

2 Corinthians

I. Setting

1. 2 Corinthians is the 4th letter written by Paul to the church in the Greek city of Corinth. Only 2 of these letters were considered to be Scripture. The 1st and 3rd letters, although written to the church by the Apostle were not divinely inspired Scripture is (2 Timothy 3:16) and have not survived. It is only through clues found in 1&2Corinthians that we have any idea of the content of those two letters.
2. Corinth sat at an isthmus connecting the narrow stretch that joins the Peloponnesus to the mainland of Greece and was a major port city in the ancient world.
 - Corinth was a densely populated metropolis with people from all over the world
 - Corinth became an important hub as merchants from all over the world took advantage of the port
 - Because of the commerce it was not difficult for Paul to find work for himself to support his ministry endeavors.
 - Corinth was also know for its vice
 - o *“When Paul wrote the Romans and described the degraded course of rebellious mankind (Romans 1:21–32), he did so from Corinth where he likely saw the sad portrayal that he wrote about” (Bible Knowledge Commentary)*
3. It was to this city that God led Paul to preach the Gospel and plant a church.

The Bible knowledge commentary gives the following overview

Paul first came to Corinth in the spring of AD 51 and ministered there for one and one-half years. He sailed in the fall of AD 52 with Priscilla and Aquila to Ephesus where they remained while Paul continued on to Jerusalem. At Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila met Apollos whom they instructed and subsequently sent to Corinth for a period of ministry (Acts 18:18–28). (Bible Knowledge commentary)

4. The book of Acts records Paul’s missionary travels;

Acts 18 –

After being released from prison in Philippi, Paul made his way south to Corinth when he met Aquila and Priscilla who were tent makers. He got a job working alongside of them in order to

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support him and soon began preaching Christ in the synagogue. Soon Silas and Timothy arrived from Philippi and assisted him in the ministry. At some point Paul was ejected from the synagogue and began ministry in a nearby home.

Although we read that “many of the Corinthians believed” (18:8) it is clear that the ministry was quite difficult. Due to the level of opposition, Paul suffered from fear and the ministry was somewhat slow going. (18:9-10) this did not discourage Paul who remained in Corinth for 1-½ years pastoring the newfound church.

Paul finally departed from Corinth to Ephesus en route to Antioch and Jerusalem. In his absence Apollos made his way to Corinth and ministered to the church.

Acts 19 –

After his furlough came to an end Paul headed out on his third missionary journey. He departed from his local church, traveled through the region of Galatia where he strengthened the local churches and made his way to Ephesus, where he had longed to do ministry. He remained in Ephesus for 2 ½ years preaching the gospel and pastoring the church. Persecution ultimately drove Paul from Ephesus where he made his way back to Greece.

Acts 20:1-6

Here Luke records Paul’s travels back to Philippi, where he probably penned the letter of 2Corinthians. He later made his way to Corinth for the final time and remained for 3 months. Finally after making his way across the Aegean Sea to Troas he began his journey to Jerusalem where he was arrested and ultimately sent to Rome.

5. The Corinthian letters record the reason for Paul’s continuing to write to the church.

1Corinthians explains that the church had sent a letter to Paul asking a series of questions regarding the Christian life.

1 Corinthians 7 – they asked regarding how Christian men and women were to have relationships with one another. Paul spends a great deal of time discussing marriage

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1 Corinthians 8 – They asked regarding diet. Was it lawful for Christians to eat meat that had been offered to idols?

1 Corinthians 12 -14 – They asked concerning the use of spiritual gifts. Paul gives a thorough list and explanation of the gifts of the Spirit

1 Corinthians 15 – Paul explains clearly the doctrine of the resurrection.

When their letter reached Paul he also received a report regarding the conduct of the Christians and the condition of the church. 1 Corinthians is filled with both correction and rebuke.

