



My Drift

Title: Bible – Books of 1 and 2 Corinthians

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Date: 31 Dec 2024

Article Number: (485-2024-44)



Summary

Here is a short summary of 1 Corinthians: 1 Corinthians was written to a young and struggling church in the city of Corinth. Paul had heard reports of divisions in the church and received a letter from the church asking all sorts of questions. The church was riddled with problems and 1 Corinthians sought to address these issues one after the other.

At the heart of these specific topics that were pertinent to the Corinthian congregation was their identity as the people of the triune (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) God. They needed to learn to embody the wisdom of God revealed in the cross of the Messiah. And they needed to learn to embody the holiness that is only appropriate to being the temple of God's Spirit.

These two great truths about their identity would help them deal with their divisions, sexual immorality, disorder in corporate worship, and confusion about the future resurrection.

Backstory to 1 Corinthians

It's the AD mid-50's and there's a small and struggling church in the city of Corinth. The church is just a few years old. Paul had started it in AD 51, spending 18 months in the city laboring to establish a solid body of Christ there.



Paul's labor was deliberate and focused. Corinth was one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire, booming with growth and economic opportunity. It commanded two harbors on the west and the east, and tradesmen and travelers frequented the city. A solid church there could influence hundreds, if not thousands, for the sake of Christ.

So, Paul stationed himself in Corinth on his second missionary journey in the year AD 51. When Paul first came to Corinth, he stayed and worked with Aquilla and Priscilla in their leather and tent shop. Working for his own room and board was a regular practice for Paul, but in due course it caused issues with some of the Corinthians. Manual labor like that lowered his honor and status, and seemed beneath the dignity of someone who was supposedly an apostle of King Jesus. If he needed financial help, why not just accept some wealthy person's patronage as everyone else did?

But the patronage had its own entanglements that Paul saw the problems of, so he worked for his own keep until Timothy and Silas came down from Macedonia and brought an offering from the church there which allowed Paul to give himself more full-time to preaching and ministry. And so Paul settled in for 18 months laboring to establish the church.

A few years after his time in the city, Paul writes 1 Corinthians to address pressing questions and issues that were threatening the church in Corinth. The church members thought of themselves as super spiritual, but they were actually quite spiritually immature. And as a result, they were being shaped much more by the values of the city around them than by the kingdom of Jesus.

When Paul writes the letter, he is in Ephesus, just across the Aegean Sea from Corinth, near enough to have received communication concerning the church there. He's heard from some of Chloe's people (probably a group of people from Chloe's household in Corinth) about some of the problems in the church, especially the factionalism and divisions (1:11). He's also received a letter from the Corinthians themselves asking some questions about some of the issues causing them problems (7:1).

And there were many problems:

- There were divisions along the lines of various leaders and it seems to have to do with matters of status and honor and who's really wise and spiritual.
- There were issues related to sexuality and marriage.
- There were questions about meat offered to idols and idol banquets which were impacting people's faith.
- There were matters of corporate worship, pertaining to proper attire in worship, the Lord's Supper, and spiritual gifts.
- There was even confusion about the resurrection from the dead!

The church was pretty much a mess!

And even though we call this letter 1 Corinthians, it's not Paul's first letter to them. He's already written them one letter dealing with a problem or two, especially with an "immoral brother," but they had apparently misunderstood that letter.

So Paul sets out to write another letter, the one we call 1 Corinthians, and he intends to address their questions and problems, not just for their benefit but also for the benefit of all the churches.



Outline of 1 Corinthians

As mentioned above, Paul received his information about the problems in the church from two main sources: Chloe's people (1:11) and a letter (7:1). Because of this, many organize the contents of the letter according to those sources: 1) chapters 1-6, responding to a report from Chloe's people, 2) chapters 7-16, responding to the questions in the letter.

Organizing it that way, however, doesn't really help us keep track of the contents of the letter because it doesn't describe or summarize the topics of those sections. Not only that, but it's pretty clear that Paul intermixes material from both sources at times throughout the letter. So, the best to organize the letter according to main topics, which gives us a much clearer overview.

