

13. 2 Corinthians

A. Authorship

Paul is clearly identified as the apostle of this letter (1:1; 10:1).

B. Recipients

See the notes under 1 Corinthians.

C. Occasion and Purpose

1) Occasion

Titus told Paul that the Corinthians finally came around to see things as Paul wanted them to. Paul also heard that trouble still was brewing in the church, as it had been infiltrated by **false** teachers, who got the Corinthians to doubt Paul's personal integrity and his authority as an **apostle**.

In-between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians Paul had made a painful visit and written a severe letter that Titus brought to the Corinthians. Impatient for Titus' return, Paul left Ephesus for Troas and then went to Macedonia where he finally received good news from Titus. From Macedonia Paul wrote 2 Corinthians.

Paul's visits and correspondence with the Corinthian church looks like this—

- (1) The Corinthian church is established (Acts 18:1-18)
- (2) Paul's first letter, which we do not have (cf. 1 Cor 5:9)
- (3) 1 Corinthians written from Ephesus (1 Cor 16:8)
- (4) Painful visit to Corinth (2:1; cf. 12:14, 21; 13:1-2)
- (5) Sever letter, which we do not have (2:4, 9; 7:8-12)
- (6) 2 Corinthians written from Macedonia (8:1; 9:2-4)
- (7) Third visit to Corinth (Acts 20:3)

2) Purpose

Paul wants the Corinthians to remember that when he was with them he always conducted himself with integrity, and that his message of salvation was true. He also wants the Corinthians to have the collection ready when he visits them. Paul deals with the troublemakers by warning them that he means what he writes.

Paul defends his **apostleship** and his **message**.

Paul didn't defend himself to promote himself or protect his image; he did so because he knew that their spiritual well-being depended on their acceptance of his ministry and message.

D. Characteristics

- 1) This is one of the more challenging books of the NT to interpret, as it falls in the shadow of 1 Corinthians and involves a complicated series of visits and correspondence between the Corinthians and Paul and his associates. Though challenging, if you take the time to work through the notes and outline, you will understand the flow of thought.
- 2) Has a number of familiar verses and passages—

1:3-7	blessings of Christian comfort
3:18	transformation of believers
4:4	the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving
4:7-12	we have this treasure in earthen vessels
4:16	though our outer man is decaying, our inner man is renewed
4:17-18	momentary, light affliction...we look not at the things which are seen...
5:7	we walk by faith, not by sight
5:10	we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ
5:14	the love of Christ controls us
5:17	if anyone is in Christ he is a new creature
5:20	we are ambassadors for Christ
5:21	he made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf
6:14	do not be bound together with unbelievers
8:6	he who sows sparingly shall reap sparingly
8:7	God loves a cheerful giver
10:5	we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ
11:14	Satan disguises himself as an angel of light
12:7	Paul's thorn in the flesh
12:9	My grace is sufficient for you
12:10	when I am weak, then I am strong
13:12	greet one another with a holy kiss
- 3) The most autobiographical of Paul's letters, giving us the closest view of his **personal** life and ministry. Second Corinthians shows us the warm, human side of Paul. It is full of tears and grief, the most personal and least doctrinal of Paul's letters (with the exception of Philemon)
- 4) Careful examination of the character and tactics of false teachers. They are false apostles, deceitful workers, and Satan's servants (11:13-15).
- 5) The person and ministry of **Satan**. He is identified as Satan (2:11), the god of this world (4:4), the serpent (11:3), and an angel of light (11:14). Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers so they reject the gospel (4:4) and uses religious leaders to distort and deceive others (11:15). Satan tries to keep Christians from forgiving one another (2:10-11), through false teachers seeks to deceive and corrupt believers' minds (11:3), and is allowed by God to physically afflict them (12:7-9).
- 6) Christians will someday stand before **judgment** seat of Christ to give an account of their life and ministry while Christians (5:10).

- 7) Principles of Christian **giving** are clearly outlined (8:1-9:15).
- 8) The necessity of churches being **separate** from entangling alliances with unbelief (6:14-18).