1 Corinthians 1 – Paul rebukes them for the divisions that have been created over favorite teachers

1 Corinthians 3 – Paul rebukes them for failing to grow in Christ and continuing to behave like unbelievers

1 Corinthians 5 – Paul rebukes them for allowing sexual promiscuity to continue within the fellowship. They were allowing the sexual standards of the world to determine their lifestyle

1 Corinthians 6 – Paul rebukes them for failing to love and forgive one another and instead suing each other

After receiving further news of the conditions in Corinth, Paul wrote this second epistle. The letter includes further instruction regarding the issues addressed in 1 Corinthians as well as insight into additional problems the local church was facing.

The church seems to have dealt with the division and hyper Pentecostalism and even removed the man guilty of sexual sin. Paul writes to encourage them to reach out to the man now that it has become clear that he has repented.

Now it seems that they are facing new problems. False teachers have made their way into the church and are seeking to undermine both the teaching and the authority

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of Paul. As a result he spends a great deal of time defending his apostleship.

We find contrasting principles within scripture as it relates to defending ourselves. It seems as though David was careful not to defend himself when accusations were brought against him. We read in 2Sam16 that Shimei hurled accusations, as well as rocks and dirt at David who refused to defend himself while Paul went to great lengths to defend his apostleship. It seems that the common denominator in the equation was what was best for the kingdom. David defending himself would only add fuel to the fire and harm the kingdom, Paul failing to defend his position would allow these false teachers to lead people astray.

II. Precious Promises

1. The Bible is filled with great and precious promises that when properly applied will give us great comfort and help in our walk with Christ. 2Corinthians is filled with these precious promises. Here is a small sample

2 Corinthians 1:20

For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.

There is no force stronger than the promises of God. Paul declared that God will stand true and every man a liar and Jesus stated that heaven and earth will pass away before any of the promises of God fall short. We can have absolute confidence that God will remain true to all of His promises and warnings.

2 Corinthians 3:6

who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Jesus performed His ministry under the power of the Holy Spirit to set a pattern for all who want to serve in His kingdom. We are not sufficient in ourselves for the work that we have been called to, but through the gifts and power of the Spirit we will be made able ministers of the new covenant.

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2 Corinthians 4:3-4

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

This may not seem like such a great promise at first glance. It is declaring that those who have yet to come to Christ are being blinded by the devil. If however we understand his schemes we can effectively counterattack

The counterattack for the devil blinding eyes is to pray for the Father of Lights to open their eyes.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

The great promise of regeneration is that we are made new in Christ. All sin is removed at the cross and we can have a fresh new start. The new life must be lived in the Spirit and not controlled by the emotions as the past life had been

2 Corinthians 6:14

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

A precious promise is one that will reap great benefits when applied. There is perhaps no more important promise for a single Christian than the one tucked away here. Paul declares that we must not be unequally yoked with those who do not believe.

Unequally yoked is reference to harnessing beasts of burden for labor. If a large strong animal is yoked with a smaller and weaker animal it will be hurt and the work will be hindered. In dating it is critical that a Christian not become emotionally tangled with an unbeliever. The same could be said for those who are serving Christ, we must be careful to choose a partner who also wants to serve in a similar capacity.

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2 Corinthians 12:9

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

This is perhaps the key verse for the entire book. Paul is facing great difficulty and finds that no matter what he must endure the grace of God is sufficient to meet his needs.

III. Major Doctrines

1. Divine Comfort –

JSB put it this way;

"It was written with a quill dipped in tears, from the apostle's anguish of heart, and contains more of human pathos than any other of his letters. Yet there is a lovely rainbow shining through it all, for in his dire distress and deep disappointment he is discovering more than ever before that "the Father of mercies is the God of all comfort."

