

NT Survey – 2 Corinthians
Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School
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Title and Author

This book's name is derived from its original recipients: the members of the church at Corinth. The authorship of the apostle Paul is undisputed (1 Cor 1:1-3).

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy *our* brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are throughout Achaia: ²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Cor 1:1-2

Date of Writing and Introduction

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians during his trip to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey.

Introduction

The church at Corinth 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. The timeline of events is pieced together from the epistles and Acts:

1. Around AD 50, Paul founds the church at Corinth during his second missionary journey, spending 18 months birthing and growing the church (Acts 18).
2. Paul writes his "previous letter" or "lost letter" (1 Cor 5:9), which dealt with specific immoral people and activity in the church.
3. Around AD 53-56, Paul is at Ephesus during his third missionary journey (Acts 19).
4. The Corinthians write Paul (1 Cor 7:1; 16:17).
5. Around AD 55, Paul writes 1 Corinthians from Ephesus addressing continued carnality and misunderstandings from his lost letter and answering specific questions asked by the Corinthians.
6. 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 church's failure to support Paul (2 Cor 2:6), he made a hurried "painful" visit back to Corinth while at Ephesus (2 Cor 2:1).
7. Following his "painful visit", Paul writes his "severe letter" (2 Cor 2:4). This letter was hand-carried to Corinth by Titus; we have no copy. Paul later met up with Titus in Macedonia where Titus reported that the majority of Corinthians had repented of their rebellion against Paul (7:7).
8. Around AD 56, Paul writes 2 Corinthians to continue to defend his apostolic authority (1-7), exhort the Corinthians to resume preparations for the collection for the poor at Jerusalem (8-9), and confront the false apostles (10-13).
9. Around AD 56, Paul makes one last visit to Corinth (Acts 20:1-2), staying for several months and authoring Romans from there.
10. The Corinthians' participation in the Jerusalem offering (Rom 15:26) implies that Paul's third visit to Corinth was successful.

Outline (from MacArthur)

- I. Introduction (1:1-11)
- II. Paul's Ministry (1:12-7:16)
- III. Collection (8:1-9:15)
- IV. Paul's Apostleship (10:1-12:13)
- V. Paul's Visit (12:14-13:14)

Summary

Introduction (1:1-11)

1:1-2 – Salutation – Like most of Paul’s letters, he begins with a salutation. He identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ and makes it clear that he is an apostle by the will of God.

The Corinthians knew Timothy well (2 Cor 1:19; Acts 18:5). He had accompanied Paul from the second missionary journey on (Acts 16:1-3) and was Paul’s emissary to Corinth (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10).

The recipients of the letter were the believers at Corinth and all the saints throughout the Greek province of Achaia. Other churches in Achaia may have included Cenchrea (Rom 16:1) and Athens (Acts 17:34).

1:3-7 – Thanksgiving for Comfort – God is the God of all comfort. He comforts us in all our afflictions. No matter what affliction we may be experiencing, and no matter what its intensity, God will provide comfort that is adequate for our need. Not just so we are comforted, but so that, after experiencing His comfort, we can minister that comfort in the lives of others. God’s comfort is ours in abundance equivalent to our difficulties.

❖ **Am I experiencing God’s comfort when in need?**

❖ **Am I comforting others who are in need?**

1:8-11 – Thanksgiving for Deliverance – Paul and his missionary band came under great affliction in Asia. The source of the affliction can only be conjectured, but the intensity is described: “burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life.”

We should each relate to Paul as those who have the sentence of death within us. The purpose of the sentence is so that “we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead”. God will ultimately deliver us. It is on Him that we have set out hope.

❖ **What is my perspective on this life?**

One of the purposes of prayer is that thanks may be give to God for God’s favor.

❖ **Am I too private?**

Paul’s Ministry (1:12–7:16)

1:12-2:4 – Paul’s Integrity and Plans – The false apostles at Corinth hoped to discredit Paul and take control of the church. They attacked his apostolic authority, character, and ministry. However, Paul’s personal life, relationships, and ministry were all above reproach.

Paul begins answering the attacks on his integrity and sincerity of his commitment to the Corinthians and ministry by an overarching description of his ministry and life: “...our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.”

