

**A LOOK AT THE BOOK
2 CORINTHIANS
THE PRIVILEGE OF MINISTRY**

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AUTHOR AND DATE

External and internal evidence combine to give ample evidence that Paul wrote 2 Corinthians.

The more debated issue in critical studies concerns its unity.

The change of tone in chapters 10-13 is used as a basis for considering the book to be a combination of two letters.

It is frequently assumed that the latter part represents the hard letter mentioned in 2:4.

However, the issue referred to is not mentioned.

There is no external evidence, nor conclusive evidence, to obligate us to question the unity of the book.

The book was written near the end of the third missionary journey.

The normally accepted date is A.D. 56-57.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

After Paul wrote 1 Cor., Timothy visited Corinth and came back with a negative report.

Paul made a quick trip to Corinth to try to resolve the problems there.

Following his visit, Paul wrote a hard letter to the church.

While Titus delivered the letter, Paul waited anxiously for his return.

He finally went to Macedonia to look for him.

Paul was grateful to hear from Titus that the church responded positively to his correction.

From Macedonia Paul wrote 2 Corinthians and later visited the church again.

PURPOSE AND THEME

Paul's letter was an attempt to respond to the present situation in Corinth as Titus had just described it.

He had several purposes:

To express his gratitude for their positive response.

To explain his change of plans.

To encourage the church to receive the brother who had repented back into fellowship.

To prepare for the offering.

To defend himself against the accusations of the false teachers.

Along with these main purposes, Paul wanted to build them up and to prepare for his visit.

Theme: The Joy of Serving Jesus

The book focuses on the ministry, though the treatment is hardly a unified, systematic presentation of the theme.

Three main subjects are presented in the book:

The privilege of the ministry (1-7)

The principles of Christian giving (8-9)

The vindication of Paul's ministry (10-13)

The main distinguishing feature of the book would appear to be the glimpse into the heart of God's servant.

It shows his motivation, his concern for God's people and the proper use of boasting in defense of the authority God has given him.

The emotionally charged expression of his concern for them is what makes the book hard to handle synthetically.

The book is not a logically presented thesis of a theological theme.

It is the expression of what his heart feels.

ORGANIZATION

The book is organized around the three themes already mentioned.

In the first section, Paul explains why he has delayed in coming to them and the privilege God has given him to participate in the ministry. 1-7

These two themes are interwoven.

The second section prepares the church for the collection that is going to be taken to help the brethren in other churches who are suffering. 8-9

The third section presents a defense of Paul's apostolic authority, based on autobiographical scenes from his life. 10-13

EXPLANATION OF PAUL'S CONDUCT AND MINISTRY 1-7

The letter begins with an explanation of Paul's delay in visiting them and of the ministry to which God has called him.

GREETING 1:1-2

THANKSGIVING FOR COMFORT IN SUFFERING 1:3-11

Praise to God for the comfort He sends His children when they need it.

Comfort from God 1:3-7

When he passes through affliction, God sends him comfort so that he can comfort others.

PRINCIPLE #1:

GOD COMFORTS US IN TIMES OF ADVERSITY

SO THAT WE CAN LEARN TO COMFORT OTHERS.

Deliverance by God 1:8-10

When in danger of death, God delivers him.

Their participation in prayer 1:11

They have had a part in this process through their prayers.

EXPLANATION OF PAUL'S DELAY 1:12-2:13

Paul's affliction in Asia is mentioned here because that was partially responsible for his inability to come to them as he had hoped.

It wasn't due to lack of interest in them.

He is concerned about them, but hasn't been able to go to them because he has been actively involved in ministry in Asia.

Thus the praise for God's comfort in the midst of affliction introduces Paul's explanation of his delay in coming to them.

Concern for them 1:12-14

Intention to visit them 1:15-16

False accusation against him 1:17

When he failed to visit them, some falsely accused him of taking this trip lightly and of imitating the world's way of planning.

When he saw he couldn't resolve the problem, he just stayed away.

Response to the accusation 1:18-22

Paul answers the accusation by denying that he took the promise lightly.

He does not say one thing and do another.

Delay to avoid judgment 1:23-2:4

Instead, he wrote in order to spare them.

He would rather have gone personally to see them.

However, he knew he would have to judge them if he did.

To avoid judgment and to spare them, he decided to write and give them a chance to correct their problem.

Restoration of offender 2:5-11

Now that the problem has been solved, Paul encourages them to restore the one who had offended him.

They have judged him sternly as they should have, for his correction.

Now they ought to reconfirm their love for him.

If they refuse to restore the offender, Satan will accomplish his goal of dividing them.

Concern caused by Titus' delay 2:12-13

When Paul sent Titus to deal with the problem, he was concerned about what the consequences might be.

He could not wait for his return, so he went to Macedonia to find him.

EXPLANATION OF PAUL'S MINISTRY 2:14-7:16

When Titus arrived with the good report that the issue had been resolved, Paul was grateful to God and rejoiced in the victory that had been won (2:14-16).

