

## *Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey*

Bible Survey Lesson 70: Introduction and Outline, Book of 2 Corinthians

### ***Introduction:***

The background information on the city of Corinth, the church at Corinth, and Paul's relationship to that church was thoroughly covered in the previous study (1 Corinthians).

The church was weak. Surrounded by secular influences, idolatry and immorality, its members struggled with their Christian faith and lifestyle. Through at least four letters and three visits Paul attempted to answer their questions, resolve their conflicts, and solve their problems.

### **Perhaps the best way to understand the Book of 2 Corinthians is to examine the events surrounding the writing of the two books:**

1. Paul spent 18 months "birthing and growing" the church (Acts 18).
2. Paul wrote a "previous letter" (1 Corinthians 5:9), which dealt with specific immoral people and activity in the church. This letter, which we don't have, was misunderstood (1 Corinthians 5) requiring a detailed letter of response.
3. 1 Corinthians was that response and covered moral problems in the church and answered questions about sex, marriage, and matters of conscience. This letter seems to have been received well by the majority of the church and probably rectified most of the abuses addressed.
4. However, because of the arrival of false teachers who entered into the fellowship and denied Paul's authority as an Apostle, and slandered his motives, and the churches failure to support Paul (2 Corinthians 2:6), he made a hurried "*painful*" visit back to Corinth (2 Corinthians 2:1).
5. Following that visit, Paul wrote a "*severe and sorrowful letter*" to which he refers 2 Corinthians 2:4. It was hand-carried by Titus and we have no copy, but when he met Paul in Macedonia, he reported that the majority of the fellowship had repented of their rebelliousness against Paul.
6. From Macedonia, probably in Philippi, Paul wrote his fourth letter which is 2 Corinthians. In this letter, delivered by Titus in AD. 57 (2 Corinthians 8), he dealt with questions concerning his commission, his converts, and his critics.
7. Paul later made one last visit to Corinth, staying several months and authoring the Book of Romans (Acts 20:2-3).

2 Corinthians is the least systematic and one of the most autobiographical of Paul's epistles because he is responding to questions about, and attacks on, his apostleship and ministry.

It is, therefore, more heart than head, more tense emotion than pure logic. . . perhaps our best glimpse at the personality of the most prolific of all the Apostles.

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### I. PAUL AND HIS COMMISSION (Chapters 1-5)

When Paul identifies himself as *"an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,"* in his first sentence he is already building his defense against those who would deny him his calling and authority.

The false teachers who were constantly dogging him would point to the fact that an apostle is, by definition, one who was hand picked by Jesus face-to-face. They accused him of pride and greed, and a desire for power. They indicated that he an untrustworthy man who did not keep his word and didn't want to leave his successes to visit them.

So, the first thing Paul had to do was to defend his motives and his ministry.

#### A. Paul's Motives (1-2)

Paul cannot be guilty of pride, greed, and a desire for power, because everything is from God, not from his own efforts.

##### 1. Comfort (1:1-11)

Paul experienced comfort in the midst of great suffering, even being, *"burdened excessively beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life."*(v 8) Was that a source of pride? No! It wasn't comfort through great character and self-control. It was. *"God who raises the dead; who delivered us, . . . and will deliver us."*

God gives the comfort. No source of pride here.

##### 2. Control (1:12-2:17)

The charge that Paul didn't keep his promises was also bogus.

Whether it was the failure of Paul's plan to visit the Corinthians, or the instruction to change the offenders punishment, or meeting Titus in Macedonia rather than Troas, as he desired; none had to do with Paul's pride. **God was in control.**

The proof of the apostolic nature of his ministry is that it involves sweet triumph for those who believe, but bitter death to those who reject. But, this also is not due to any human effort either. **Again, all successes come from God.**

#### B. Paul's Ministry (3-5)

The very nature of the ministry, its message, leaves no room for pride, since the entire message is about Jesus, not Paul.

##### 1. Conformation (3)

Paul didn't need to validate his ministry nor could he if he wanted to. A true minister does not need human endorsement (3:1) because changed lives speak for themselves (3:2) and only Jesus can change lives.

