

THE BOOK OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

Introduction:

Statistics:

13 chapters, 257 verses, and 6,092 words

Author:

On the basis 2 Corinthians opens in 1:1 with “Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ.” It is generally accepted that Paul wrote 2 Corinthians. The relationship to 1 Corinthians is obvious. It is apparently the “sorrowful” letter he refers to in 2:4 and 7:8, 12. There are also similar references to adversaries and open doors of opportunity (1:8-10; 2:12-13; 1 Corinthians 16:7-9).

In addition, he refers to the issue of the immoral offender introduced in (1 Corinthians 5:1-8; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; 7:12) and the collection for the saints in Jerusalem (chapters 8-9; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4). Moreover, part of 2 Corinthians is clearly the apostle’s defense against the charge of fickleness due to his change of plans from that announced in (1 Corinthians 1:13-2:4; 1 Corinthians 16:5-6).

Most agree that the contents of the letter are so characteristically Pauline that his authorship cannot be denied, but there are critics who deny the unity of the letter, in spite of no manuscript evidence to support their theories. Tampering with the unity of the epistle has only proved to create more problems than it solves.

Date of Writing:

Assuming that I Corinthians was written in the spring of A.D. 56 from Ephesus, and that there is a close connection to the second epistle, the date and place of 2 Corinthians can easily be established. Enough time elapsed between the writing of the two letters to allow Titus to deliver I Corinthians to Corinth (7:13-15) and meet Paul in Macedonia after a failed attempt to meet him in Troas (2:12-13; 7:5-7).

It appears most likely that: Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia in response to Titus' encouraging report which Paul received from him there (2:13; 7:5-7). Most assume the exact location in Macedonia was Philippi. but Thessalonica has been suggested. The date would then be the late summer or fall of A.D. 56 since only a few months had elapsed from the time of Paul's departure from Ephesus immediately after Pentecost in the late spring (1 Cor. 16:8).

Destination:

The destination of the second epistle was the same as the first (1:1). The Corinthian church had been founded by Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18). Corinth was positioned in Achaia such that its harbors brought abundant trade and wealth to the area

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together with accompanying vice. The wickedness of the city had its corrupting effect on the church there, as seen in the problems addressed in I Corinthians.

Key Verses:

2 Corinthians 1:2; 3:5; 4:4; 5:10, 19-20; 6:14; 8:9; 9:6; 12:9

The Occasion:

The immediate occasion of the letter is tied to the sending and result of I Corinthians. Paul had sent the corrective "sorrowful" letter by Titus to Corinth (2:4; 7:13-15) with arrangements to meet him in Troas with news of the church's response to his instructions (2:12-13; 7:5-7). Paul proceeded to Troas where he found an open door to preach, but the failure of Titus to meet him there caused such concern that he moved on to Macedonia (2:12-13).

In Macedonia Paul met new troubles to add to his inner distress (7:5), but was able to begin the collection for the Jerusalem saints (8:1-7). Finally, Titus arrived in Macedonia with his report from the Corinthian church (7:6). The report assured Paul of an overall favorable response (7:7-16) with some residue of opposition. The good news about the repentance of the Corinthians (2:3-9; 7:6-12) prompted him to write and express his joy. The bad news about those who attacked him for changing his plans (1:15-2:2) and challenged his authority (10:2, 10-12; 11:4,12-13) prompted him to write in defense of his reputation.

The Purpose:

Paul's purpose in 2 Corinthians is three-fold as seen from the occasion for his writing. First, he desires to affirm his love for the Corinthians and renew his relations with them (chapters 1-7). His affection for them is the reason behind his change of plans that brought the charge of fickleness (1:15-2:2). His relationship with them is also dictated by the nature of his New Testament ministry (3:1-6:10).

Second, Paul encourages and arranges for the collection he will carry back to Jerusalem (chapters 8-9). Third, he defends his apostolic authority and message against those who challenge him (chapters 10-13). This defense occupies most of the epistle and is woven into his personal expressions of affection in the early chapters.

