

## 2 Corinthians Ch1v1-2 - God Rules His Church

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[ 0 : 00 ] I was in Corinth. It's on page, if you're reading the Red Church Bible, it's on page 1114. And we'll start on verse 1 of chapter 18.

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome.

Paul went to see them. And because he was a tent maker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, Your blood be on your own heads. I am clear of my responsibility.

[ 1 : 38 ] From now on, I will go to the Gentiles. Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titus, a worshipper of God.

Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believe in the Lord. And many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized. One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision.

Do not be afraid. Keep on speaking. Do not be silent. For I am with you. And no one is going to attack and harm you. Because I have many people in this city.

So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God. And I'm just going to turn over to 2 Corinthians chapter 1 and just read the first two verses.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother. To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia. Grace and peace to you from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 2 : 43 ] Thank you, Johnny. Thank you, Jonathan.

It's good to be with you again this morning. And it's good to be able to share God's word with you. Please have your Bibles open on those last couple of verses in 2 Corinthians.

I know I said to Jonathan it would be Acts. It's actually 2 Corinthians verses 1 and 2. Don't get too excited, you think.

Two verses. He hasn't much to say. Well, there's lots here for us. To draw your attention to another book, if you haven't got a Bible, please help yourself just around the corner there.

There's plenty of Bibles. It will help you as we go along and study God's word together. Another little booklet, not on the same authority as Scripture, but nonetheless, it will help you.

[ 3 : 47 ] 2 Corinthians is just an introduction to some of the big themes that we will be coming across. And it will help you in your understanding of the letter. So pick up your copy of that as well.

Thank you, Jonathan. Oh. Place has fallen down. Thank you very much. Let me get a drink.

Let's pray together. Father, we are privileged to have your word.

written down for us so that we can learn about you and your son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that these words written on the page would be transformative in our lives.

changing us, changing us, humbling us, and helping us to see Christ. Please pour out your blessing upon us as we gather today and as we study this letter of 2 Corinthians over the coming weeks.

[ 5 : 14 ] May it be truly good for us. May it be truly good for us to hear your word. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Well, we need someone who is more successful and influential. A crowd puller.

A big named speaker. We need someone who is more dynamic. Well, that seems to be the word on the street in Corinth.

The Apostle Paul, as we've just read from Acts, had brought the good news of Jesus Christ to the city. And it records for us there that many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.

However, despite the early growth, not all is well in the local church. So-called super apostles have arrived and they're questioning Paul's ministry and his credentials.

[ 6 : 28 ] Have a look with me in 2 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 1. Paul writes to the church and he says, Are we beginning to commend ourselves again?

Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? It seems there were complaints that Paul's ministry CV was not up to scratch.

He hadn't been to the right college. He wasn't mixing with the right people. Or have a look at chapter 10 and verse 10. Paul writes about what people are saying about him.

Chapter 10, verse 10. For some say his letters are weighty and forceful. But in person, he's unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.

That Paul, I wouldn't cross the road to hear him. But despite all the criticism, Paul pushes back chapter 11, verse 5.

[ 7 : 47 ] I do not think I am in the least inferior to those super apostles. In fact, the one thing Paul has that they don't have is weakness.

Look at chapter 11, verse 24. If you want a CV, if you want credentials, well then here it is, verse 24.

Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was pelted with stones.

Three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I've been constantly on the move and have faced many dangers.

Verse 27. I have laboured and toiled. I have often gone without sleep. I've known hunger and thirst. And often gone without food.

[ 8 : 50 ] I've been cold and naked. And besides everything else, I face the daily pressures of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak?

And I do not feel weak. Who is led into sin? And I do not inwardly burn. If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

It's not greatness that Paul has, but weakness. And in a culture that prized success and encouraged the influential, Paul, it appeared, was a complete failure.

He was neither an attractive personality or an impressive speaker. The church wanted someone who was powerful and dynamic, not weak and fragile.

Well, isn't that how often we can think? If only we had a better preacher.

[ 10 : 04 ] Someone just like... Someone who's influential. Funny. Draws a crowd.

If only we had better programs. Something more creative and successful. If only we had a better building. An impressive place that we would be proud of.

A place to invite. Who wants to be in a small church with weak people? But as Paul begins his letter, he reminds us that it's not about individual greatness.

It's all about God. God is the one who rules his church. So, let's go to the beginning of the letter, 2 Corinthians chapter 1.

And we're going to see that the church begins with God. The church belongs to God. And the church is blessed by God.

[ 11 : 21 ] So, first of all, the church begins with God. Despite what other people have been saying about Paul, he wants to make it clear from the very beginning.

Verse 1. Paul, I'm an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. And Timothy, our brother.

He's wanting to show them that the church exists not because of anyone's greatness, but because of God's will.

Now, to help us see this, I want us to turn back to Acts chapter 22. Go to Acts chapter 22. Here we have a record, an account, of when Paul became a Christian.

He was formerly known as Saul, and his job was to gather all the Christians, put them in prison, and even kill them.