❖ **How am I conducting myself toward the world and fellow believers?**

Next, Paul deals with the charge that he is not trustworthy. Paul had planned to visit Corinth on the way to Judea, but had been delayed. The false apostles claimed that Paul did not always speak the truth and they supported that claim by Paul not visiting when he said he would – he changed his travel plans. Paul does not defend himself with the details of the travel plans, but by opening his heart to reveal his motives and attitudes.

Paul showed that he was loyal (1:15-16), honest (1:17-18), reliable (1:19-20), authentic (1:21-22), sensitive (1:23-2:1), desiring purity in the body (2:2-3), and loved the Corinthians (2:4) (MacArthur NT Commentary).

❖ **Do I judge people based on out of context incidents?**

2:5-11– The Offender’s Punishment – The Holy Spirit, moving Paul, spends a moment talking about forgiveness. The Corinthians had responded to Paul’s severe letter and had disciplined one who had had apparently verbally and publicly assaulted Paul during the apostle’s “painful visit” to Corinth. The Lord had used this discipline to bring the sinning believer to repentance (Matt 18:15-17; 2 Tim 2:24-26; Heb 12:7-11). The brother had been won. The clear expectation is that the Lord’s discipline will yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

¹⁵“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. ¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Matt 18:15-17

¹¹All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, **afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.** Heb 12:11

Continuing in church discipline after true repentance has taken place moves the sinning believer to be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. This places the disciplined believer in a place of vulnerability and also the church since they are living in sin (unforgiveness). Satan will take advantage of that. Therefore, forgiveness must be generous.

❖ **Is my forgiveness generous?**

2:12-6:10 – The Ministry’s Nature – Throughout this section, contrasts between the Spirit-imparted viewpoint on life and ministry and the natural viewpoint stand out. Some of the Corinthians were criticizing Paul because they were looking at his activities from the human viewpoint and were projecting that point of view onto him. They were concluding that he viewed life as they did. For their benefit he drew these contrasting views of life clearly. The extent to which we view life from Paul’s spiritual viewpoint will be the extent to which we do not lose heart in our ministry.

❖ **How do I view life, do I have a Biblical view of reality?**

2:12-17– Triumph of the Ministry – Paul was so concerned about the situation in Corinth that even though a door of ministry was open for him at Troas, he left other ministers there and went on to Macedonia to find Titus to hear of the Corinthians’ response to his letter.

Even in the midst of “no rest for his spirit”, Paul found encouragement in the Lord “always leading him in triumph in Christ.” That triumph is a manifestation of the sweet aroma of the knowledge of God in every place in which Paul visited.

Paul was not a peddler of the Word of God; he did not sell the gospel. But out of sincerity, he preached what God said.

❖ **Do I focus on my triumph in Christ or on difficulties around me?**

3:1-3 – The Confirmation of the Ministry – Paul did not 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.

3:4-18 – The New Covenant – Paul make it clear that he and his fellow ministers were not adequate in themselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but their adequacy was from God, who also made them adequate *as* servants of a new covenant.

Paul contrasts the nature of the old and new covenants: old and new; letter and Spirit; death and life; stone and Spirit; some glory and greater glory; condemnation and righteousness; temporary and permanent. Because of they are ministers of the new covenant; they have great boldness in their speech. Paul wants the Corinthians to know that this is from God.

❖ **From where do I derive my adequacy? Am I bold?**

4:1-6 – Encouragement – Since our ministry is to bring the eternal-destiny changing gospel to people and we see God about the business of changing lives and we have been shown mercy, we do not lose heart – we are encouraged.

❖ **Am I encouraged by God’s work in my life and other believers’ lives?**

Paul is not concerned with craftiness or adulterating the word of God in ministering to people, but he walks in truth with a clear conscience.

❖ **Do I attempt to share the gospel with craftiness?**

The gospel is veiled to those who ARE perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. This gospel is not about Paul it is about Christ. Paul did not preach himself, but Christ Jesus as Lord. He viewed himself as bond-servants of those he was sharing the gospel with.

❖ **Is my life about me or Christ?**

4:7-18 – Trials Show God’s Power – We have the gospel treasure in weak vessels so that God’s greatness will be clearly evident. Paul contrasts the outer, decaying person with the Spirit-filled person allowing the life of Christ to flow through them. They were always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in their body.