Chapters 1-4: Divisions, Wisdom, and the Cross

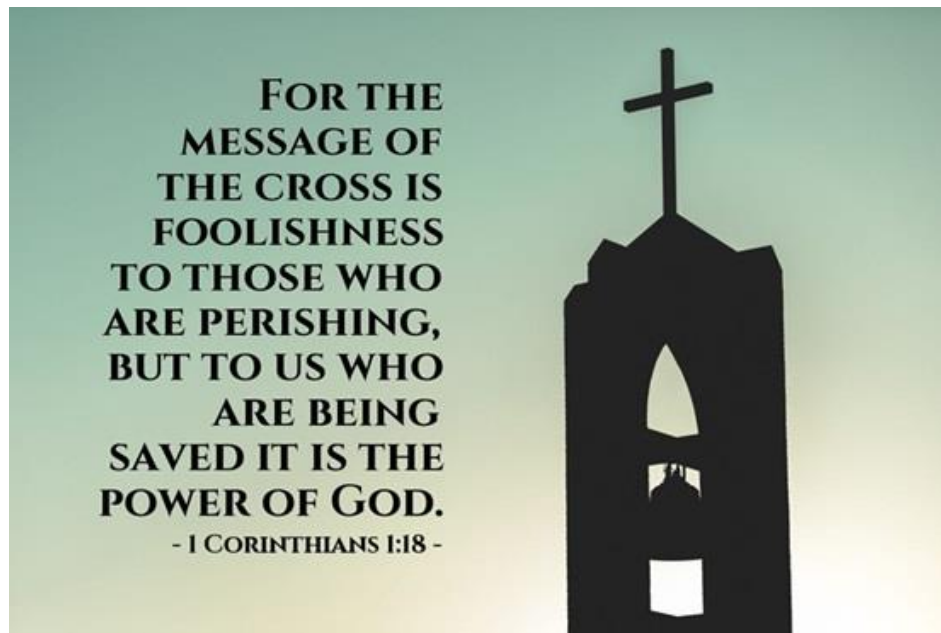
The first major section of the letter focuses on the divisions that are plaguing the church in Corinth. These divisions are being fueled by the "wisdom" of this world—the values, aims, and ambitions of Corinth itself. God's wisdom subverts all of that, and the pattern of God's wisdom takes the shape of the cross.

So the letter begins in 1:1-9 with a standard greeting and thanksgiving, but Paul doesn't thank God for the Corinthians directly. Instead, he thanks God for his grace that has enriched them and his faithfulness that will establish them.

Then he turns to the first major issue in the church that he needs to address: divisions. In 1:10-17, Paul asserts that there must not be any divisions based on

worldly wisdom around various leaders in the church. God's wisdom is completely different from worldly wisdom, and at the heart of God's wisdom is the message of the cross. That message may be considered foolish by the wisdom of the world, but it imparts God's power (1:18-2:5).

In fact, Paul challenges the Corinthians to acknowledge that most of those who made up the church in Corinth weren't wise or great or powerful by the world's standards, and that's because God in his wisdom intends to subvert the so-called wisdom of this world.



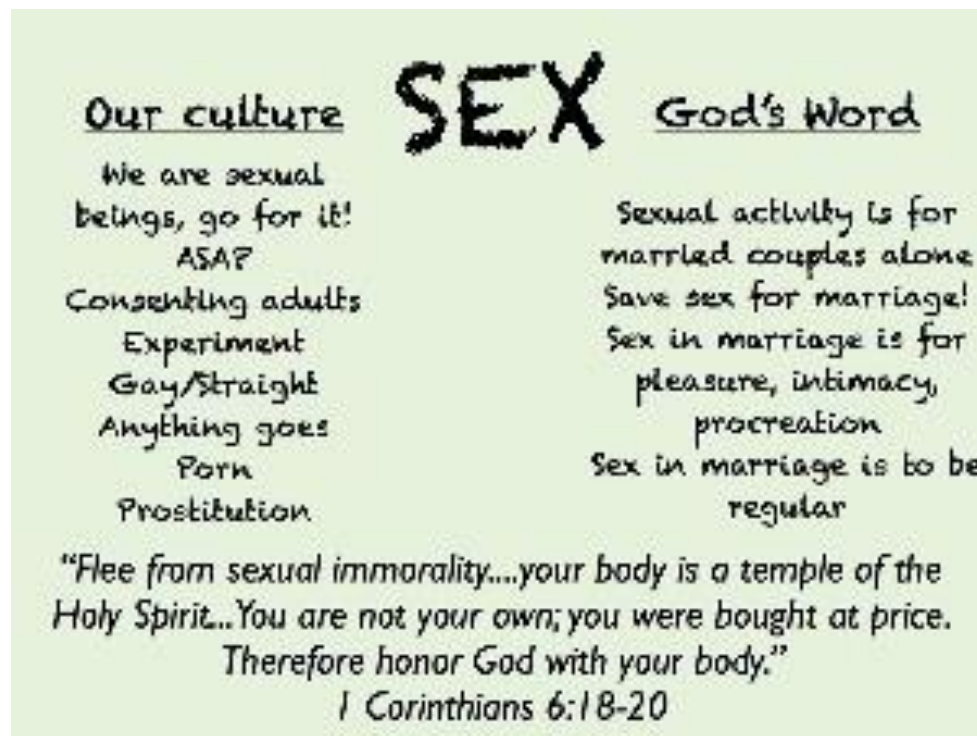
In 2:6-16, Paul clarifies that even though the message of the cross is viewed as foolish by the standards of the world, it actually reveals the wisdom of God. Thus, Paul's preaching does in fact impart wisdom, even wisdom revealed by the Spirit of God. Those who are mature, that is, those who live by the Spirit, will recognize the message about Jesus and the cross as God's wisdom (3:1-23). If anyone does not recognize it as such, then they aren't spiritual or mature.