[ 12 : 32 ] And as he was on his way to Damascus, you know the story, the risen Lord Jesus appeared to him with a shining bright light.

He fell off his horse. He was confronted by Jesus and he went blind. And here in Acts 22, he retells his story.

So I want us to read this thinking about how the church started. Let's pick it up in verse 11. My companions led me by the hand into Damascus because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there.

He stood beside me and said, Brother Saul, receive your sight. And at that very moment, I was able to see.

[ 13 : 39 ] Then he said, The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the righteous one, that's Jesus, and to hear words from his mouth.

You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized, wash your sins away, calling on his name.

Verse 21. Then the Lord said to me, Go, I will send you far away to the Gentiles.

So from these few verses, I want us to see three things. First, that Paul was saved and sent by God. He was converted as he was confronted by the risen Lord Jesus.

And he was commissioned, Go, Paul, I want you to go to where people have not heard about Jesus. So he was, sent by God and saved by God.

[ 14 : 56 ] second, he was sent with the authority of God. Look at verse 14. The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will.

So if you were to ask Paul, Paul, by what authority do you have to do what you do? His answer was very simple. I'm sent with the authority of God.

He chose me and I have obeyed and gone. So he was saved and sent with the authority of God to preach, thirdly, the good news about Jesus.

His sending and choosing was for a purpose. Let's read verse 14 and 15 again. The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the righteous one and to hear words from his mouth and you will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard.

So as Paul went, he only spoke the words about Jesus that God had spoken to him. So when Paul arrived in Corinth, he came with the authority of God and he came with a message from God about Jesus Christ that he is God's saving king and we must believe in him for the forgiveness of our sins.

[ 16 : 36 ] Let's go back to 2nd Corinthians. Now in reading that we might think, isn't Paul amazing? Isn't he great? He went and he planted a church in Corinth. Well at one level he did and he is great but in another reality it was all of God.

Do you see that verse 1 and this is what he recounts? Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.

Paul didn't save himself, he didn't send himself and he didn't speak his own words. It was all by the will of God.

God had planned and purposed all the events. God had saved him and God sent him and God gave him the words that he was to speak.

[ 17 : 38 ] You see it's God who started his church and it's God who has started this church. God had planned and purposed before time began all the events to bring Carigoline Baptist Church into existence.

People who brought the same message that Paul had heard and he passed down to others through the centuries that we now have written down for us people have heard and believed and have been baptized and are now part of this local church.

As Paul said in his first letter I planted the seed I brought the good news of Jesus Apollos watered he began to teach others but God made it grow so neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything but only God who makes things grow.

So God is the one who begins the church. Second the church belongs to God.

Again we're going to look at three things all from the second part of verse one. Let's read the second part of verse one. To the church of God in Corinth together with all his holy people throughout Achaia.

[ 19 : 25 ] Three things to note. First we belong to God. Do you see it there in verse one? To the church of God. You see if we've heard the good news about Jesus if we've trusted in him we become part of God's church.

We become his special people. We belong to him. And that's really important for us to note because it means that when we belong to God we belong to him forever.

eternally. Just have a look over at chapter one verse twenty one. We're reminded of how we belong to God forever.

Now it is God who makes both of us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us and set his seal of ownership on us and put his spirit in our hearts as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come.

It's God who makes you stand firm. It's God who puts his seal of ownership of belonging upon us. So we're his forever.

[ 20 : 46 ] We belong to him for eternity. But it also means that we belong to each other. Do you see there a very simple phrase to the church of God in Corinth.

So it is for us we are the church of God in Carigoline. You see our belonging to God and our relationship with God is always expressed in our belonging to a local church.

None of us can ever say I belong to God but I don't belong to a church. church. The Bible doesn't think of it like that ever.

The two are always together and never ever separated to the church of God in Carigoline. And the way we show our belonging to each other is through baptism and membership.

It's saying I'm committed to God. Yes I belong to God but I also belong to you. I'm committed to God and I'm committed to you.

[ 22 : 02 ] We belong to his people. And third Jonathan picked up on this in his introduction we belong to the worldwide church.

Look at scripture to the church of God in Corinth together with all his holy people throughout Achaia. God has his people all over the world.

Just a couple of weeks ago I and some others here from the church went to a Christian festival called Kinfire. Recommend that you go next year.

And gathered together were over 700 people from different churches from all over the island of Ireland. together we came and we celebrated that we belong to God.

But of all those people there with such a crowd it's only a drop a sprinkle in the bucket of the millions of Christians who love Jesus and who are gathering today all around the world and they're belonging to God and to one another.

[ 23 : 15 ] You see the church is much bigger than just me. It's much bigger than just belonging to God it's belonging to one another and to the church worldwide and as we reflect on our belonging we see that we belong not just to God but we belong to his work and all that he is doing among us.

God is building his church both locally and globally through all those who belong to him.

Paul reminds us of the kind of people that he uses to do his work those who belong to him. It's not through our greatness but it's through God's power in his people.

