

# **A Study of 2nd Corinthians**

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## Introduction

(Taken from *ESV Study Bible*)

### Author and Title

The apostle Paul is the undisputed author of 2 Corinthians. Although some scholars have questioned whether Paul wrote 6:14–7:1, due to its unique vocabulary and subject matter, these differences are more likely due to the fact that in this passage Paul is quoting a collage of Scripture. Second Corinthians is actually the fourth letter that Paul sent to the church he founded in Corinth (Acts 18:1–17), together with the house churches “in the whole [province] of Achaia,” of which Corinth was the capital (2 Cor. 1:1; 11:10; cf. Rom. 16:5, 23; 1 Cor. 16:15, 19). The four letters are (1) the previous letter mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9; (2) our 1 Corinthians; (3) the tearful, severe letter mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:3–4; and (4) our 2 Corinthians.

### Date

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia around A.D. 55/56, a year or so after writing 1 Corinthians and a year before he wrote his letter to the Romans from Corinth (Acts 20:2–3).

### Theme

The central theme of 2 Corinthians is the relationship between suffering and the power of the Spirit in Paul’s apostolic life, ministry, and message. In addition to calling into question Paul’s motives in organizing a collection for believers in Judea (8:20–21; cf. 2:17; 12:14–18) and questioning his personal courage (10:10–11; 11:21), Paul’s opponents had argued that Paul suffered too much to be a Spirit-filled apostle of the risen Christ. Paul argues that his weakness as an apostle is the very means by which believers are comforted (1:3–11) and God in Christ is made known in the world (2:14–17; 4:7–12; 6:3–10; 11:23b–33). Paul’s sufferings embody the cross of Christ, while his endurance amid adversity, with thanksgiving and contentment, manifests the resurrection power of the Spirit (12:7–10). Paul’s suffering as an apostle is thus the very means God uses to reveal his glory (1:3–4, 11, 20; 4:15; 9:11–15; 10:17–18).

Paul therefore sees a close tie between the Corinthians’ acceptance of his apostleship and the genuineness of their faith. To reject Paul and his proclamation is to

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reject Christ himself, since Paul's message, ministry, and manner of life are one. This explains why 2 Corinthians is the most personal of all of Paul's letters, filled with deep emotion.

### **Purpose, Occasion, and Background**

Second Corinthians is a response to a complicated history between Paul and the Corinthian church, which must be reconstructed from the evidence available today. Originally, Paul had planned to travel from Ephesus through Macedonia to Corinth on his way back to Jerusalem to deliver the money he had collected for the believers in Judea (1 Cor. 16:5–9). In the meantime, he sent Timothy to visit the Corinthians on his behalf (Acts 19:22; 1 Cor. 16:10–11). When Timothy arrived in Corinth, he found that the church was in turmoil, most likely in response to the arrival of Paul's opponents from the east. When Paul learned of this he decided to proceed immediately to Corinth to resolve the issues first, then travel on to Macedonia before returning to Corinth for a second visit on his way to Jerusalem (the proposed "second experience of grace" of 2 Cor. 1:15).

Paul's visit, however, turned out to be very "painful" as a result of the church's open rebellion against him (2:1, 5–8; 7:8–13; 11:4). At that time, Paul decided it was best to suffer humiliation and leave, without retaliating, in order to extend mercy to the Corinthians (1:23–24). Once back in Ephesus, Paul sent Titus back to Corinth with a tearful and severe letter (now lost), warning the church of God's judgment if they did not repent (2:3–4; 7:8–16).

To Paul's great joy, the majority of the Corinthians did repent, which Paul discovered when he met Titus in Macedonia (7:5–16). But there was still a rebellious minority who, under the influence of Paul's opponents (11:12–21), continued to reject Paul and his gospel. In response, and as yet another act of mercy, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia in anticipation of his third, impending visit to Corinth before going on to Jerusalem (12:14; 13:1).

The mixed nature of the church in Corinth, not to mention the opponents whom Paul addresses indirectly throughout the letter, explains the complex nature of 2 Corinthians and its sometimes sudden shifts in focus and tone. This has led some scholars to suggest that it is a compilation of as many as six fragments. There is no evidence, however, that 2 Corinthians ever contained less than or more than its present content, or that it was arranged in a different order.

Paul's letter is an extended defense of the legitimacy of his apostolic ministry and its implications. It is intended to accomplish three overlapping purposes: (1) to strengthen the faithful majority and the purity of the church (primarily chs. 1–7); (2) to complete the collection as the expression of their repentance (primarily chs. 8–9); and (3) to offer the rebellious minority one more chance to repent before Paul returns to judge those still rejecting him and his message (primarily chs. 10–13). Thus, chapters 1–

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7 focus primarily on the past track record of Paul's ministry, chapters 8–9 on the present responsibility of the repentant, and chapters 10–13 on the future judgment of those still in rebellion against the gospel.