E. Keys

- 1) Theme – The **Servant** of **Christ**
- 2) Verse – **4:5**

F. Outline

Here's a basic outline of 2 Corinthians—

- 1) An Apostle's Ministry, 1-7
- 2) Gracious Giving, 8-9
- 3) Defense and Denunciation, 10-13

Here's a more detailed outline of 2 Corinthians—

Introduction, 1:1–11

- 1) Greeting, 1:1–2
- 2) Thanksgiving, 1:3–11

1. An Apostle's Ministry, 1:12–7:16 – *the Corinthians doubted Paul's apostleship*

- 1) Changed plans defended, 1:12–2:13
 - a. The original plan, 1:12–22
 - b. Postponement of the plan, 1:23–2:4
 - c. Forgive the offender, 2:5–11
 - d. A new plan, 2:12–13
- 2) Ministry described, 2:14–7:16
 - a. Triumphant in Christ, 2:14–3:3
 - b. Ministers of the New Covenant, 3:4–18
 - c. Tremendous responsibilities, 4:1–15
 - d. Anticipating the judgment seat of Christ, 4:16–5:21
 - e. Involves hardship and suffering, 6:1–10
 - f. Demands exclusive devotion, 6:11–7:4
 - g. Encouraged by results, 7:5–16

2. Gracious Giving, 8–9 – *the Corinthians were distracted from their commitment*

- 1) An example of giving, 8:1–5
- 2) Abound in giving, 8:6–15
- 3) Be ready to give, 8:16–9:5
- 4) Results of gracious giving, 9:6–15
 - a. Increased blessing to the giver, 9:6–11
 - b. Increased thanksgiving to the Lord, 9:12–15

3. Defense and Denunciation, 10–13 – *the Corinthians were deceived by false teachers*

- 1) Defense of ministry, 10:1–18
- 2) Denunciation of false teachers, 11:1–12:13
- 3) Paul's third visit, 12:14–13:10
 - a. His desire and concerns, 12:14–21
 - b. A warning of discipline, 13:1–4
 - c. Call to self-examination, 13:5–10

Conclusion, 13:11–14

Now let's take a closer look at 2 Corinthians—

Introduction, 1:1–11

- 1) Greeting, 1:1–2
- 2) Thanksgiving, 1:3–11

1. An Apostle's Ministry, 1:12–7:16

As the Corinthians **doubted** Paul's apostleship, he explains what happened and describes his ministry.

Paul was evidently accused of being fickle because he had changed his plans to visit the Corinthians. Paul defends himself by explaining that the reason for the change was the Corinthians themselves (1:15–2:1). While their relationship had been greatly strained because of this change, it gave time for the one who caused trouble to repent and now needed sympathy (2:2–17). The Corinthians should recognize the nature of Paul's ministry (3:1–6:10) and separate themselves from what hinders their fellowship with Christ's ambassador (6:11–7:16).

- 1) Changed plans defended, 1:12–2:13

Paul originally planned on visiting the Corinthians, then going up into Macedonia, returning back to Corinth, and then going off to Judea (1:16). However, due to the Corinthians' unrepentant attitude (1:23–2:1) and an open door for the gospel in Troas (2:12–13), he changed his plans. Having heard of the repentance of the offender (2:5–9), Paul encourages them to forgive the offender so Satan does not further divide them (2:10–11).

- a. The original plan, 1:12–22
- b. Postponement of the plan, 1:23–2:4
- c. Forgive the offender, 2:5–11
- d. A new plan, 2:12–13

- 2) Ministry described, 2:14–7:16

- a. Triumphant in Christ, 2:14–3:3

Paul does not need a “letter of commendation” to establish his credentials, for the **Corinthians** are his letter, which is far better than any human letter written with ink for they were the work of the Spirit of the living God. Therefore they should not separate themselves from him.

- b. Ministers of the New Covenant, 3:4–18

The old covenant was so glorious that its minister, Moses, had to veil his face. The new covenant is far more glorious. Note the contrasts between the two covenants—

Old Covenant

The letter, v. 6
Kills, v. 6
Ministry of death, v. 7
Ministry of condemnation, v. 9
Fades away, v. 11
Israel's heart is "veiled," v. 15

New Covenant

The **Spirit**, v. 6
Gives **life**, v. 6
Ministry of the Spirit, v. 8
Ministry of **righteousness**, v. 9
Remains, v. 11
Christian's hearts are "unveiled," v. 18

Paul's point is this: I am a minister of the new covenant that is superior in everyway to the old covenant. Because of this, the Corinthians should welcome him.

c. Tremendous responsibilities, 4:1–5:5

The Corinthians may have wondered, "If Paul is a minister of Christ the King, why is he suffering like a criminal?" Paul responds by maintaining that he faithfully gives the gospel, but opposition and rejection are ultimately because of **Satan** (4:1–6). He experiences terrible circumstances so that God is glorified (4:1–12). He does not lose heart but in faith continues on, refusing to conduct his life based on bad experiences (4:13–5:5).