In 4:1-16, all of this material about wisdom and the cross is applied to the issue of leadership and status. It's the worldly values surrounding those two things that are causing many of the divisions in the church. So, in view of the cross, God's wisdom is that status and leadership means being self-emptying servants of Christ. In chapter 4, Paul uses himself and his team as examples of this kind of self-giving service. He expresses hope that they will follow his example so that when he comes he won't have to use a "rod" of discipline (4:17-20).

Chapters 5-7: Immorality, Sexuality, and Marriage

As you begin chapter 5, you are beginning the next major section of the letter. All the issues addressed in chapters 5-7 involve sexuality and marriage, except one (6:1-11). It appears there was some confusion about holiness, marriage, and sex in the church at Corinth. Some in the church seemed to have the idea that they could have sex with whomever since it didn't affect their spiritual life. Others had the opposite view that sex even in marriage taints their holiness. Paul thus provides a Christian perspective on sex and marriage.

In 5:1-13, Paul addresses a specific behavioral issue facing the church in Corinth. There is a man who is sleeping with his stepmom! Paul is aghast and urges them to remove the man from among them for the purity of the community and hopefully the man will repent, too.



6:1-11 discusses the one topic that isn't directly related to sexuality and marriage in this section, but it is loosely connected to the end of chapter 5. In 5:11 Paul lists the kinds of people the church should discipline, and he restates that list in 6:9-10, tying the two paragraphs together. The specific issue in 6:1-11 is people in the church suing other people in the church. In short, Paul says to quit taking their fellow Christians to court and sort the matters out among themselves, since they have been called by God to judge matters like this.

In 6:12-20, Paul returns to the issue of sexuality and addresses some in the church who are still visiting prostitutes. Paul's instructions are clear: flee immorality and stop going to prostitutes.

Then chapter 7 addresses several topics related to sexuality and marriage. First, Paul tells married couples to stop withholding sex from each other (7:1-9). Then in 7:10-24, he addresses people who have become believers but their spouses have not. He tells them to stay married to their unbelieving spouse unless the unbelieving spouse chooses to leave the marriage. Finally in 7:25-40, Paul gives instructions about marriage for young betrothed people, explaining that there are advantages to choosing to remain unmarried but that getting married isn't a sin.

Chapters 8-10: Freedom and Meat Offered to Idols

Chapter 8 begins a new topic that is also stirring up trouble in the church: meat offered to idols and how Christian freedom relates to that. Paul states in 8:1-13 that although they have freedom to eat meat, if eating it causes their fellow Christians to stumble, they should not eat meat.



On the surface, 9:1-27 seems like a different subject altogether. But Paul returns to the topic of meat offered to idols in chapter 10, so we know Paul is still addressing that subject. So how does chapter 9 fit in? Paul once again

provides his own example as a pattern for the Corinthians (Paul even ends this whole section in 11:1 by calling the Corinthians to imitate him). In ministry, Paul limited his freedom based on what was best for others and the Corinthians should imitate this pattern.

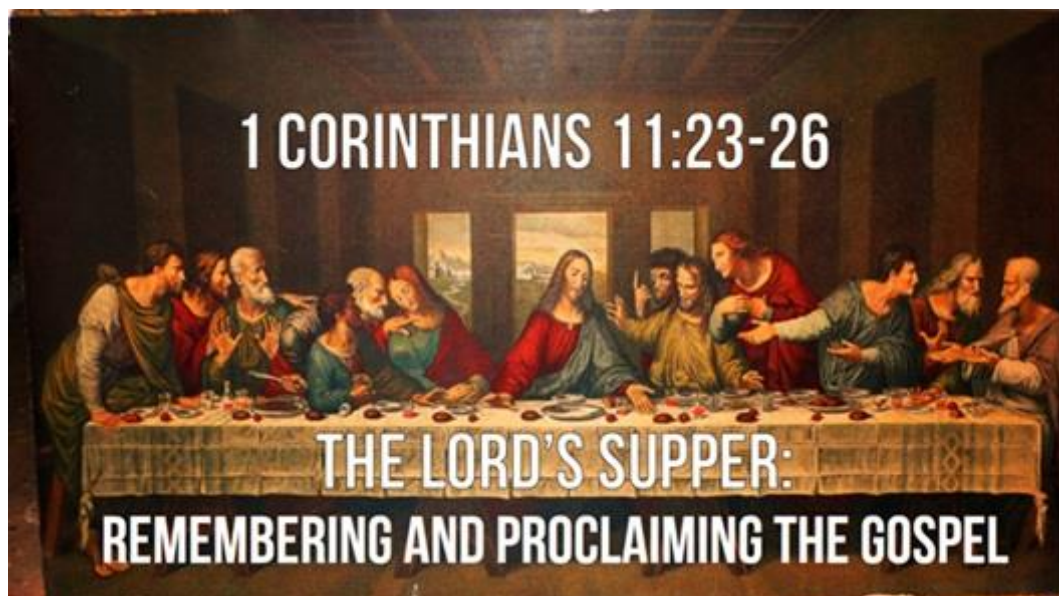
Next Paul uses the example of Israel during the Exodus (10:1-13). They experienced some amazing displays of God's power, but those experiences did not eliminate the need for loyal obedience to God. The same is true for the Corinthians. They must be loyal to God.