### Outline

- I. Paul's Defense of His Legitimacy as an Apostle (1:1–7:16)
  - A. Salutation (1:1–2)
  - B. Introduction to the letter (1:3–11)
  - C. Paul's boast (1:12–2:17)
    1. The content of Paul's boast (1:12–14)
    2. The reason for Paul's first change of plans (1:15–22)
    3. The reason for Paul's second change of plans (1:23–2:4)
    4. The application of Paul's example to the Corinthians (2:5–11)
    5. Paul's visit to Troas and Macedonia (2:12–17)
  - D. Paul's ministry of the new covenant as a ministry of the Spirit (3:1–18)
    1. The reality of the Spirit in Paul's ministry (3:1–6)
    2. Paul's interpretation of Exodus 32–34 (3:7–11)
    3. Paul's application of Exodus 32–34 to his own situation (3:12–18)
  - E. Paul's encouragement in his ministry (4:1–6:13)
    1. The new covenant dawning of the new creation (4:1–6)
    2. The new covenant power of the resurrection (4:7–18)
    3. The new covenant motivation for the life of faith (5:1–10)
    4. The new covenant ministry of reconciliation (5:11–6:2)
    5. The new covenant support for the legitimacy of Paul's ministry (6:3–13)
  - F. Paul's call for church discipline as an expression of repentance (6:14–7:1)
  - G. Paul's joy over the repentant Corinthians (7:2–16)
- II. Paul's Appeal Regarding the Collection (8:1–9:15)
  - A. The collection as the grace of God (8:1–15)
  - B. The commendation of Titus and the brothers (8:16–9:5)
  - C. Generosity, joy, and the glory of God (9:6–15)
- III. Paul's Appeal to the Rebellious Minority in Corinth (10:1–13:10)
  - A. Paul's defense of his humility as an apostle (10:1–11)
  - B. Paul's defense of his authority as an apostle (10:12–18)
  - C. Paul's defense of his boasting like a fool (11:1–21a)
  - D. Paul's boast in his service and suffering (11:21b–33)
  - E. Paul's boast in his heavenly vision and subsequent weakness (12:1–13)
  - F. Paul's final defense and appeal to the rebellious (12:14–13:10)
- IV. Closing Greetings (13:11–14)

## Chapter One

1. Who appointed Paul an apostle and why is this important?
2. What does Paul mean when he uses the term "affliction" in verse 4?
3. How does God's comfort help us to comfort others?
4. Why does Paul describe his afflictions in such detail in verses 8-10?
5. How does Paul defend his integrity and sincerity in his dealings with the Corinthians in verses 12-14?
6. What does Paul mean by "the day of our Lord Jesus" in verse 14?
7. In the context of discussing his travel plans, why did Paul feel it necessary to defend himself in vv.17-18?
8. What is the "seal of ownership" mentioned in verse 22?
9. What do we learn about the character of God from 2nd Corinthians one?

## Chapter Two

1. Why did Paul delay his visit to the Corinthians?
2. What was the situation of the offender Paul mentions and how was he dealt with?
3. How had this brother reacted to the church's discipline and now what did Paul urge them to do?
4. Why did Paul leave Troas despite the promising opportunity there?
5. What is the significance of the phrase "the aroma of Christ" in verse 15?
6. How does Paul contrast those who are perishing with those who are being saved?
7. What is Paul's view towards his apostolic ministry compared to some?
8. How does Paul describe the Corinthians' role in his ministry?

## Chapter Three

1. How does Paul compare and contrast the old covenant with the new covenant in this chapter?
2. What does Paul mean the Corinthians were a letter of recommendation for him?
3. Why did Paul refer to the old covenant as the "ministry of death"?
4. What is Paul's point regarding the "glory" of the old covenant vs. the new?
5. What is the significance of the veil that Moses wore, according to Paul?
6. How does Paul develop this idea about the veil?
7. How does Paul describe the role of the Spirit in the new covenant?
8. What does Paul mean by the phrase "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" in verse 17?
9. What is happening to Christians who are part of the new, more glorious covenant?

## Chapter Four

1. How did Paul and his fellow workers execute the task of preaching?
2. Why do some people not understand or believe the gospel?
3. What application can we make from verse 5?
4. What is Paul's point in verse 7?
5. How does Paul explain the suffering that he and his fellow workers endure?
6. How did Paul manage not to grow discouraged as a result of his sufferings?
7. According to Paul, what is the key to maintaining faith while suffering?
8. To what is the eye of faith always looking?
9. What practical applications can we draw from this chapter?