Argument:

Most observe that this epistle is the least systematically arranged of Paul's writings. Still the major divisions can be marked off according to his purposes in writing. After the introduction (1:1-2), the first main division is an explanation of Paul's ministry (1:3-7:16) in which Paul affirms his relationship with the Corinthians. explains the nature of the New Testament ministry, and appeals for their affection.

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Paul begins by explaining his relationship with the Corinthian church (1:3-2:17). He declares from the start how much he has suffered for the sake of the churches, especially for the church at Corinth (1:3-11). Certainly, his reference to comfort in (1:3-7) is based on his recent meeting with Titus which greatly encouraged him and resulted in the writing of this letter. The deliverance of God from the "sentence of death" (1:8-11) raises a theme which will recur throughout the epistle, that the theme of the apostle's weakness and God's sufficiency.

In affirming his relationship with the church, Paul declares his sincerity toward them (1:12-2:16a). He affirms his sincerity with a boast of a clear conscience in his treatment of them (1:12-14). He then defends this declaration of sincerity in light of his recent treatment of them (1:15-2:16a).

Evidently, some leaders or false teachers in Corinth had charged him with inconsistency and insincerity when he changed his plans about visiting them (1:15-2:2). Paul explains that he did not take his planned visit lightly, nor was he fickle, but his ministry is directed by the Spirit of God who is consistent with His promises (1:17-22). His reason for the change in plans was that he did not want to make them sorrowful by his visit (1:23-2:2). A visit in the midst of the many uncorrected problems would have been grievous to both parties.

His sincerity is also defended in connection with his previous correspondence (2:3-11). He wrote so that the source of his sorrow might become the source of his joy. Paul is referring to the incestuous man he instructed them about in his previous letter (1 Cor. 5:1-8). It was a "test case" to test their love for him by their willingness to obey and discipline the offender, which they did (2:6-9). Paul declares his forgiveness of the man, thus removing the main barrier that kept him from visiting them (2:10-11).

His sincerity is also exemplified by the account of Titus' report in Macedonia (2:12-16a). He describes his great anxiety before he heard of their response and the joyous relief he experienced after Titus brought the good news of their love and obedience. His thanks to God for this victory in spite of his weakness demonstrates that his sufficiency in ministering to the church is from God (2:16b-17). This leads to the following section on the nature of his ministry.

The digression on the nature of the New Testament ministry (3:1-6:10) is not irrelevant to Paul's defense of his relationship to the Corinthians. It is a spiritual ministry of sincerity and divine sufficiency such that the minister cannot exalt himself, as Paul has probably been charged with doing and others are now trying to do in his absence.

The very commendation of his ministry is spiritual in the hearts of the Corinthians (3:1-3), which should make his own defense and commendation unnecessary. His confidence in the ministry (3:4-18) is directly related to the nature of the New Testament ministry. God is his sufficiency in this ministry; it is not self-confidence, because only the Spirit can give life (3:4-6). His boldness of speech is due to the exceeding glory of this spiritual

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ministry over the ministry of the law (3:7-11). The Spirit can remove the veil from unbelieving hearts, bring liberation from the death of the law, and transform the new believer into the likeness of Christ (3:12-18).

The nature of the New Testament ministry therefore affects how Paul preaches (4:1-12). He does not use deceit and trickery, but handles the Word of God in truth (4:1-2). If men still do not respond, it is not the fault of his preaching, but the “god of this world” blinds men (4:3-4). Only God can bring light out of this satanic darkness, that is why Paul does not promote himself, but Christ (4:5-6).

As a minister, Paul is but a weak and dying vessel, thus the life-giving power of his preaching is from God (4:7-12). The conclusion implied by his argument is that no one should be able to charge Paul with self-interest or the action or process of promoting himself as being powerful or important.

This conclusion also applies to Paul's motivations in the New Testament ministry (4:13-15:19). His first great motivation comes from the assurance of resurrection (4:13-5:11). He endures suffering in the ministry because his focus is on the future glory (4:16-18) with its guarantee of a new body (5:1-8). His resurrection will cause him to appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account for his work (5:9-11). Knowing this motivates Paul to “persuade men” in the gospel ministry. His second important motivation is the love of Christ for men (5:11-19).