So in 10:14-11:1, Paul calls the Corinthians to flee idolatry. That means that even though they have freedom regarding meat, they should not eat in temple dining rooms, and they should avoid eating idol meat when they learn that's what is being served.

Chapters 11-14: Issues of Order in Christian Worship

The Corinthians were also dealing with several kinds of disorder in their corporate church gatherings. So Paul addresses those issues next.

In 11:2-16, he addresses a very specific issue about head coverings for those praying and prophesying in the church service. In keeping with their culture's gender expressions, he instructs that when someone prays or prophesies in church, men should keep their head uncovered and women should wear a head covering.



There was also a problem with the way they were celebrating the Lord's Supper and the meal that went with it. The more well-to-do people in church were feasting and the poorer members of the church were going hungry. So in 11:17-34, Paul tells them that this division between the haves and have nots in their communal meal was a violation of the very spirit of the Lord's Supper, and it must stop. It's the kind of activity that brings judgment upon them.

There was also a major problem involving the spiritual gifts in the church gathering, especially regarding tongues-speaking and prophecy. Paul tackles this subject in chapters 12-14.

In 12:1-31, Paul makes clear that, in the body of Christ, unity in diversity is a God-designed necessity. Not everyone has the same gift. Not one gift is superior to the others. All gifts are necessary to forming a complete body.

13:1-13 points out that spiritual gifts (including the more visible speaking gifts like tongues and prophecy) are not the mark of spirituality. Love is the supreme measure of spiritual maturity.

Then in chapter 14, Paul gives some specific guidelines for using the gifts of tongues and prophecy in the church service. It appears that some in the Corinthian congregation were claiming that tongues-speaking was the greatest (and most spiritual) gift. So in 14:1-19, Paul explains that prophecy is superior to tongues because it is understandable to everybody in the gathering. Paul is also concerned that everything be done in an orderly fashion, so in 14:20-40, Paul gives specific guidelines for order in the practice of prophecy and tongues when the whole church gathers.

Chapter 15: The Resurrection



The Corinthian church is so theologically confused that there was even some confusion about the resurrection of the dead, with some even denying it. So, in 15:1-34, Paul contends that the resurrection is central to Christian faith and living, and is based on the fact of Jesus' own resurrection. If Jesus has not been raised, their faith is worthless!

Paul then addresses some of their confusion by explaining a few things about the future resurrection body in 15:35-58. He says, in essence, that the resurrection body will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, and empowered by the Spirit.

Chapter 16: The Collection and Closing Remarks

Before Paul wraps up the letter, he addresses one of his own concerns. He is working on a project to collect an offering for the Christians in Judea and the Corinthians have signed on to participate. So in 16:1-12, he instructs them to prepare for the collection by collecting their offerings each Sunday until he comes.

Paul wraps up the letter in 16:13-24 by noting that Apollos will come when he can and encouraging the Corinthians to be strong and to honor people like Stephanas and others who give themselves to ministry.

1 Corinthians in 10 Passages

1. "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

—1 Corinthians 1:18

2. "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy that person; for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are."

—1 Corinthians 3:16-17

3. "Flee sexual immorality. Every other sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?"

—1 Corinthians 6:18-19

4. "But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife is not to leave her husband (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband is not to divorce his wife."

—1 Corinthians 7:10-11

5. “But take care that this freedom of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.”

—1 Corinthians 8:10

6. “For though I am free from all people, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may gain more....I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”

—1 Corinthians 9:19, 23

7. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.”

—1 Corinthians 11:26

8. “For just as the body is one and yet has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

—1 Corinthians 12:12-13

9. “If I speak with the tongues of mankind and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.”

