

# 2 Corinthians

# Study Workbook

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If you would like to contact the author of this workbook concerning specific chapter questions, please e-mail Chad at [chad@spiritbuilding.com](mailto:chad@spiritbuilding.com).

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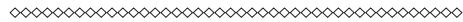


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## *Paul's Second Letter...*

### **Introduction**

Second Corinthians is not one of the more popular books of the New Testament. Admittedly, it is not among the easier of Paul's epistles to study, often due to its more emotional (versus intellectual) style of writing. It is not filled with doctrinal instructions, nor does it address a number of "church problems" as does its predecessor. Its theme, content, format, and emphasis are altogether different from 1 Corinthians, and thus it does not appear to serve as a nice, neat sequel; "Its language is loose, cumbersome, and marked by sudden breaks; there are digressions and parenthetical asides throughout the letter."<sup>1</sup>

What 2 Corinthians does offer, however, is perhaps the most revealing look into the apostle Paul himself, as well as his own disposition toward the work and struggles of a true apostle of Christ. It is more personally insightful and poignant ("a tumult of contending emotions")<sup>2</sup> than any of Paul's other extant writings; in this letter, "Paul bares his heart and his life as he does in none of his other letters."<sup>3</sup> Second Corinthians offers a number of facets of Paul's ministry that Acts does not; it also reveals a lot about his devotion to the Corinthians themselves, much more than is revealed in either Acts or 1 Corinthians.

On the occasion of this epistle, however, the relationship between the Corinthians and Paul had been strained considerably. Paul's own credibility at Corinth had been gravely threatened. Two major reasons existed for this: first, there was the issue of the "immoral man" (1 Corinthians 5), whose situation created a great deal of unnecessary tension between Paul and the Corinthians; second, there were rebels within the Corinthian church ("a dangerous and defiant minority")<sup>4</sup> who still resisted Paul's authority. These men were likely Jews themselves who were being externally influenced by Jews elsewhere (as in Acts 15:1); they purported to know more about the gospel than did Paul and ridiculed his personal integrity and authority. Some of their accusations against him included: cowardice, vacillation, personal insecurity, fiery talk with no substance, no letters of commendation (i.e., from Jerusalem), doubts about his knowledge of the Law (of Moses), insinuations about his honesty, and charges of self-ambition and profiteering.

It is clearly evident that Paul was both heartbroken and very angry over this. Part of what fueled these accusations was the matter of money he was collecting from Macedonia and Achaia for the relief effort in Judea. Paul's opponents ("most eminent apostles," he rhetorically calls them) claimed that he was gathering the money for himself and had "deceived" the Corinthians by using other men (such as Titus) to make it appear that he was not involved. Paul's response to these charges, however, was not to vindicate himself to God, but to prove his sincere (and godly) intentions to the Corinthians. Furthermore, "It was [his] sublime conception of Christ that explains the earnestness of Paul's propaganda, his solicitude for the churches that were threatened by the insidious sophistries of the Judaizers, and his uncompromising assault upon them."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, "Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians," *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Co., 1997), 19.

<sup>2</sup> R. H. Strachan, "The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians," *The Moffat New Testament Commentary* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1949), xxix.

<sup>3</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, "The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians," *Commentary on the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1998), 804.

<sup>4</sup> J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, *The Standard Bible Commentary: Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Foundation, 1916), 167.

<sup>5</sup> David Lipscomb, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles: Second Corinthians and Galatians* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1979), 17.

## *...to the Church at Corinth*

While not an in-depth treatise (as, say, Romans), 2 Corinthians does offer certain theological teachings that are expounded upon nowhere else in the New Testament. These include: certain teachings on the “new covenant” (2:12 – 4:16); our earthly dwelling and heavenly “clothing” (4:7 – 5:10); and the “ministry of reconciliation” (5:11-21). Paul also offers revealing insight to the difficult ministry which Christ required of him (Acts 9:15-16), and provides further characteristics of a “true apostle” (compare Acts 1:21-22 with 2 Corinthians 12:12, for example).

Second Corinthians was written from Macedonia (possibly Philippi), ca. AD 56-57, while Paul was on what is known as his third missionary journey. Paul wrote it in preparation of his intended visit to the Corinthians (see 2 Corinthians 12:14; 13:1), to smooth out the relationship between himself and the church, bring closure to some of their past struggles, and instruct them in regard to the collection being gathered for needy saints in Jerusalem. The epistle’s design is not as well structured as we see in other letters, simply because of its highly emotional and personal tenor. The five basic sections used for this study are: **a**) salutation and introduction (1:1-11); **b**) Paul’s physical and spiritual ministry (1:12 - 7:16); **c**) the monetary collection, and principles of giving (8:1 - 9:15); **d**) Paul’s defense of his authority as an apostle (10:1 - 13:10); and **e**) final commendation (13:11-14).