Go back with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 2 1 Corinthians chapter 2 Here's the kind of people that God uses to do his work the people who belong to him.

Let's pick it up chapter 1 verse 26 Brothers and sisters think of what you were when you were called when you became a Christian.

[ 24 : 59 ] Not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many were influential. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.

God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. Now go down to chapter 2 verse 1 and Paul says, so it was with me brothers and sisters.

When I came to you I didn't come with eloquence or human wisdom. It wasn't about my impressive speaking or my wonderful training.

Verse 3 I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, on my cleverness and all my wonderful ideas but on God's power.

Let's go back to 2 Corinthians. You see we belong to God and we belong to God as he does his work through weak people like us.

[ 26 : 27 ] So he begins the church, we belong to the church and third the church is blessed by God because this is God's church he will ensure that everything we need is provided for so that we're not lacking anything.

Have a look at verse 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Two things that God gives to his church today two blessings that we can count on. First the gift of grace.

Grace in the Bible always refers to God's undeserved favour towards people like us. It's God's goodness and his kindness that we don't deserve.

Let me give you two examples of God's wonderful grace to people like us. Go to chapter 8 verse 9 You'll know this chapter 8 verse 9 an example of God's undeserved favour goodness and kindness here it is for you know verse 9 the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich.

[ 28 : 22 ] Christ who had everything the eternal God stepping into this broken world taking on flesh just like you and I but taking on our sin becoming poor taking the blame for all the wrong things that we have done so that we might become rich in all the bountiful goodness and kindness that God would pour out on his people here's another example chapter 12 verse 8 and 9 another example of God's goodness and kindness here Paul is talking about a particular suffering in his life chapter 12 verse 8 three times

I pleaded with the Lord take it away take this suffering out of my life but God said to me my grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness we sang didn't we Christ is enough for me the grace of Christ is sufficient to save us from our sin and to strengthen us in our suffering what a wonderful gift that God gives to his people his church not only is the blessing of grace but there's the blessing of peace and peace in the Bible is not just the absence of conflict and trouble it's about primarily a restored and right relationship with

God and with others so just look over the next chapter chapter 13 verse 11 here we see an example of peace at work God's peace at work in the church he closes his letter by saying finally brothers and sisters rejoice strive for full restoration encourage one another be of one mind live in peace peace and the God of love and peace will be with you you see when we've received the peace of God when we are in right relationship with him we become agents of peace we become a conduit of God's peace to one another he fills us with his peace so that we can live at peace and the

God of peace will be with you he will bless you now these two blessings let's go back to chapter one to the beginning second Corinthians chapter one and verse two these two blessings grace and peace to you come from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ the blessings that the father loves to give to his children the church he delights in blessing us but they are only experienced this grace and peace are only experienced in Christ it's as we trust in him we are united to him and all the blessings that belong to Christ now become ours how rich we become it's like those all you can eat and drink restaurants

I love them you just pay your 25 euro whatever and you fill your plate and your cup again and again no limits well the good news is even better than this Christ has paid the cost he's dealt with our sin and shame and guilt he's dealt with everything and he gives us access to a banquet filled with goodness and kindness with his blessings you see God's blessings are like an overflowing river that will sustain and provide us with all that we need it's a tap that's never turned off and never runs dry it's like a gushing fountain that flows day after day after day grace and peace again and again and again for our every moment and our every need you see the church is not about individual greatness or dynamic speakers or having successful programs or impressive buildings it's not about me it's not about you it's about

[ 34:11 ] God God our father who pours out his blessing on his church through Jesus Christ it's about his people coming to Jesus in all our helplessness and depending entirely on him it's about embracing our weakness and experiencing his strength it's recognizing our desperate need to receive his grace and his peace in abundance you see as we begin a new church year together as we step out into a new term with a new program we need to leave pride at the door you see you and I we didn't start this church we we can't grow this church we can't even plant a church this is this is

God's church it is his work through weak people like us and he calls us in all our frailty and with all our fears and with all our failures he calls us to admit to our worries to come to him to confess our sins and to receive from him his grace and his peace so that we can go into our community with the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ so that people can become rich in Christ and we can go as people of peace and show how they can be at peace with God and peace with one another and peace within their families and no more strife we come to God the God who starts the church who owns his church and who blesses his church we come to

God who rules over his people and we go filled with his grace and peace this is God's church let's praise him and thank him in prayer now Father thank you for showing us in just a few short sentences the wonder of your church thank you that it is yours and it is safe in your hands thank you that we as your gathered people are safe in your hands saved and secure forever coming to you in all our mess and brokenness asking that even now

Father through your son Jesus Christ will you pour out your grace in abundance upon us fill us with your peace and send us into our school and into our college into our neighborhoods and to wherever we are working into this new term and new year send us that we might bring the grace of Christ and be people of peace and showing them how they can be right with God thank you that you will do it because you have promised thank you Lord

Amen we're going to sing oh church arise arise from your seats to your feet if you are able and let us pray one another into this new