—1 Corinthians 13:1-2

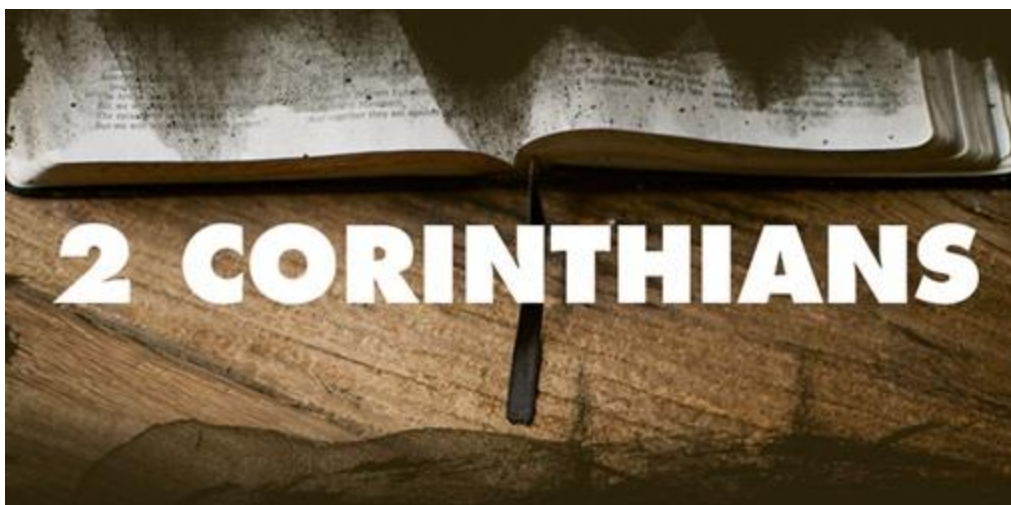
10. “For if the dead are not raised, then not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.”

—1 Corinthians 15:16-17

Bonus Passage

“But when this perishable puts on the imperishable, and this mortal puts on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O Death, is your victory? Where, O Death, is your sting?’”

—1 Corinthians 15:54-55



Summary

2 Corinthians is actually the fourth letter from Paul to the church in Corinth. There had been a serious breakdown in the relationship between Paul and members of the church, a lot of which was motivated by some traveling preachers who ran down Paul and promoted themselves. Paul had made a difficult visit to Corinth and sent a hard letter to them, calling them to repent. And thankfully most of them did. So, he writes 2 Corinthians to restore the relationship and to urge those who still oppose his ministry to mend their ways.

A large part of this is explaining the nature of authentic gospel ministry as demonstrated by himself and his ministry team, showing that the weakness and suffering they endure is part of living out the gospel. Paul also encourages the church to resume collecting funds for the Jerusalem Christians as part of their return to supporting Paul's ministry.

Backstory

By the time Paul writes the letter we call 2 Corinthians, there has been a lot of back and forth between Paul and the church in Corinth, so much so that it can be hard to sort it all out. Their relationship has gone through a severe rough patch (to put it mildly) and now is beginning to come out the other side. Second Corinthians is written to restore that broken relationship with the majority of the church and to challenge those who still question Paul's credentials as an apostle by calling them to repent. The story that lies behind all this goes something like this:

Paul started the church in Corinth AD 51 and stayed there for 18 months (Acts 18:1-22). Sometime later, Paul heard about a serious issue of immorality in the

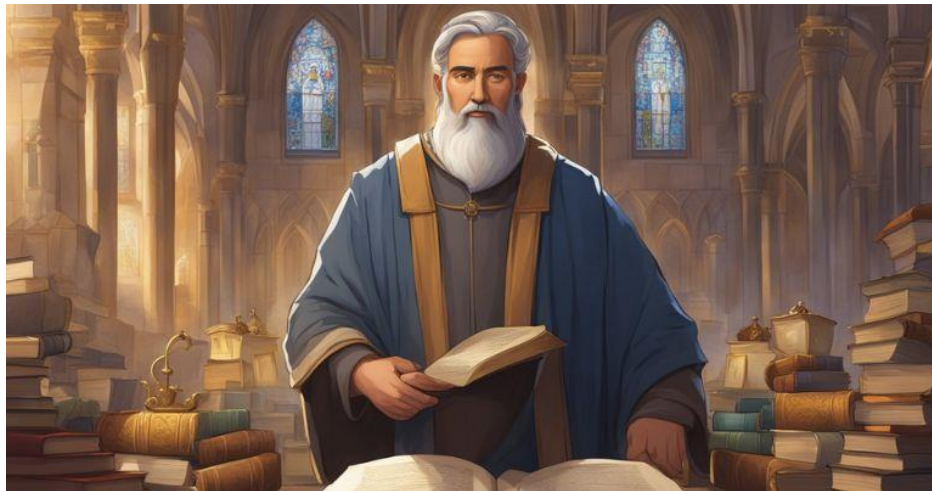
church in Corinth and wrote them a letter (which we don't have access to) about how to handle it (1 Cor. 5:9).