The sacrificial love of Christ compels Paul to minister and distinguishes him from those whose boasting is focused on external appearances (5:12-15). His selfless love gives him a new perspective toward men and Christ (5:16-17), and brings a new responsibility to help men be reconciled to God (5:18-19). Therefore, Paul's motivations are pure before God and in harmony with Christ's love for men.

The messengers of the New Testament ministry consequently are obliged as Christ's ambassadors to urge men to be reconciled to God (5:20-6:10). Paul appeals to the Corinthians to appropriate the grace of God and to respond to it accordingly in their conduct, because as he has demonstrated, there is no reason to take offense at his ministry (6:3-10). In every way and in every aspect of his relationship to the Corinthians he has proved himself blameless. Paul wants his ministry record to speak for itself and silence any unfair charges against his sincerity and loyalty to the Corinthian church.

His appeal is more direct in (6:11-7:16) as he urges a mutually affectionate relationship. He pleads for an affirmation of their affection toward him comparable to his (6:11-13). His sudden mention of immoral associations suggests that these are the obstacles in their relationship hindering them from openness toward him (6:14-7:1). Separation from immoral relationships will prove their love of God and their affection for the apostle. Paul's earnestness is seen in his repeated appeal to them for an open heart toward him (7:2-16).

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He declares emphatically his concern for the Corinthians (~~24~~²²⁴) and uses his reaction to Titus' report as evidence (7:5-16). He explains his great anxiety due to uncertainty about their feelings toward him, until Titus reported their affection and repentance which elated him. Paul -found additional encouragement in the joy of Titus resulting from their reaction.

In affirming his affection for the Corinthians, Paul has also defended his reputation against those who had accused him of insincerity and deception. His motives are pure and his love genuine in accordance with the nature of the New Testament ministry of which he is a divinely ordained and empowered minister. Now that the relationship has been repaired, Paul is free to address the business of the collection the saints in Judea.

The grace that has been demonstrated to the Corinthians in their repentance is the basis of Paul's explanation and instruction about the collection (8:1-9:15). In this division, Paul changes subjects in order to explain about the arrangements for the collection and urge the Corinthians to complete their First, he discusses his arrangement for the prepared gift (8:1-24).

His appeal to the Corinthians starts with a report on the generosity of the Macedonians (8:16). The grace of God was evident in them as they gave liberally and willingly from their poverty. Paul desires the Corinthians to give as they are motivated by the same grace of God (8:6), so he exhorts them on the basis of grace (8:7-15). He refuses to command them to give, but prefers to test their love in Christ by giving them opportunity to show their concern for others in finishing the gift they had begun a year earlier.

Paul's discussion of the arrangements for the collection assumes their willing cooperation (8:16-9:5). He endorses the messengers he is sending (8:16-23) and appeals for a loving reception of them (8:24). He explains the reason behind the early sending of the messengers was that the gift might be ready ahead of his arrival and not embarrass him or the Corinthians, since he had boasted confidently of their willingness a year ago to the Macedonians (9:1-5). Also, he argues, advance preparation will allow them to give out of generosity and not by compulsion to save face (9:5).

Paul expands this theme of generosity by setting forth some arguments for generous giving (9:6-15).

Those who give generously experience an abundance of God's grace (9:6-11). Furthermore, the recipients of the gift will not only have their needs met, but will respond with thanksgiving to God (9:12-14), as Paul demonstrates in his closing exclamation of thanks (9:15). It is clear from this section Paul is confident of the Corinthians' positive response to his appeal for the collection.

In the final division of the epistle, Paul vehemently defends his apostolic authority which is being challenged in Corinth by some who have labeled themselves apostles (10:1-13:10). He begins his defense by explaining the nature and exercise of his apostolic

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authority (10:1-18). He was gentle among them in the past, but plans on being bold in the exercise of his authority if his detractors persist (10:1-6).