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and **God of all comfort**, ⁴ who **comforts** us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to **comfort** those who are in any trouble, with the **comfort** with which we ourselves are **comforted** by God."*

a. Comfort – "To draw near in order to provide encouragement and solace"

The Word translated "Comfort is used 11 times in 2Corinthians

A similar word is used 20 times in 2Corinthians

b. Paul explains the process of divine comfort

God is the God of comfort. All comfort comes from Him. When we are uncomfortable we should come to Him

i. Scripture is filled with examples of those who are suffering coming to Christ for help

The leper cried out for Jesus

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The man with the withered hand went where he
knew Jesus hung out
The Paralytic was carried to Christ

- ii. Paul explains that we can receive the same comfort from the risen Christ
 - 1. He comforts us no matter what the problem is
 - a. “Who comforts us in ALL our tribulation...”
 - 2. Tribulation – pressing together. When life seems to be placing you in a vice
 - a. Word is used 8 times in 2Corinthians
 - 3. The Word is very broad and is used to describe great persecution caused by those who oppose Christianity as well as the troubles we face in married life (1Corinthians 7:28)
 - 4. No matter what the problem is there is comfort in Christ
 - 5. His comfort is more than sufficient
- b. Our consolation ABOUND through Christ
- c. We are comfort with enough comfort to pass on to others
- d. Verse 4 explains the process
 - a. We are troubled, we receive comfort from the Lord, we look for others who are struggling and seek to provide the same comfort we have received from Christ
- e. Scripture explains how the process of receiving comfort works
 - 1. **Acts 9:31** –from the Holy Spirit
 - a. 5 times in his writings John refers to the Holy Spirit as the comforter

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- b. This is a reference not only to His work but also to His deity for the Rabbis referred to the Messiah Himself as “the comforter”

2. **Romans 15:4** – through the Scriptures
3. **2 Corinthians 1:11**- through the prayers of God’s people
4. **2 Corinthians 7:7** – through the ministry of others

- f. I can almost feel the response from within us.
 - i. “You don’t know how great my suffering is”
 - ii. To this Paul will respond by going into great detail to explain the difficulties he had faced. In fact Paul’s personal suffering is one of the main themes of this letter.

2 Corinthians 1:8-10

*For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were **burdened beyond measure, above strength**, so that we **despaired** even of life. ⁹ Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, ¹⁰ who **delivered** us from so great a death, and **does^a deliver** us; in whom we trust that He **will still deliver** us,*

Beyond – to throw beyond

Above – beyond

Despaired – to be utterly at loss, be utterly destitute of measures or resources, **to renounce all hope**, be in despair

Paul is declaring that he was going through some very dark trials and that he thought that perhaps he would not make it. The only thing that kept him going was the promises of God.

Delivered – same word used in Col 1:3 to speak of us being delivered out of darkness and placed into the kingdom of God. It is a complete deliverance

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It seems that Paul was still facing much of the emotional struggle but was confident that God would one day set him free.

2 Corinthians 2:12-13

*Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, ¹³ **I had no rest in my spirit**, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, **I departed** for Macedonia.*

Paul describes a scene where he arrived in the city of Troas with a wide open door to preach Christ, yet because of inner turmoil he did not take advantage of the opportunity but instead departed. The anguish he was facing was partly due to the absence of his friend and ministry partner Titus. It is possible that he was so worried about Titus that he could not consider doing ministry

In the midst of his anguish he declares

2 Corinthians 2:14

Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.

His intense suffering was met by the comfort of Christ and he was triumphant. This comfort was so great that he diffused the fragrance of Christ in every place

He goes into detail to discuss how the fragrance of Christ is diffused.

2 Corinthians 4:8-10

*We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—
¹⁰ always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.*

Paul contrasts the condition he is in with the comfort he received from the Lord

Hard pressed yet not crushed – to be in a vice but not crushed

Perplexed but not in Despair – to be without resources yet not left without resources

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Persecuted but not Forsaken – to be chased after but not left alone

Struck down yet not Destroyed – to be thrown to the ground but not dead

He explains that all this was done so that the life that is in Christ might become evident to others

2 Corinthians 6:4-10

But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, ⁵ in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; ⁶ by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, ⁷ by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, ⁸ by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

Paul lists a number of the things he faced because he chose to become a minister of the gospel, and the comfort he received through it all.