A little while after that while he was in Ephesus on his third missionary journey, Paul received news from Corinth, both by word of mouth (1 Cor. 1:11) and in a letter (1 Cor. 7:1), raising questions and reporting some serious problems within the church.

In response to that communication, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians.

Second Corinthians is written to restore that broken relationship with the majority of the church and to challenge those who still question Paul's credentials as an apostle by calling them to repent.

Paul planned to visit Corinth himself in a little while, but before coming he planned on sending Timothy to Corinth. So, he urged the Corinthians to treat Timothy with kindness when he comes. Shortly thereafter, Paul sent out Timothy and Erastus (Acts 19:21-22; 1 Cor. 16:10-11).



Timothy

Not long after that, Paul received word that the problems in Corinth had gone from bad to worse. In addition to the Corinthians' own issues, they had welcomed in some traveling preachers who had impressive letters of recommendation. These newcomers ran down Paul, questioning his legitimacy as an apostle and his entire approach to ministry. The church turned on Paul and things were a mess. So, Paul decided to deal with the situation in person rather than send another letter.

Paul sailed from Ephesus to Corinth for a brief visit. It didn't go well at all. Paul was publicly shamed and sailed back to Ephesus with a completely broken relationship with the church in Corinth (2 Cor. 2:1).

Once back in Ephesus, Paul wrote what he called a "sorrowful" letter, since his visit to Corinth hadn't accomplished all he had hoped it would. This letter apparently was a very direct rebuke and call to repentance. Paul sent Titus to them with this letter (2 Cor. 2:3, 9) and resolved not to visit them again until he heard how they responded to this letter.

This was a change of plans on Paul's part. He had originally planned to sail from Ephesus to Corinth, then travel north from Corinth through Macedonia, and then back to Corinth, and from there sail to Judea (2 Cor. 1:16). This change of plans was used against Paul by those who opposed him in Corinth.

Titus was supposed to deliver the "sorrowful" letter and urge the Corinthians to return to a good relationship with Paul. After that, he was to meet Paul in Troas to report how the Corinthian church responded (2 Cor. 2:12-13).



Paul and Titus

"Whether any do enquire of Titus, he is my partner and fellow helper concerning you: or our brethren be enquired of, they are the messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ." - 2 Corinthians 8:23

So, at the approximate time they were supposed to meet up, Paul left Ephesus and traveled to Troas. He waited for a while, but Titus never showed. And Paul was deeply concerned. So, he left Troas and sailed to Macedonia, hoping to find Titus there (Acts 20:1, 2 Cor. 2:12-13; 7:5).

By the grace of God, Titus and Paul connected in Macedonia (2 Cor. 7:6-7, 13). Titus brought a mixed report from Corinth: there was a spirit of repentance among the majority (2 Cor. 2:5ff.; 7:6-16), but some were still ridiculing Paul and holding him in contempt (2 Cor. 10:1-2, 7-18; 11:4ff.).

Paul was determined to restore the relationship at least with the majority. So, Paul wrote the letter we call 2 Corinthians (which is actually the fourth letter we know of that he wrote to them but only the second one passed on to us).

Paul sent Titus back to Corinth along with two others to deliver 2 Corinthians and prepare the Corinthians for Paul to visit (2 Cor. 8:18-19; 9:5). In addition to delivering 2 Corinthians, Titus and the others were also supposed to help the Corinthians resume the collection for the Jerusalem Christians that they had started the year before (2 Cor. 9:1-5; Rom. 15:25-32; 1 Cor. 16:1-4).

While they were delivering the letter and working to get things sorted out, Paul himself continued preaching in Macedonia, probably for close to a year, likely going west into Illyricum (Acts 20:2; Rom. 15:19). Finally, Paul traveled south to Corinth, reunited with the church, and spent the three winter months there (Acts 20:2-3).

Trying to keep in mind all of this backstory can make 2 Corinthians hard to understand. We are reading somebody else's mail about a fight they've had and how they are now working to restore the relationship.

Paul writes 2 Corinthians to reaffirm his commitment to the church in Corinth and urge full reconciliation with him by those who have repented. As part of that, Paul has to explain his theology of ministry and why his ministry looks the way it does, even though it is very counter-cultural and looks so weak. He also needs to call out the unrepentant to mend their ways, and to challenge them to reject those who have come into the church (whom Paul pejoratively calls "super-apostles") and who turned them against Paul.

It's this complex web of relationships that makes 2 Corinthians feel a bit erratic. Paul is writing fully aware of his position under God as an apostle. He's

thinking of the majority who have pledged their support of him and his ministry. But he's also aware of those who still oppose him. All of those relationships affect what he says and how he says it.

Outline of 2 Corinthians

The letter of 2 Corinthians has three main sections: chapters 1-7, chapters 8-9, and chapters 10-13. These sections are very distinct, and each has its own focus and tone.

