

A Study in II Corinthians

Strength in Weakness

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. (2 Corinthians 1:5)

Introduction

Writing and Background

Paul's Visit to Corinth: Paul's first visit to Corinth was on his second missionary journey; he would spend 18 months there (Acts 18:1-11).

Paul at Ephesus: Following Paul's visit to Corinth he travels to Ephesus where he spends three years (Acts 19:8, 19:10, 20:31). It is from Ephesus that Paul writes a uncanonized epistle to those at Corinth regarding fornication (I Cor. 5:9). It was in Paul's second year at Ephesus that he would write I Corinthians. Paul does visit the Corinthians a second time; it would seem he did so some time during his time at Ephesus, possibly during his final year there, for in 2 Corinthians he speaks of desiring to come a third time (2 Cor. 12:14, 13:1-2). Following his time in Ephesus Paul heads into Macedonia and on into Greece (Acts 20:1-2).

Paul in Macedonia: Though not specifically stated, it would stand to reason that Paul wrote 2 Corinthians during his time in Macedonia, for in writing to them he commends the churches of Macedonia for their generosity (2 Cor. 8:1-4).

The Report from Titus: Titus was sent by Paul to Corinth upon their departure from Ephesus. They had agreed to meet back at Troas. However, through mishap or misunderstanding Titus did not show up at Troas to meet him, so Paul continued up into Macedonia (II Cor. 2:12-13). It was not until Paul was in Macedonia (most likely Philippi) that Titus met him and brought a report concerning the state of the church at Corinth (II Cor. 7:6-7). Titus was then sent back to Corinth with the epistle of 2 Corinthians (II Cor. 8:16-18).

Theme of the Epistle: The overall theme of this epistle is that of strength in weakness or suffering: *"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong"* (2 Corinthians 12:10).

It is very evident both from the subject matter of 2 Corinthians and the account surrounding its writing that Paul was under great persecution and stress for the furtherance of the Gospel. The great suffering he endured during his time at Ephesus and into Macedonia, along with the continual care of the churches, was near crippling to Paul.

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. (2 Corinthians 1:5)

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you. (2 Corinthians 4:8-12)

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. (2 Corinthians 4:16)

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: (2 Corinthians 5:1-2)

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? (2 Corinthians 11:23-29)

Outline: Comfort from God in Suffering (1-7)

Collection for the Poor Saints (8-9)

Calling of the Apostle Paul (10-13)