They have mistakenly judged him by this outer appearance of meekness and ignored his spiritual weapons of warfare. But Paul reminds them that Christ gave him his authority, and he is more than willing to exercise it among them to refute the charge that he is bluffing in his letters (10:7-11). Moreover, Paul recognizes the limits his apostolic authority has placed on him (10:12-18). He will not boast to commend himself, for he is limited to what God has done through him.

Having established the fact that only God's commendation is important, Paul then engages in his own boasting to show the folly of this standard of measure (11:1-12:13). His grounds for boasting (11:1-21) include his jealousy for the doctrinal purity of the Corinthians (11:1-4).

He also boasts because there is such a great contrast between him and the false apostles (11:5-15). He is inferior to no apostle, but voluntarily abased himself for the sake of the gospel among them (11:5-9). This was a proof of his love for them and a distinguishing difference from the others who wanted to be regarded as apostles (11:10-12). But there is no comparison; they are false apostles and deceptive ministers of Satan (11:13-15). Paul's sarcastic tone is evident as he begs the Corinthians' indulgence in his boasting like the false apostles (11:16-21).

His boasting begins with a certification of his Jewish heritage (11:22). He continues with a catalog of his experiences of suffering in the ministry (11:23-29). If the false apostles want to compare their sacrificial labors, Paul will put them to shame. He then takes a different direction by insisting he will only boast in his weaknesses (11:30-12:10).

He recalls his fearful flight from Damascus in a basket (11:30-33). Furthermore, he sarcastically demonstrates he has plenty to boast about in the vision of "a man" (obviously Paul) caught up to Paradise, but he is resolved to only boast about his weaknesses (12:10). Therefore, he boasts of his "thorn in the flesh", a probable physical disability, that keeps him from being exalted more than he should be (12:7-10). In this way, by taking pleasure in weakness and suffering, he is able to experience the power of God in his life and ministry.

This section's concluding remark by Paul explains the need for such uncharacteristic boasting (12:11-13). They should have recognized his authenticity by the presence of "the signs of an apostle" he performed among them and his concern in not being a financial burden to them. Paul has defended his apostolic authority by matching the tactics of the false apostles in boasting of themselves. But all this would have been unnecessary if the Corinthians' had recognized the miraculous power and self-sacrifice that he manifested when he was with them.

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A final assertion of his authority is evident in Paul's remarks about his impending visit. He reaffirms his intention not to be a financial burden to them and his love for them (12:14-18). He also expresses his fear that his arrival will find them involved in remnants of immorality (12:19-21).

Paul's statement about this being his third visit (13:1) shows he had made a visit to them sometime after the writing of I Corinthians. Whereas he did not fully exercise his authority at that time, he now threatens to demonstrate the power of God on his impending visit (13:1-4). Thus, he appeals for them to examine their relationship to the Lord (13:5-6). He finishes with a prayer for their honorable response to his authority so that he will not be forced to manifest its disciplinary power (13:7-10). The epistle closes with some brief exhortations, a greeting, and a benediction (13:11-14).

Through this letter, Paul has communicated his fervent love for the Corinthians and his desire that they complete their repentance by recognizing his authority and forsaking any remaining immorality. He apparently assumes their positive response as he prepares to visit and finalize the collection of the offering. The defense of his apostolic authority was ingeniously argued but in such a way that his great love for the Corinthian Christians was also impressed upon them.

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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. In Whom the _____ of this world hath _____ the _____ of them which believe _____, lest the _____ of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.
2. For we must _____ appear before the _____ seat of Christ; that _____ one may receive the things done in his _____, according to that he hath _____, whether it be good or bad.
3. Paul's three fold purpose in Corinthians (fill in the blanks)
 - a. His desire to affirm his _____ for the Corinthians and _____ his relations with them.
 - b. Paul _____ and arranges for the _____ he will carry back to Jerusalem.
 - c. Paul defends his _____ authority and message against those who challenge him.
4. Therefore if any man be _____ Christ, he is a _____ creature: old things are past away; behold _____ things are become _____.
5. For _____ hath made _____ to be sin for us, who knew no _____; that _____ might be made the _____ of God in _____.