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He refers to the Jewish interpretation in Exodus 34 where Moses covered his face so that the people could not see the glory of God fade. Under the old covenant the revelation of God was external, short lived, carved in stone. Under the new covenant the presence of God is internal, permanent, and carved into human hearts. **This is supernatural . . . of God!**

### **2. Containers (4-5)**

Paul's message is not of himself, but of Jesus. He is only a weak container holding the priceless message that "*Jesus is Lord.*"(4:5-7) His ministry is one of a servant motivated only by love for Christ. His only desire is to reach Corinth for Him (5:5:16-21).

## **II. PAUL AND HIS CONVERTS (Chapters 6-9)**

Paul moves from the questions of his commission, motives, and message to his relationship to the members of the church at Corinth, who are his spiritual children, his converts to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **A. Faithful Partnership (6-7)**

Reconciliation is the removal of human enmity. Since the true believers at Corinth were reconciled to God, Paul asks that they be reconciled to him. Paul had nothing against the Corinthians so the block in a loving relationship must have been coming from them.

Paul knew that their separation was evidence of their love of the world, since "*light cannot have fellowship with darkness.*"(6:14) So, he calls them to consciously separate themselves again.

In chapter 7 he exudes confidence that they will respond to his loving pleading and recommit themselves to Jesus.

### **B. Financial Partnership (8-9)**

In the context of restored fellowship, Paul feels confidence to discuss the needs of the suffering church in Jerusalem. They had promised to help but had not done so. These two chapters deal entirely with the need of the church to renew its commitment to stewardship. Lack of stewardship is symptomatic.

Chapter 8 spelled out the principles of giving. It should be: sacrificial (1-2), spontaneous (3-4), with spiritual motives (5-9), cheerful and free (10-15).

For their peace of mind and for the testimony of the ministry, Paul was not to handle the money personally.

Chapter 9 equated their desire to give to the needs of the body to the extent of God's great giving to them.

**Last of all, Paul turned to a vigorous defense of himself and his personal ministry. A small group of "*false apostles*" in Corinth has maligned Paul.**

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### **III. PAUL AND HIS CRITICS (Chapters 10-13)**

Paul is accused of being two-faced (10:1-2) and worldly (10:2-5). They claim to have a closer relationship to Jesus than he has (10:6-9).

#### **A. Personal Approach (10)**

Like so many opponents of the righteous, Paul's detractors turn to character assassination and personal attack. They even referred to him as contemptible, cruel, vindictive, and self-serving.

Paul will not enter into that game. He notes that God has used him, not them, to plant the Corinthian church and any ministry they have is dependent on his ministry.

And then, the bottom line: *"He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord."* (v. 17)

#### **B. Proven Apostleship (11:1-12:13)**

The rebellion at Corinth was serious enough that Paul was forced to give an organized defense of his credentials. His worry was not the loss of their love and respect, but how quickly they had turned away from the apostolic teaching (11:1-6). He was jealous, not for himself, but for God and His gospel.

First, they challenged his financial practices. He didn't preach for the money, but provided his own support. Interestingly enough, his opponents took the money, so they accused him of not taking the money because he knew he didn't deserve it as a non-apostle.

Second, they criticized him for suffering by not taking support. His surprising response was that true apostles suffer so they had exposed themselves as false. He discussed his suffering and showed that it was for righteousness, not because it was deserved.

Third, they claimed true apostles had revelations directly from God. He related a supernatural experience but also quickly related how God allowed Satan to afflict him to keep him humble. (12:1-13.)

#### **C. Passionate Appeal (12:14-13:10)**

Paul found all of this debating distasteful. His ministry was not validated by special experiences, but by his shepherds heart, and concern for the church.

His final appeal is that they be ready to greet him when he comes to them again, remembering his true character. He was consistent in words, actions, and motives and he truly loved the believers in Corinth.

He begged again that they repent so he could come in joy instead of having to deal with their sin. (13:1-4) He admonished them to *"test yourself to see if you're in the faith; examine yourself!"* and restore fellowship with God, himself, and other believers. (13:5-10)

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### ***Conclusion:***

The letter concludes without the usual greetings but with a beautiful benediction which became a key part of worship in the early church.

### **READ 2 CORINTHIANS 13:11-14**

### ***Lessons:***

1. Ministry involves service, suffering, joy, comfort, and hard work.
2. Ministry is the power of God working in and through us to accomplish God's purposes.
3. Spontaneous, cheerful giving can be a gauge of our spiritual health.
4. A key to unity in the body is: Because God reconciled us to himself at great cost, we should be reconciled to the members of the body.