Chapters 1-7: The Nature of Paul's Ministry and the Corinthians

These chapters focus on restoring the relationship with those who have renewed their support of Paul and his ministry, but not without occasional glances at those who still reject Paul's leadership. The heart of this section is Paul's theology of ministry which shapes everything he does in life and ministry.

After the introduction and greetings in 1:1-2, Paul begins the letter in 1:3-11 by praising God for the comfort and strength he regularly gives them in all the affliction they endure in service to God on behalf of others. God comforts Paul and his team so they can comfort others. Paul even recounts a recent episode where the affliction was so bad that he thought he might die, but God delivered him. This opening paragraph introduces a key theme of the letter that has been a large part of the problem between the Corinthians and Paul, namely all of Paul's sufferings which make him look very weak and dishonorable.



Before Paul addresses the matter of his sufferings, he acknowledges another issue that has been used against him in the Corinthian church, namely the matter of his travel plans and his integrity. In 1:12-22, Paul assures the church

that he is not self-serving or wishy-washy but his choices and behavior even in something as minor as his itinerary are in accordance with God's faithfulness as seen in Jesus.

So it was actually for their sake that he changed his plans and decided not to come back to Corinth for a while (1:23-2:4). He even encourages the church (since most of them have repented and returned to Paul) to reaffirm their love for the person(s) who stirred up the trouble and have now repented, as well (2:5-11).

Then Paul recounts his trip to meet up with Titus who had taken the sorrowful letter to Corinth (2:12-13). He breaks off the story rather than telling us all that happened (he'll pick it back up in 7:5ff). He does summarize, however, his grateful reaction upon finding Titus, and describes his ministry in terms of a Roman triumphal procession in 2:14-17. This becomes the springboard for Paul's extended exploration of his theology of ministry, especially in relation to suffering and weakness, which takes up the next several chapters.



In 3:1-3, Paul tells the Corinthians that unlike those who have shown up in Corinth credentialing themselves with letters of recommendations, Paul and his team don't need such letters because the Corinthian believers are themselves Paul's letter of recommendation, commending his ministry. Paul's ministry is a ministry of the Spirit in keeping with the new covenant promises, and in 3:4-18, Paul's argues that this new covenant ministry has greater glory than the old covenant ministry of Moses. It leads to an unveiled relationship with God.

Therefore, Paul rejects trickery and self-promotion, and instead straightforwardly imparts the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ (4:1-5). In 4:6-15, Paul explains that to do this entails embodying Christ, not just proclaiming him. So, he and his team suffer because they are carrying about in their bodies (which he compares to a fragile jar of clay) the very death of Jesus, so that they can also display the resurrection of Jesus.

And Paul doesn't lose heart in all of this and the affliction it involves, because he's confident of the resurrection and focuses on the things of eternity (4:16-18). In 5:1-10, Paul explains that this focus on eternal things causes him to desire his heavenly body and being with the Lord, and this hope gives him great courage.

Paul then explains in 5:11-21 that because he knows that his life and ministry are accountable to God, he is constrained by the love of Christ to be his ambassador. Paul has been reconciled to God and given the ministry of reconciliation, so he seeks to pass on the righteousness of God.

In view of this, Paul appeals for the Corinthians to return to God (6:1-2) and restates that his weaknesses and suffering actually commend his ministry rather than undermine it (6:3-13).

This leads to a call for full restoration of their relationship in 6:14-7:4. He urges them to open their heart fully to him and not to be bound with unbelievers, since they are the temple of God.



Then Paul resumes the story about searching for and finding Titus in 7:5-16. Paul was deeply comforted by the news Titus brought about how the Corinthians had responded. So even though the letter Paul had sent caused them sorrow, he rejoices that it led to repentance.

Chapters 8-9: The Collection for the Jerusalem Christians

For about a year, Paul has been working on collecting funds to deliver to the Christians in Jerusalem, and the Corinthians were early adopters of this project. So, in these chapters, Paul reminds the Corinthians of their commitment to give to this work and he calls them to have their offering ready when he comes. This is a very tangible way they can demonstrate their renewed support of Paul's ministry.

In 8:1-7, Paul urges the Corinthian Christians to abound in giving to the Jerusalem Christians, just as the churches of Macedonia are doing. Since they were one of the first churches to commit to this project over a year ago, they should complete the offering (8:8-15).

Organizing and completing this project is actually one of the reasons Paul sent Titus back. Titus was eager to return, and Paul sent two others with him to ensure integrity in this generous work (8:16-24). In 9:1-5, Paul further explains that he has sent Titus and the others so that neither Paul nor the Corinthians will have any cause to be ashamed due to lack of preparation when he arrives with the rest of the delegates from the other churches involved in the project.