- afflicted in every way, but not crushed
- perplexed, but not despairing
- persecuted, but not forsaken
- struck down, but not destroyed

❖ **Am I different because of Christ in my life?**

Paul did not lose heart for though the outer man is decaying, yet the inner man is being renewed day by day. 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 at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

❖ **Do I have the proper view of difficulties?**

Ministry, God’s work in people’s lives (the grace which is spreading to more and more people), is so the giving of thanks will abound to the glory of God.

❖ **Do I give thanks for God’s work in people’s lives?**

5:1-10 – Motivation – Biblical ministry and ministers have an eternal focus. They are not concerned with this life, but with the life to come. God almighty has prepared us for eternity and gave us the Spirit as a pledge. While we look for eternity, now in this life our desire is to be pleasing to the Lord. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. This is not a judgment to determine whether we will enter heaven but one to determine to what extent He will reward us who enter heaven.

❖ **Where is my focus – now or eternity? Is my desire to be pleasing to the Lord?**

5:11-21 – Message – Since we will be judged, we should know the fear of the Lord and seek to persuade men to repent of their sin and turn in faith to Jesus as Lord and Savior. 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. Salvation changes us – if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

❖ **Who do I live for and who controls me?**

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. He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

❖ **Do I act as a new creature, as someone reconciled to God, as an ambassador for Christ?**

6:1-10 – Conduct – Paul’s shows his example in the conduct of his ministry.

- giving no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited
- but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God
- in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger
- in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in the word of truth, in the power of God
- by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left
- by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report
- regarded as deceivers and yet true
- as unknown yet well-known
- as dying yet behold, we live
- as punished yet not put to death
- as sorrowful yet always rejoicing
- as poor yet making many rich
- as having nothing yet possessing all things

❖ **What is my example?**

6:11-7:16 – Corinthians Exhorted – Since the true believers at Corinth were reconciled to God, Paul asks that they be reconciled to him. The Corinthian’s separation from Paul was evidence of their continued love of the world – those that had not yet been reconciled to God.

¹⁴Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; ... 2 Cor 6:14-16

❖ **To whom or what am I bound together?**

Since we have the promises of God to walk with us, we should cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

❖ **Am I cleansing myself from all defilement?**

Paul exhorts the Corinthians to know that he loves them and has done everything only to see them walk in holiness before God. His letters and words were meant only to bring about godly sorrow (true repentance).

⁹I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of repentance*; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of God*, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. ¹⁰For the sorrow that is according to *the will of God* produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. ¹¹For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.

❖ **Is my repentance demonstrated with a zeal?**

The Corinthians' repentance encouraged Paul to share with them a project that was dear to his heart, the collection for the needy believers in the Jerusalem church (chaps. 8–9).

Collection (8:1–9:15)

In the context of restored fellowship, Paul feels confident to discuss the needs of the suffering church in Jerusalem. The Corinthians' repentance encouraged Paul to remind them of a project that was dear to his heart, the collection for the needy believers in the Jerusalem church. They had promised to help but had not done so. How believers view money is an effective barometer of their walk with Christ, so Paul deals with the need of the church to allow the life of Christ to flow through them in their stewardship of God's resources.

8:1-9:15 – Patterns of Giving – This is the offering that Paul was collecting to take to the poverty stricken in Jerusalem (Acts 20; Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 8:1-5). The churches of Macedonia Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea were an example that the Corinthians should follow.

... giving was not motivated primarily by philanthropy or human kindness, but by the grace of God at work in their hearts. One of the effects of saving, transforming, sanctifying grace is a longing to give generously and sacrificially to those in need, especially other believers.
MacArthur NT Commentary: 2 Corinthians

Some principles of giving from this passage:

1. giving is motivated by grace; it is an out flow of worship (8:1-2)
2. grace giving transcends difficulties in life (8:2)
3. grace giving is accompanied with joy (i.e. the fruits of the Spirit) (8:2)
4. grace giving is generous (8:2)
5. grace giving is proportional (8:2)
6. grace giving is sacrificial (8:3)
7. grace giving is voluntary (8:3)
8. grace giving is viewed as a sought after privilege (8:4)
9. grace giving is an act of worship (8:5)
10. grace giving is not abandoned (8:6)
11. grace giving is consistent with a Spirit-filled live (8:7)
12. grace giving demonstrates love (8:8)
13. grace giving is motivated by the giving of God's Son (8:9)
14. grace giving should be faithful, with commitment (8:10-11)
15. grace giving should not be speculative (8:12)
16. grace giving abound in biblical fellowship (8:13-14)
17. God's resources must be handled with accountability; above reproach integrity (8:16-24)
18. grace giving sets an example of submission to the Lord (9:1-4)
19. grace giving is the "put on" half of the "put of" of the sin of covetousness (9:5)
20. grace giving "sows" bountifully (9:6)
21. grace giving "reaps" blessings (9:6)