2 Corinthians 7:5-7

Indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. ⁶ Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, ⁷ and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.

Paul speaks of being troubled on every side. Lest we think he is speaking of left or right side, or of top or bottom side, he goes on to explain that he was speaking of **inside** and **outside**.

Outside were conflicts he faced because of life and ministry

Inside were fears that threatened his ability to press on in Christ

Life is filled with fear. We are afraid of what might happen or what might not happen. God wants to comfort us

What has been extremely helpful to me is Paul's exhortation to Timothy

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2 Timothy 1:7

God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Fear is not the primary motivator God uses to direct His children. We must fear sin and disobedience, but God does not fill us with fear to get us to act. He wants us to take our fears to Him and trust that He is greater than our fears. Fear will often keep us from acting in faith. True faith acts even when filled with trepidation

2 Corinthians 11:22-33

In an attempt to give his credentials for ministry, Paul gives a detailed list of many of the struggles he faced as a result of following and serving Christ. This list is not designed to discourage us from following or serving but to shed light on some of the experiences that may await those who do so. It is important to keep in mind that a life that is not surrendered to Christ does not promise to be any more comfortable or easy than one that is.

Paul received comfort from the Lord in the midst of his difficulties

2 Corinthians 12:9

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

1. The doctrine of New Testament giving

The Tithe – the Old Testament doctrine of giving was based upon the tithe. A word meaning tenth; a person was required by the law to give 1/10 of their income to the Lord for the service of the Lord.

The tithe predates the law and was seen in the gift that Abraham offered to Melchizedek

The Law explained the tithing principle requiring the people of God to give to the work of the God.

The tithe was offered to the priests and used for the work of ministry including supporting the priesthood.

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Since their life was given to the work of ministry the work of others would serve to provide for their needs.

According to Malachi those who failed to give were robbing from God

2. The New Testament doctrine is based not upon the law but upon grace

While it is the common practice of many Christians to give 1/10, the New Testament does not put the law of the tithe on the Christian but explains the need to give

Jesus spoke about giving as if it were a given. He said, "*when you give...*"

Much of what we know about giving comes from Paul's instruction to the churches regarding an offering that was being raised for the church in Jerusalem. Persecution and famine had created very difficult conditions for the believers in Jerusalem. Paul and others sought to gather a financial gift to help the church.

In Corinthians Paul spends a great deal of time explaining the way in which New Testament believers should give to the work of God

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

- Giving should be to the local church on the Lord's day
- Giving should not be manipulated. Paul did not want the collection to take place when he arrived because people could more easily be coerced.

2 Corinthians 8-9

- 8:1-4 – Using the Philippian church as an example, Paul speaks of those who gave generously not from their wealth but from their poverty.
 - o Jesus spoke of the same thing when He drew attention to the widow who gave her mites. From heaven's perspective she gave more than others because it cost her more.
 - o NT giving should be costly. We do not give because we see it as a way to get. We give

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because we see value in the furthering of the kingdom of Heaven.

- 8:9-15 – Using Christ as an example, Paul explains that those who made a commitment to give should carry out their commitment.
 - It seems that when they first heard of the need that they made a decision to give, but as time went on it became very difficult to let go of their cash
 - 8:12 – Paul explains that we can only give what we have. God is not interested in you promising to give to Him what you do not possess. If you do not have \$1000 don't promise \$1000. We are responsible to give what we have not what we do not have.

- 9:6-15 – Paul gives a list of very practical guidelines for giving
 - 6 – Giving is like farming; if we sow sparingly we reap sparingly. If we sow bountifully we reap bountifully. We must keep in mind that we are not promised a great reward in this life
 - 7 - We give as we purpose in our hearts. It is wise to sit before the Lord with your finances and determine what you will give
 - 7 – we are to give cheerfully not out of obligation but out of grace
 - 10 – God is able to multiply what is given to accomplish His purposes.

Doctrine of repentance

2 Corinthians 7:10

For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Doctrine of judgment

2 Corinthians 5:10

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.