Each of you should give
what you have decided
in your heart to give,
not reluctantly
or under compulsion,
for God loves a cheerful giver.
2 Corinthians 9:7



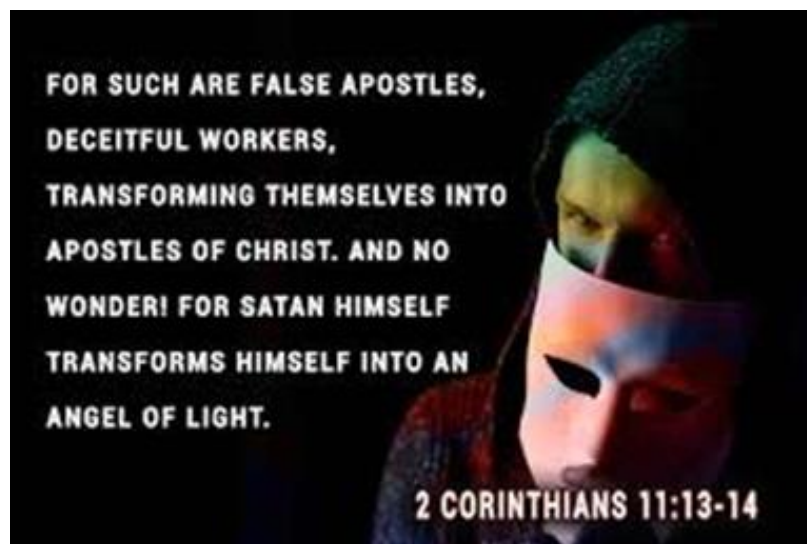
Paul concludes this section in 9:6-15 by assuring them that their generosity depends on God who will graciously provide for them so they can give (sow) bountifully and cheerfully.

Chapters 10-13: Paul's Ministry and a Call for the Rest of the Corinthians to Repent

In this final section, Paul calls out the vocal minority who remain opposed to him and his ministry, announcing his intention to confront them directly when he comes if they don't change their ways. Because of this, the tone changes in these chapters but the theology of ministry from chapters 1-7 shines through at every turn.

In 10:1-11, Paul says he carries out his ministry with divine power in order to take every thought captive to Christ. Therefore, he has the authority to punish them if necessary but would prefer to use his authority to build them up.

Paul then explains that in contrast to the so-called "super apostles" who came into their church from the outside, they are actually his sphere of ministry because he was the first to bring them the gospel (10:12-18). This is why, Paul continues in 11:1-5, he is so jealous for them. He loves them like a father betrothing them to Christ. Therefore, he urges them to reject the false apostles.



Those false apostles have shown up and boasted in their credentials. They shamed Paul for his suffering, weakness, and lack of such credentials as theirs. Paul decides to entertain their challenge for him to boast just like they boast. But in keeping with his theology of ministry as embodying the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul turns boasting on its head. In 11:16-33, Paul

“boasts” in his weaknesses and sufferings. According to 12:1-13, even though Paul has had incredible spiritual experiences that he could boast in, he boasts in his weaknesses because God showed him that his grace is sufficient and that his power is perfected in weakness.



Then Paul returns to his relationship with the Corinthians and what he expects of them. In 12:14-21, Paul challenges them to recognize that he has demonstrated his love for them by expending himself on their behalf, like a parent for his children. He asks them to be honest: has he taken advantage of them? No, he hasn't, and none of those he's sent to them have done so. His aim has always been to build them up, but he's uncertain what kind of behavior he'll find when he comes to them.

So, when he comes, he'll spare no one if need be (13:1-4). Therefore, they should examine themselves to make sure they are in Christ so that they'll be made complete and Paul won't need to confront anyone when he comes. The Lord gave him his authority for building up, not tearing down (13:5-10).

Paul then signs off the letter in 13:11-14 by urging them to work at unity and promises that if they do, God will be with them. His final words are a prayer-wish for the grace, love, and fellowship of the triune God to be with them.

2 Corinthians in 10 Passages

1. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer.

—2 Corinthians 1:6

2. But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no. For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no but has been yes in Him. For as many as the promises of God are, in Him they are yes; therefore, through Him also is our Amen to the glory of God through us.

—2 Corinthians 1:18-20

3. But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us reveals the fragrance of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

—2 Corinthians 2:14-15

4. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. But we all, with unveiled faces, looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

—2 Corinthians 3:17-18

5. For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen containers, so that the extraordinary greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.

—2 Corinthians 4:6-7

6. Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer person is decaying, yet our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.

—2 Corinthians 4:16-17

7. 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 in our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

—2 Corinthians 5:20-21

8. For 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.

—2 Corinthians 7:10

9. Now I say this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows generously will also reap generously. Each one must do just as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

—2 Corinthians 9:6-7

10. And 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. Therefore, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in distresses, in persecutions, in difficulties, in behalf of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

—2 Corinthians 12:9-10

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