashioned the apostles' character. They also fashion ours.

When we contemplate their significance, Paul completes his argument for his reliability by giving two reasons why he changed his plan. Look at verse 23. By putting a seal on us, I give it up, but I call on God as a witness against me.

It was to spare you that I did not come again to Corinth. Now he tells them the reason. If you knew the reason why I did not come, you should have been thanking God.

It was for your sake. It was for your good. Because if I came, things probably would not be the way they are.

You wouldn't have enjoyed it. I mean, putting it literally. He said I call on God as a witness against me.

For it was to spare you that I did not come again to Corinth. You see his love for them. He loved them.

He cared for them. They were still his children in the faith, and he felt responsible for them. His first reason for changing his plan is that he might spare them discipline, apostolic discipline.

He might spare them the road. He wanted to give them an opportunity to work out the problem among themselves rather than give them death sorrow. He confirms his statement with an oath.

For he had no way of proving his motivation at all. He explains that he took this course of action because neither he nor his associates are lords over the Corinthians faith. Isn't that interesting? Unfortunately, today, particularly in the majority world, preachers and ministers behave as if they are lords over the faith of their members.

In the majority world, their world is almost equivalent to God, who is like, sir, I can't do this now. I want to pray. And the minister will say, well, I have prayed, and I know.

You don't have to pray. You just go. No, Paul said, no, no, no.

I'm not lording it over your faith. I mean, it's sad. Like many ministers, I mean, they play God.

And Paul says I'm not going to play God. Rather, we are promoters of your joy. This means that their ministry is basically to promote the Corinthians spiritual well-being.

This means that they love them and their well-being by directing their faith to Christ and to his word. Paul, though an apostle, did not want to dominate their faith. Such right belongs to God alone.

You see, pastors and Christian workers must be aware of the temptation to usurp that right. It belongs to God. It doesn't belong to us.

And as we look at this chapter, it's very, very important to understand. I mean, as a summary, we begin by saying we are called to be saints. And we need to live up to our exalted calling, particularly in the morally polluted environment with which we are surrounded today.

We need to remember that we are living saints. We are called holy people of God because we belong to him and our lives need to reflect God who has called us. Then, we need to think about when we want to make decisions.

Paul tells us, I make decisions under God. When we're in positions of leadership, we need to bear in mind that our decisions affect others in one way or the other. And because our decisions affect others, we need to make sure that we make decisions under God.

We've also learned that integrity is not negotiable in the life of a Christian worker. And a lack of integrity will affect the ministry; whether we know it or not, it will affect us. Then we learned something about Paul in the time of trial.

He bought it because he knew the purpose. He did not have a victim mentality but rather knew that God was working out his purpose and plan in his life. And then, finally, whether we suffer or we are comforted, it's not just for us; it's for the sake of the body of Christ.

This is Dr. Ayo Adewuya in his teaching on 2nd Corinthians. This is session 2, 2 Corinthians 1, Greeting, Prayer, Thanksgiving, and Travel Plans.