The joy of victory in this problem stirred Paul to write about the privilege of the ministry.

Joy of ministry 2:14-16

Requirements for ministry 2:17-3:6a

After rejoicing about the victory, Paul describes the proper characteristics of the man who wants to participate in the ministry.

Contrary to false teachers who use their message for personal gain, God's messengers seek to please God and produce followers that demonstrate the validity of their message.

They have become that kind of evidence for his ministry (2:17-3:3).

The requirements for successful ministry in God's program are not met by human ability.

God must supply that kind of competence.

The Corinthians themselves are the best evidence that God has made them competent for this ministry (3:4-6a).

PRINCIPLE #2:

GOD IS THE ONE WHO ENABLES US

TO STAND FIRM IN TIMES OF ADVERSITY AND

TO MINISTER ADEQUATELY FOR HIM.

1:21 -- 3:5 -- 4:7 -- 5:5

The presence of the Holy Spirit is our guarantee that God will complete this work in us! 1:22 -- 5:5

Basis for ministry 3:6b-5:10

The enablement for the ministry which God has given Paul and that has been demonstrated through the lives of the Corinthians, motivates Paul to write concerning the basis for the ministry of God's word.

Glory of the old covenant 3:6b-7

The old covenant was given to Israel in glory.

Greater glory of the new covenant 3:8-11

The new covenant is given in even greater glory.

Ministry without a veil 3:12-4:16

Permanence of the revelation 3:12-18

The veil used at the giving of the old covenant demonstrates that it is temporary and provisional, but the new covenant is permanent.

Light given by the revelation 4:1-6

Those who refuse the new covenant do so because they have been blinded so that they cannot see the light. Jesus Himself is the light they need to see.

Ministry in fragile vessels 4:7-5:10

The ministry which we have been given through the new covenant is a valuable treasure, but the vessels used to carry it are fragile.

PRINCIPLE #3:

GOD HAS GIVEN US A TREASURE SO GLORIOUS

THAT IT WOULD PUT MOSES TO SHAME

BUT HE HAS GIVEN IT TO US IN FRAGILE CLAY POTS.

3:10-11 -- 3:18 -- 4:6-7

4:7-18— We still live in a human corruptible body, so that God will receive all the glory for our ministry and not us.

The work is His and he deserves any credit, not the messenger.

Although we suffer now, we know that we will receive greater glory in the future.

PRINCIPLE #4:

THE AFFLICTIONS OF THIS LIFE

CAN'T HOLD A CANDLE

TO THE GLORY WHICH WILL BE OURS WHEN CHRIST COMES.

THEREFORE, WE DON'T GIVE UP! 4:1 -- 4:16

4:17-18

This is not "pie in the sky by and by" to put us to sleep.

This is the working man's philosophy.

It is the reason why we keep on fighting.

There is something more to come!

5:1-10— Even if this ministry should cost us our life and the human vessel be destroyed, that loss is insignificant beside the gain which will be ours.

All that can be destroyed is the tent.

What matters is that we live in a way that is pleasing to Him.

We can entrust the risk of losing the temporary dwelling to Him.

PRINCIPLE #5:

OUR PRIMARY GOAL IN LIFE OR IN DEATH

SHOULD BE TO PLEASE HIM.

5:8-9 It is better to be at home with the Lord.

BUT-- Whether we live or die *should* be the least of our concerns.

The real issue is what pleases Him.

Privileged position of ministry 5:11-21

The apostle is drawn by the reference to judgment back to the privileged position he enjoys as a minister for God.

Motive for ministry 5:11-16

He is motivated by reverence for the Lord and by the love of God.

Fear of God 5:11-12

Love of God 5:13-16

Ministry of reconciliation 5:17-21

It is our privilege to be a representative for God in the task of reconciling sinful men to God and seeing Him change their lives.

Exhortations based on ministry 6:1-7:2

Having described his view of the ministry, Paul exhorts us on the basis of this ministry which God has made possible for His servants.

Be fruitful 6:1-10

First he urges us to become productive.

He wants us to follow his example and participate in the ministry as he has for this is a time when God is saving many.

Be open with them 6:11-13

Second he urges them to be open with him and to open their hearts to him, as he has with them.

Be separated from evil 6:14-7:1

We ought to separate from evil.

We should not form partnerships with people who do not believe, especially with those false teachers who have been criticizing him.

Further, we ought to abstain from evil deeds.

Respond to his love 7:2

In conclusion, he appeals to them to return the love which he has shown them.

Praise from results of ministry 7:3-16

Paul concludes his rejoicing on account of the blessings he enjoys in the ministry with a word of praise and encouragement.

Lack of condemnation 7:3

He has no desire to condemn them.

Confidence in them 7:4

He expresses confidence in them.

Response to his exhortation 7:5-16

He is encouraged because they have responded appropriately to his exhortation.

