

2 Corinthians

Introduction, Background and Argument

1. Title and Destination

1.1 *Pros Korinthious B* - "*First to the Corinthians.*" The letter *B* was added later to distinguish it from *Pros Korinthious A*.

1.2 Corinth was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia just east of the narrow isthmus that connected the Peloponnesian peninsula to mainland Greece.

1.3 Corinth was at the foot of a rocky acropolis called the Acrocorinth that towered 1,800 feet above the city.

1.4 Corinth was home to several temples of the gods and goddesses. 1) Aphrodite, the goddess of love, which boasted a thousand priestesses serving as sacred prostitutes. 2) Apollo, the god of music, poetry, purification, healing, and medicine. 3) Her, the goddess of marriage, women, family and protector of women in childbirth. 4) Poseidon, god of the sea, earthquakes, and horses. 5) Athena. 6) Hermes. 7) Pantheon, to all gods. 8) Isis, an Egyptian god. 9) Serapis, another Egyptian god.

1.5 Corinth was major commercial center strategically located between two gulfs: 1) Corinthian and 2) Saronic, thus controlling commerce between Asia and Italy, and three harbors: 1) Cenchreae (Acts 18:18), 2) Lechaeum, and 3) Schoenus, thus controlling traffic between the Ionian and Aegean seas.

1.6 Corinth was home of the Diolkos ("haul across"), which enabled ships to port in one harbor and haul their merchandise across to the other harbor in order to avoid sailing around the dangerous southern Cape Melea which also added another 200 miles.

1.7 Corinth was home to the Isthmian Games which were held near the harbor at Schoenus and attracted thousands of visitors every four years.

1.8 Corinth was a cosmopolitan city where east met west, full of idolatry, sophistry, pleasure, and thus a place of great temptation.

2. Authorship

2.1 Paul

2.2 Internal Evidence

2.2.1 2 Cor 1:1 Paul is named as the author along with Timothy.

2.2.2 2 Cor 10:1 Paul refers to himself in the 1st person indicating he is the author

2.2.3 The contents of the letter are manifestly Pauline and relate to issues in 1 Corinthians, which is Pauline.

2.2.4 It is unlikely that someone would imitate Paul and present themselves as losing apostolic authority at Corinth.

2.3 External Evidence

2.3.1 Polycarp

2.3.2 Irenaeus

- 2.3.3 Clement of Alexandria
- 2.3.4 Tertullian
- 2.3.5 Marcion's *Apostolicon*
- 2.3.6 Muratorian Canon

3. Unity

The unity of 2 Corinthians was universally accepted until 1776 when Semler claimed chapters 10-13 were an addition, usually considered to be part of the "lost letter" mentioned in 2:4.¹ The claim was based on the seemingly sudden change of spirit from joy in chapters 1-9 to self-defense in chapters 10-13. Despite these claims, there are no firm reasons to conclude the letter is not a unity. First, the later chapters do not fit Paul's description of the lost letter because they are not sorrowful and don't refer to the offender he mentioned in 2:5-11. Second, if these chapters are part of the letter that relate to the offender it would have made more logical sense to place it earlier so a clear connection was made with the offender. Third, no manuscript evidence supports breaking the unity of 2 Corinthians. Finally, Paul's change in tone is better explained as reflecting his joy over the repentant majority at Corinth and his self-defense toward the Judaizers and their followers.

4. Date

- 4.1 Written after 1 Corinthians
- 4.2 The description of when they desired to give a contribution to the saints in Judea is noted to be a year later (2 Cor 8:11), so a date of AD56 is most likely.

5. Occasion

After Paul wrote 1 Corinthians he fulfilled his intention of returning for a second visit (1 Cor 16:3-6). Apparently this was a difficult visit (2 Cor 12:14; 13:1-2). He was offended by the leader of a rebellious party within the Corinthian assembly (2:5-8; 7:12). When he returned to Ephesus, he wrote what is known as the "severe letter" (2:3-4; 7:8-12) and sent it by way of Titus and an unnamed famous brother (12:18). The letter addressed the whole congregation, but the goal was to secure repentance of the leader and his rebellious party (7:8-10). While Paul waited in Ephesus for Titus' return, Demetrius and the silversmith guild raised a mob to attack Paul. This resulted in Paul leaving Ephesus (Acts 19; 20:1). Anxious to know the effect of his letter he traveled to Troas in search of Titus. While there a door of ministry was opened (2:12). However, not finding Titus, he took leave to look for him in Macedonia (2:13). There he found him and was comforted by the report that they had disciplined the leader (2:5-11) and the majority had repented (7:6-16). However, Titus now reported that some Judaizers had stirred up trouble within the assembly. They challenged Paul's conduct in ministry, re-installed the Mosaic Covenant as the mode of ministry, and questioned Paul's apostolic authority.