## Chapter Five

1. How does Paul describe our earthly bodies and our heavenly dwelling?
2. What is the significance of being clothed with our heavenly dwelling?
3. What does Paul mean "we walk by faith and not by sight"?
4. Why should it be our aim to please God?
5. What does Paul hope the Corinthians will do for him in response to his critics?
6. How does Paul describe the love of Christ and its impact on believers?
7. What is the "new creation" that Paul talks about?
8. What is the ministry of reconciliation that Paul mentions?
9. What lesson(s) should we take away from this chapter?

## Chapter Six

1. What does Paul mean by "working together with God" in verse one?
2. What is the significance of the phrase "now is the day of salvation" in verse two?
3. How does Paul defend his ministry in verses three to ten?
4. What does Paul's description of his hardships in verses four to ten indicate about his heart?
5. How does Paul's appeal to the Corinthians in verse 13 reflect his pastoral concern for them?
6. What does Paul mean by "unequally yoked" in verse 14?
7. What is the connection between verses 16 and 17, and how does it relate to the preceding verses?
8. What does Paul mean by "the temple of the living God" in verse 16?
9. What are some practical applications from this chapter for Christians today?

## Chapter Seven

1. What appeal does Paul make to the Corinthians?
2. What is the significance of the phrase "filthiness of the flesh and spirit"?
3. What is the connection Paul makes between fear and holiness?
4. Despite their strained relationship, how does Paul feel towards them?
5. How did the arrival of Titus allay Paul's concerns?
6. Why was Paul glad that he wrote his "painful letter"? (See 2:1-4)
7. What does Paul mean by "godly sorrow" and how is it different from worldly sorrow?
8. What did the manner in which the Corinthians handled the situation reveal about them and why did this please Paul?
9. What else about Titus' visit to Corinth brought comfort to Paul?

## Chapter Eight

1. Why is Paul eager to share the details of the Macedonian brethren's generosity?
2. What was so remarkable about their giving?
3. To whom had they entrusted themselves to? What can we learn from their example?
4. What would fulfilling their pledge to give say about the Corinthians' love?
5. How should Jesus' sacrifice influence our giving?
6. What is the Corinthians' responsibility in regards to giving?
7. What are the blessings promised to those who give generously?
8. What is the purpose of Paul sending Titus to the Corinthian church along with the other brothers?
9. How does Paul maintain transparency and avoid suspicion in carrying out this charitable work?

## Chapter Nine

1. What does Paul not want to happen when his party arrives? Why is this a concern?
2. What is the significance of the phrase "God loves a cheerful giver"?
3. What principles should guide us in giving that Paul articulates in vv.6-9?
4. What promise do we have from God that should eliminate any reluctance to be generous (vv.10-11)
5. How would this charitable work for the needy saints glorify God?
6. How would their gift draw them closer to their Jewish brethren?
7. What applications can we make from this chapter?

## Chapter Ten

1. Why does Paul abruptly change his tone at the beginning of this chapter?
2. What were Paul's opponents saying about him that he hoped he would not have to prove to them otherwise?
3. What is the significance of the phrase "the weapons of our warfare"?
4. What is the meaning of the phrase "casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God"?
5. What does Paul mean by "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"?
6. How does Paul defend his apostleship in this chapter?
7. What did Paul hope his influence among the Corinthians would allow him to do?
8. What do we learn about how to boast properly?
9. What other applications can we draw from this chapter?

## Chapter Eleven

1. What does Paul mean that he feels a "divine jealousy" for them?
2. What vulnerabilities did they have that Paul points out in verse 4?
3. Who is Paul referring to when he talks about the "super-apostles"? Why did they feel superior to him?
4. What hadn't Paul done that they offered as "proof" that their judgment of him was correct?
5. Why did Paul regard them as false apostles?
6. What does Paul mean when he says he is speaking as a "fool"?
7. What were some things these "super-apostles" boasted about that Paul was able to boast about as well?
8. Why does Paul go over his many afflictions and sufferings?
9. What lessons can we draw from this chapter?

## Chapter Twelve

1. Who is Paul speaking about in v.2 and how do we know?
2. What does Paul mean by the "third heaven"?
3. What is the meaning of the "thorn in the flesh" that Paul talks about?
4. What is the significance of God's response to Paul's prayer to remove the thorn in the flesh?
5. What is the message behind Paul's statement that "power is made perfect in weakness"?
6. How does Paul's experience of weakness and strength relate to our own experiences as believers?
7. Despite not taking support from them, how had Paul treated them equally to all the other churches?
8. What was Paul concerned about the nature of his planned third visit to them might be?



## Chapter Thirteen

1. What warning does Paul give to them regarding when he comes?
2. What does Paul mean by his statement "test yourselves" in verse 5?
3. What was Paul's purpose in writing this letter according to v.10?
4. How did Paul view the purpose of his apostolic authority?
5. What is the significance of Paul's reference to the Godhead in verse 14?
6. How do verses 11-14 relate to the overall theme of Second Corinthians?
7. What practical applications can we draw from Second Corinthians chapter thirteen for our lives today?