Therefore, the Corinthians should not be hesitant to fellowship with Paul though his life and ministry are so difficult.

d. Controlled by fear and love of Christ, 5:6–21

So that the Corinthians will be able to answer those who make evaluations on how things are going now (5:12), Paul makes clear that he does not conduct his ministry based on outward appearances but rather on the fact that someday he will answer to Christ (5:6-10). Paul is controlled not by pride but by the **fear** of the Lord and the **love** of Christ (5:11–21).

e. Involves hardship and suffering, 6:1–10

As a servant of God, Paul's only concern is to have a ministry that does not bring offense or results in being discredited. This he does, regardless of the circumstances or cost and depending on God's Word alone.

f. Demands exclusive devotion, 6:11–7:4

The Corinthians' fellowship with the apostle is hindered because they are "bound together" in an unbiblical alliance. This affected their affections toward Paul (6:12; 7:2) and as a result toward the true gospel. They must separate themselves from such and strive for personal holiness. By doing so the things that take Paul's place in their hearts are removed, enabling them to love Paul as they should.

g. Encouraged by results, 7:5–16

Paul rejoices as he thinks back to his meeting with Titus in Macedonia, as Titus told him of the Corinthians' response of repentance.

2. Gracious Giving, 8–9

The Corinthians got **distracted** from their commitment to give to poverty-stricken Christians in Jerusalem. Paul therefore encourages them to renew their commitment by challenging them with the Macedonians' and Jesus' examples (8:1–9). If the Macedonians and Jesus, being poor, could give what they had for the benefit of others, the Corinthians, being rich, should have no problem doing the same (8:10–15).

- 1) An example of giving, 8:1–5
- 2) Abound in giving, 8:6–15
- 3) Be ready to give, 8:16–9:5
- 4) Results of gracious giving, 9:6–15
 - a. Increased blessing to the giver, 9:6–11
 - b. Increased thanksgiving to the Lord, 9:12–15

Note these principles of **Christian giving**—

- (1) Attitude of joy, not with resentment or reluctance, 8:2; 9:7
- (2) Possible to do regardless of circumstances, 8:2
- (3) Done according to and beyond ability, 8:3
- (4) Seen as a ministry, 8:4; 9:1
- (5) Preceded by giving of self to the Lord, 8:5
- (6) A work of grace, not law, 8:7–10
- (7) Should be proportionate to income, 8:12–15
- (8) Motivated by love, not compulsion, 9:7
- (9) Trust God for needs, 9:8–11
- (10) Results in thanksgiving to God, 9:12–15

The principle of 9:6 is “If you don’t abound in gracious giving, you will experience little blessing from God and cause little thanksgiving to God.”

3. Defense and Denunciation, 10–13

The Corinthians were **deceived** by false teachers to think that Paul was not a true apostle.

- 1) Defense of ministry, 10:1–18

Here Paul defends himself against those who questioned whether he really had the qualifications to be an apostle. Though his accusers put stock in externals, Paul does not “war according to the flesh” (10:3–6). The Corinthians should therefore not evaluate based on externals (10:7). One should boast in the Lord, not himself, and in the end, only the one whom the Lord approves is commended. The true servant of the Lord desires to please Christ (5:9) and gain His approval (10:18).

2) Denunciation of false teachers, 11:1–12:13

Paul here says basically, “Tell you what, I’ll play the same way that my opponents do. If they want to brag about themselves, I’ll do the same.” By doing so, Paul demonstrates that his apostleship is not inferior, for no one can produce more impressive credentials than he can. Paul calls this game “foolishness” (11:1, 16–17, 21; 12:11), but does so because of his jealousy for them (11:2).

3) Paul’s third visit, 12:14–13:10

Paul will visit Corinth a third time (12:14; 13:1), and if necessary will administer discipline (13:1–4). Therefore Paul calls on the Corinthians to examine themselves as to whether they are truly in the faith so that when he comes he will not have to administer discipline (13:5–10).

- a. His desire and concerns, 12:14–21
- b. A warning of discipline, 13:1–4
- c. Call to self-examination, 13:5–10

Conclusion, 13:11–14