

2 CORINTHIANS

Practical Guidance in
Our Confused Times

Writing of the Book

- Corinth was the largest city in first-century Greece, and well-known for two things:
 - an important commercial and trading center; and,
 - its extensive and lucrative trade in immorality.
- **There was a sizable Jewish presence in Corinth**, and it was at a Jewish synagogue that Paul began to preach Christ, teaming up with Aquila and Priscilla to minister there.

Writing of the Book

- Paul arrives in Corinth during his second missionary journey, preached in the synagogue, and after he wore out his welcome there, moved next door to a private home.
- As we read the Corinthian letters, it is also important to remember **they are one side of a two-sided conversation**, and not the only letters that Paul sent them.
- It is likely that Paul himself visited Corinth after Timothy's visit and was apparently rebuffed as well.

Writing of the Book

- Rather than press matters to the breaking point, he departed, following up his visit with a sternly worded letter delivered by Titus, the “painful letter.”
- Praise God, that reception was positive, and chapter 1-9 of 2 Corinthians reflect Paul’s joy that the **Corinthians seem to have been turning back to God.**
- The tone of the letter shifts in chapter 10, however.

Writing of the Book

- During the writing he learned of new difficulties in the Corinthian church brought on by **dangerous false teachers**, which would explain **the different tone and urgent warnings**.
- In sum, Paul writes this letter to **praise the Corinthians for their progress**, to warn them of new threats, and to prepare them for a third visit by Paul, where he **settles the issues with the false teachers**, hopefully without being too harsh, and **take charge of the financial gifts** for the Christians in Judea and Jerusalem.

Purpose and Message

- For all of the different topics that 2 Corinthians addresses, there is a consistent theme running throughout: **the way of glory is the way of the cross.**
- Unfortunately, there is **a very common misunderstanding** of the gospel we could call the “way of glory,” which the Corinthians seem to have adopted.
 - a way of viewing the gospel primarily as a means to self-betterment, self-improvement, the way to success and power and popularity and acceptance by others.

Purpose and Message

- The gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul's gospel, is a different gospel.
- The center of the gospel is the **cross**, and **in service to Christ**, the way to true glory, **glory that elevates God** not ourselves, is the **way of the cross**, *which is often suffering and death*.
- **Following Jesus means saying "no" to self**, because the way to find one's life is to lose it.
- The Corinthians, or at least their leaders, wanted no part of this, so 2 Corinthians challenges their self-serving understanding of the gospel and **exhorts them to examine themselves to see whether they are really in the faith at all**.

Outline of 2 Corinthians

- I. Introduction (1:1-11)
- II. Paul's explanation of his conduct in recent matters (1:12-2:13)
- III. Paul's reflection upon his ministry (2:14-5:21)
- IV. Paul's appeal to the Corinthians (6:1-13:10)

Major Themes

Apostolic Authority

- Paul's stress on the **gospel of the cross** is the content of his message.
- But 2 Corinthians also deals with the **authority of his message**.
 - In other words, **who speaks for God?**
 - **Who gets to determine the gospel?**
- Paul is not commending himself, however, but working to ensure the salvation of those who would hear him, because they need **the true gospel of Jesus Christ, the one that Jesus passed on to the apostles he chose** and not to others.

Major Themes

Apostolic Authority *(continued)*

- Today, many believers and some church leaders do the same thing, **dismissing, discounting, rejecting, redefining, or even ridiculing the truth and doctrine of the Christian faith.**
- These have always been under fire, and Paul reminds us **that even the “church” can lose its appetite for truth, which is biblical teaching and practice.** This is why novel interpretations of the gospel and heresies have been part of church history up to the present hour.

Major Themes

The Jerusalem Collection

- The financial assistance from Gentile churches to the Jewish churches in Palestine was **one of the crown jewels of Paul's ministry**.
- Jew-Gentile animosity **was at least as active and deadly as any racial or ethnic tensions existing in the world today**.
- It would have been so much easier for Paul's ministry in Gentile areas for him **to cater to their racial bias against Jews**, or at the very **least ignore it**, especially considering how he was so consistently snubbed and opposed by Jewish opponents, as were believers in the churches he ministered to.

Major Themes

The Jerusalem Collection *(continued)*

- Instead, Paul prayed and lobbied for churches from Macedonia and Achaia to Asia to set aside money regularly for Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.
- Think of everything modeled here: doing good to those who persecute you, the oneness of Jew and Gentile in Christ, the Gentiles being brought into the promises to Israel so that they anticipate the kingdom together, the importance of sacrificial giving to help others.
- Paul's conviction was always that such kindness would help melt hardened Jewish hearts to receive Jesus as their Messiah.