6. Purpose(s) of Writing

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in order to explain his conduct in ministry (1-2), rejoice at the repentance of the majority (2, 7), restore them to the New Covenant ministry which was superior to the Mosaic Covenant (3-6), encourage them to have the collection ready for saints in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9), and to defend his apostolic authority (10-13). He wrote it during his third missionary journey in AD56 from Macedonia (2:12-13; 7:5-7; 8:1). Titus volunteered to take the letter along with another famous brother (8:16-24).

7. Argument

2 Corinthians is the most extensive discussion of ministry in the New Testament. Judaizers had invaded the Corinthian church and swayed some of them to turn against Paul. This broke Paul's heart. He defends his conduct and ministry against the Judaizers.

First, Paul explains his conduct and ministry. He begins by saying that we all suffer, but God comforts us in our suffering and other believers are involved by praying. The Judaizers claimed Paul was fickle and didn't love them, or else he would have come to them sooner, but Paul answers that he delayed his coming because he didn't want to have another sorrowful visit, and would rather they have time to repent. Now that the offender had repented, he says they should forgive the offender. Paul was convinced this would be successful because adequacy to minister the new covenant comes from God and is life-transforming. God has placed the light of the gospel within us and it shines forth to enable us to overcome difficulties as our inner man is renewed day by day. Even if we die we will simply be at home with the Lord and then go to the judgment seat of Christ. Therefore, we should live our lives in the fear of God and the love of Christ, proclaiming the message of reconciliation. Ministry should be characterized by upright integrity despite afflictions. Separation from the world and living new lives is paramount. Paul's prior letter was not intended to cause sorrow, but the godly sorrow it produced brought about repentance, which gave Paul reason to rejoice.

Second, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to complete their former desire to give to the saints in Jerusalem. Giving should be done liberally and with a cheerful heart because the Lord Himself became poor for us so that we might become rich. He will also supply all our needs. Sowing sparingly will result in reaping sparingly, and sowing bountifully will result in reaping bountifully. Giving should be motivated by the indescribable gift we have in Christ!

Third, Paul defends his apostleship and authority against the Judaizers. Paul may not have been bold in their presence, but this was due to the meekness and gentleness of Christ. He would fight with the knowledge of God and punish all disobedience. He did

not like fleshly boasting, but he could boast if needed. He was justified in this boasting because he had not taken any money from them, he had not been a burden to them, he loved them, and the Judaizers were false apostles, servants of the angel of light. Paul had been much more gentle with them. By comparison he was far more a servant of Christ and had suffered far more than they had for Christ. He had also enjoyed a trip to paradise. So great was the revelation Paul received that he was given a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble. God's grace is sufficient, His power is perfected in weakness. Paul preferred to boast in his weaknesses and this weakness testified to Paul's authenticity as an apostle, which magnifies the power of God and Christ!

8. Theme(s)

8.1 Several helpful descriptions of the doctrine of suffering, comfort, and prayer (1:3-11; 4:17-18; 7:4-7).

8.2 Most extensive discussion of proper conduct in ministry. Rooted in love and forgiveness, adequacy from God, manifested in converts, servants of the new covenant, sacrificial service (1:12-7:16).

8.3 Satan and his schemes that we battle are described several times (2:10-11; 4:3-4; 10:3-5; 11:3; 13-15).

8.4 Doctrine of the resurrection and judgment seat of Christ in relation to how we live (5:1-13).

8.5 Doctrine of reconciliation and imputation of righteousness (5:17-21).

8.5 An important discussion on separation from the world (6:14-7:1).

8.6 Most extensive discussion of giving (8-9).

9. Outline

9.1 Explanation of Paul's Conduct and Ministry (1-7)

9.2 Encouragement to Complete Giving to Saints in Jerusalem (8-9)

9.3 Evidence of Paul's Apostleship (10-13)

10. Uniquenesses

10.1 Most autobiographical of all Paul's letters, with Galatians as a possible exception.

10.2 A very personal letter where Paul divulges his heart, character, emotions, desires, and boasts.

10.3 Paul's apologetic defense of his ministry, conduct, and apostleship is strewn throughout.

10.4 Only epistle to mention Paul's visit to the 3rd heaven.

10.5 Only epistle to mention Paul's thorn in the flesh.

10.6 Most unsystematic of Paul's letters.

11. Controversial Passages

2 Cor 3:5-6, “Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

2 Cor 5:17, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

2 Cor 5:18-20, “Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

2 Cor 13:5, “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?”

12. Keys to 2 Corinthians

12.1 Key Word: New Covenant or Ministry

12.2 Key Verse(s): 2 Cor 4:17-18, “For momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but the things which are seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

2 Cor 5:14-15, “For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”

2 Cor 5:17, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come.”

2 Cor 5:21, “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

2 Cor 9:7, “Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

2 Cor 9:15, “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”

2 Cor 11:9, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.”

12.3 Key Idea: Adequacy in ministry is found in God and the new covenant.

¹ The three possibilities for the identification of the sorrowful letter are: 1) 1st Corinthians, 2) partially in 2 Corinthians 10-13, 3) it may be lost.