22. grace giving is cheerful (9:7)
23. grace giving is a good deed for which we were created in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:10) (9:8)
24. grace giving uses multiplied blessings for more sowing (9:10)
25. grace giving results in thanksgiving to God and glorifying God (9:11-13)
26. grace giving results in body unity (9:13-14)

❖ **Do I practice grace giving?**

“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” Grace giving flows from a saving relationship with Jesus Christ as His life flows through the Spirit-filled believer.

Paul’s Apostleship (10:1–12:13)

Last of all, Paul turned to a vigorous defense of himself and his personal ministry. A small group of "false apostles" in Corinth had maligned Paul, so he defends his apostolic authority to silence his critics and confirm the united support of the Christians there. Paul describes the false apostles:

¹³For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

¹⁴No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds. 2 Cor 11:13-15

10:1-18 – Authority – 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 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). Obviously, these are lies and Paul will not enter into that game. He is about destroying the lies of Satan through truth.

²I ask that when I am present I *need* not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh. ³For though we walk in the flesh, **we do not war according to the flesh**, ⁴for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. ⁵*We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, ⁶and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

❖ **Am I waging a battle for the truth in my thoughts?**

He notes that God has used him, not the false apostles, to plant the Corinthian church and any ministry they have is dependent on his ministry. But, the only boasting Paul does is what God has done in and through him. He does not take credit for ministry, he gives the credit to God.

❖ **Do I give credit to God?**

11:1-12:13 – Proven Apostleship – The rebellion at Corinth and the continued influence of the false apostles 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.

³But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity *of devotion* to Christ.

❖ **Is my walk characterized by the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ?**

First, the false apostles challenged Paul’s financial practices (11:7-15). Paul did not preach for 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 did not deserve it as a non-apostle.

❖ **Am I involved in ministry to get something?**

Second, the false apostles criticized him for suffering (11:16-33). His surprising response was that true apostles suffer so the false apostles had exposed themselves as false. He discussed his suffering and showed that it was for righteousness, not because it was deserved.

❖ **Do I make decisions to limit ministry so as not to “suffer”?**

Third, the false apostles claimed true apostles had revelations directly from God (12:1-13). Paul reluctantly related a supernatural experience to show that he does get direct revelation, on occasion. But also that it is not something to boast about. God is so concerned about humility that He allowed Satan to afflict him to keep him humble.

⁸Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. ⁹And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

❖ **Do I get my instruction from somewhere other than God’s word?**

❖ **Am I humble about what I know from God’s word?**

❖ **Am I content with difficulties?**

Paul’s Visit (12:14–13:14)

12:14-12:18 – Passionate Appeal – Paul found all of this debating distasteful. His ministry was not validated by special experiences, but by his shepherd’s 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 Corinthians.

❖ **Am I consistent?**

12:19-13:10 – Warnings – Paul begged that the Corinthians repent (or continue in repentance) so he could come in joy instead of having to deal with their sin again.

²⁰For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps *there will be* strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; ²¹I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.

If Paul finds them unrepentant, he will spare no one. Those that pass the test of having Christ live in them, should be walking in a way that honors Christ.

❖ **Do I deal with sin expeditiously in my own life; in the life of the church?**

13:11-14 – Paul’s Greeting and Benediction – The letter concludes without a usual greeting where he exhorts the Corinthian believers to: 1) rejoice; 2) grow in their relationship with Christ; 3) rest on God and be comforted; 4) be like-minded; and 5) live in peace. These characteristics are the result of Spirit-filled living. The result is that they are in a worship relationship with God.

❖ **Am I displaying the fruits of Spirit-filled living?**

Paul ends this epistle with a unique and beautiful Trinitarian benediction.

¹⁴The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Homework

Read Galatians.