

Introduction to 2 Corinthians

I. History

- A. Paul's (unrecorded) painful visit to Corinth from Ephesus (2:1; cf. 12:14; 13:1)
 - 1. Probably due to a distressing report received in Ephesus, about opponents of Paul in Corinth;
 - 2. Paul made a trip to Corinth but found things worse than he thought. Things were so out of hand that he left the problem unsolved and went to Macedonia to recoup, promising to return to Corinth before going East again (1:15-16).
 - 3. However, following his better judgment, he did not revisit Corinth before returning to Ephesus. His withdrawal from Corinth made him look weak to his opponents (10:10) and his change of travel plans made him seem prone to vacillate (1:17-18, 23)
- B. Paul's (now lost) "sorrowful letter" (2:3-4; 7:8, 12)
 - 1. Sent from Ephesus
 - 2. Sent by the hand of Titus
 - 3. Urging severe church discipline
- C. Paul's expedition to Macedonia to meet Titus
 - 1. Paul awaited the report from Titus concerning Corinth's response to his letter.
 - 2. Paul may have prearranged to rendezvous with Titus in Troas, because Paul went there, and, finding an open door for preaching, used the opportunity (2:12).
 - 3. When Titus did not arrive, as expected, Paul began to worry about him, and left Troas for Macedonia—apparently to intercept Titus en route, if possible (2:13)
 - 4. In Macedonia (probably Philippi) Paul was under great strain, from external trials and internal anxieties about the safety of Titus and of the church (7:5)
 - 5. Titus finally arrived, bearing good news of the church's loyalty to Paul and their decisive action against his principle opponent (7:6-7)
- D. From Macedonia, Paul penned, at least, chapters 1-9 (There is some question about the timing of chapters 10-13). The letter was apparently carried by Titus, accompanied by two other brothers (8:16-18, 22).

II. Message of the Letter

- A. Expression of relief and explanation of his earlier actions (1:15-18, 23 / 2:1-4, 12-13 / 7:5-12, 16)
- B. Urging to forgive and restore the offender (2:5-11)
- C. Exhortation to be ready with their offering for the poor Judean Christians (chs.8-9)
- D. Defense of his discipleship against opponents (chs.10-13)

III. Three sections of the letter

1. Relief and recollection of recent crisis (chs.1-7)
 - a. Narration discontinued at 2:13 and resumed at 7:5
 - b. First (seemingly) unrelated parenthesis (2:14—7:4) about suffering, weakness and glory
 - c. Second (internal) parenthesis (6:14—7:1) about holiness and separation
2. The matter of the collection (chs.8-9)
3. The crisis of opponents to Paul (chs.10-13) when was this? A new crisis, or an older one?

Excursus: Paul's opponents in Corinth

- A. Corinthian Christians who preferred Apollos' or Peter's teaching to that of Paul, and tended separate to favor them against Paul (1 Cor.1:12; 3:4).
- B. Some who were "puffed up"—mouthy but powerless (1 Cor.4:18-21)
- C. Libertines, who say "All things are lawful" (1 Cor.6:12; 10:23)—one notable example (1 Cor.5:1)
- D. The (self-styled?) "superior apostles"(2 Cor.11:5; 12:11)—actually *false* apostles (2 Cor.11:13)
 1. *Their ministries:*
 - a. Supported by letters of recommendation from Jerusalem? (2 Cor.3:1?)
 - b. Jewish descent (2 Cor.11:22)
 - c. Possibly appealing to connections with Peter (1 Cor.1:12)
 - d. Probably undermining Paul's New Covenant emphasis by appeal to the glory of the Old Covenant (2 Cor.3:4-18)
 - e. They preached a different gospel than what Paul preached (2 Cor.11:4)
 - f. Authoritarian in style, they brought Christians into bondage (2 Cor.11:20)
 2. *Their criticisms of Paul:*
 - a. He carried no letters of commendation (2 Cor.3:1)
 - b. He was bold in his letters, but weak and contemptible in person (2 Cor.10:1, 10)
 - c. He was not a good speaker (2 Cor.11:6)
 - d. By not charging for his ministry, he sought to gain confidence for a bigger con job (2 Cor.11:7; 12:16-17)

IV. Paul's theology of personal suffering

- A. The comfort of God
 1. In the absence of relief (1:3-5)
 2. In the form of relief (7:6)
 3. Ministering comfort to others (1:4, 6 / 2:7)
 4. Being comforted by someone else's being comforted (7:7, 13)
- B. The enabling of grace
 1. Grace as "sufficiency" (3:5-6 / 9:8 / 12:9)
 2. General enablement for Christian living (1:12 / 8:1)
 3. Specific grace in suffering (12:9)
- C. The advantage of weakness
 1. No trusting in the flesh (1:8-9)
 2. No glorying in the flesh (10:17)
 3. No resistance to God's working (4:7 / 12:9-10)
 4. Likeness of Christ (glory)—(4:8-11, 16-18)