## Paul's Second Letter...

### Section One: 1:1-11, Salutation and Introduction

#### LESSON ONE

#### 1:1-11, Salutation and Introduction

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,” (1:3)*

**Define the following words or phrases as they are used in context:**

- ❑ **1:1 – saints** (see Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:1, 2:19):
- ❑ **1:3 – God of all comfort** (see 2 Corinthians 7:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17):
- ❑ **1:5 – the sufferings of Christ...abundance** (see 2 Timothy 1:8; 2:8-9; 3:17; 4:19):
- ❑ **1:9 – the sentence of death within ourselves** (see 1 Corinthians 4:9; 2 Corinthians 4:7-11; James 5:6):

**Practical exposition:**

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God”—a necessary introduction for a church wrestling with compliance to Paul’s spiritual direction (see also 1 Corinthians 1:1). An *apostle* of God writes to the “*church* of God” at Corinth. The mention of Timothy (1:1) does not put the two men on the same standing; Timothy is Paul’s “brother” in the faith and a fellow minister, but not Paul’s equal or successor. This epistle is most certainly written by Paul with apostolic authority. Both the apostle and the saints [lit., “holy ones”] belong to and derive their approval from “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This immediately sets the context in which Paul writes: he is commissioned by God to instruct them, and God expects them to listen to that instruction. It does not seem that Paul himself intended for this epistle to be distributed among the churches (see Colossians 4:16), but it is a personal letter from Paul to Corinth alone. “Achaia” likely refers to the entire peninsula south of Macedonia, of which Corinth was the capital.<sup>6</sup>

“...the Father of mercies and God of all comfort” (1:3)—mercy and comfort are major themes of this letter, concepts which resonate throughout the rest of the text in the form of “reconciliation,” “grace,” “life,” “glory,” “joy,” etc. “Mercy” is the sparing of that which is rightly deserved; it is often used synonymously with “compassion.” “Comfort” is derived from [Latin] *con* (with) + *forte* (strength); literally, it means “to make strong together” or “to strengthen (through the encouragement of another).”<sup>7</sup>

Paul recognized God to be the *source* of mercy and comfort. In proportion to the sufferings one must endure for the sake of Christ (Acts 14:22; 2 Timothy 3:12), so God provides comfort as a demonstration

<sup>6</sup> McGarvey, 169.

<sup>7</sup> “Comfort” is from the Greek *parakleseos*, related to *paraklete*, translated “Comforter” or “Helper” in John 14:16,26, et al.; this latter word Jesus used to describe the (work of the) Holy Spirit (A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. IV [Grand Rapids: Baker Books; no date], 208-209).

## ...to the Church at Corinth

of His mercy (1:5). The specific comfort to which Paul refers is the favorable report from Titus concerning how the Corinthians had received his previous letter (7:6-7, 13). Paul had written to them strongly, and feared that they might not respond appropriately to what he had said. His intention was not merely to rebuke them, but to have them repent of their sins (7:8-9).

Paul did not keep his joy of being comforted to himself, however. He spoke freely of the “sufferings” that he (and others) endured for the sake of the gospel (1:5-7): genuine comfort cannot be realized without having genuinely suffered. The more intense the suffering, the sweeter and more appreciated God’s comfort appears. Paul is not saying that his suffering would translate to another’s salvation (see 1 Corinthians 1:13); rather, whatever he learned and gained through God’s having comforted him would be extended to the Corinthians’ advantage. “Affliction...in Asia” (1:8)—it is uncertain as to whether this refers to a specific event (as in Acts 19:23-41), or to the general trouble Paul faced in the Roman province of Asia (see 1 Corinthians 15:32, a figurative expression). It is very possible that Paul refers here to a situation that is nowhere else recorded in the New Testament, similar to Romans 16:4 (as Coffman suggests).<sup>8</sup>

“Trust” and “deliverance” (1:9-10) are themes which accompany the concepts of suffering and comfort. One’s perilous physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual situation may strengthen his dependence upon the life-giving support that God alone possesses. Just as God “raises the dead” (1:9), so He is able to raise the hopes of those whose circumstances seem hopeless and “dead.” Paul faced death on a number of occasions, as he later describes in chapter 11 (consider also Acts 14:19-20), yet he always kept his faith in the Great Deliverer. Notice also how saints’ prayers contribute to the comfort of fellow believers (1:11; see also Ephesians 6:18-19; Colossians 4:2-4; Philippians 1:19; and Hebrews 13:18-19).

### Questions:

- 1.) How does God “comfort” the one suffering, and how is this perceived? Is Paul referring to miraculous comfort, or something that any Christian today can enjoy? Please explain.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2.) If we choose to suffer or rejoice only in private, how does this undermine the instructions of the gospel? What are the benefits of our shared positive and negative experiences (see 1 Corinthians 12:26; Galatians 6:6; and 1 Peter 5:9, for example)?

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<sup>8</sup> James B. Coffman, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Austin: Firm Foundation, 1977), 310.