Comfort from Titus' report 7:5-7

Response to previous letter 7:8-12

Joy expressed by Titus 7:13-16

PREPARATION FOR THE COLLECTION 8-9

The second major theme Paul presents is the collection for the saints in Judea.

APPEAL FOR THE OFFERING 8:1-15

He appeals to us to give generously.

Example of Macedonia 8:1-6

The church in Macedonia had their own financial needs yet they insisted on giving generously.

Petition 8:7-8

Paul urges us to follow their example.

Example of Christ 8:9

The example of Christ who surrendered everything for our sake is used to encourage us to give also.

Previous interest 8:10-11

They were eager to give previously, now they should fulfill their promise.

Proper motive 8:12-15

The correct motive is that everyone will have enough.

It is not right that some should have an abundance while others suffer.

RECOMMENDATION OF MESSENGERS 8:16-22

Paul presents the messengers who have been chosen to take the collection.

They already know Titus, and the others are also known to be trustworthy.

REASON FOR THEIR JOURNEY 9:1-5

The delegation has been sent to encourage them to prepare the offering in advance, so it will be done generously and without pressure.

PRINCIPLES FOR THE OFFERING 9:6-15

The principles which should control our giving are summarized.

The basic principle for giving is that we should give generously, just as God has given to us.

VINDICATION OF PAUL'S MINISTRY 10-13

The concluding section of the book is a response to those who have attacked Paul's ministry as inferior to others.

He demonstrates his divinely-given, apostolic authority.

RESPONSE TO THE CRITICS 10-12:18**Exhortation not to judge by the flesh 10:1-6**

Paul answers the critics by pointing out that they're judging by human standards.

We should lay aside the world's tools and evaluate things from God's perspective, or he will come to them as a judge.

Denial of inconsistency 10:7-11

They are using external appearance as a basis for evaluation.

He denies their charge that he is inconsistent.

He has tried to be kind to them but he has been forced to write them some stern letters.

If they don't resolve the problem in their midst, he will have to come to them with the same kind of severity he has used in his letters.

Importance of divine approval 10:12-18

What really matters is what *God* thinks about Paul's ministry, not what *man* thinks.

His opponents have been boasting about themselves.

Paul is only concerned that *the Lord* approves of his ministry (10:17-18).

They have been comparing themselves with their own kind (10:12).
That kind of evaluation becomes purely the world's perspective.

Fear of effect of false teachers 11:1-6

While Paul is not concerned about human evaluation of his ministry, he is concerned that because of such a misconception, *his* message might be rejected, while that of *the false teachers* may be accepted by them.

That error he wants to prevent.

He hopes to present them as a pure virgin, untainted by the pollution of false doctrine.

Refusal of financial support 11:7-15

Convinced that he did not want to be accused of seeking personal gain, nor be a burden to them, Paul refused financial support.

This attitude was interpreted by some to mean that Paul did not have the same authority others had.

What they have not realized is that the pursuit of financial gain is a mark of the false teachers.

Therefore, Paul will continue to serve without charging them for his ministry, so no one can accuse him of seeking financial advantage.

Suffering on account of the gospel 11:16-12:11

Paul has adequate basis for boasting about himself, if that's what they want to hear.

This is not the kind of message Paul likes to give.

He doesn't enjoy bragging about himself.

"Boasting about myself is foolish!"

BUT--the circumstances have forced him into it.

They have established the policy of following those who make the biggest promotion campaign for themselves.

They are back to operating by the world's standards.

God doesn't operate by the same standards.

God doesn't look on the outward appearance and the promotional campaigns to evaluate His servants.

Comparison with Judaizers 11:16-33

Rather than prestige and power, the true servants of God are designated by their suffering.

Paul demonstrates that he can stand up to any of God's servants in that area.

He lists the sufferings he has endured for Christ.

Among the sufferings he has endured is the anguish caused by concern for the churches.

Corinth certainly had its fair share in causing that pain!

Experience in the third heaven 12:1-4

Besides the suffering, Paul also boasts of the special revelation he received of the third heaven.

Thorn in the flesh 12:5-10

Because of the greatness of the revelation seen, God sent a physical affliction which forced him to depend on Him.

After responding throughout the whole section to man's perspective which looks at individual power and strength as the indicator of greatness, Paul points to the divine perspective on greatness: *God's power is made perfect in weakness.*

When we are weak, then we are truly strong.

God's power is revealed through our weakness –*NOT* through our own strength.

When men see how weak we really are –*then* they can see how great our God is!

Proof of his authority 12:11-18

Paul feels he should apologize for his prolonged boasting.

He should not have needed to boast.

They have sufficient evidence to cause them to do the boasting for him.

He concludes by reminding them of some of those proofs.

Evidence of apostleship 12:11-13

The evidence includes the signs of an apostle which were demonstrated in his ministry.

Refusal to burden them 12:14-16

He has refused to be a burden to them.

Honesty demonstrated by messengers 12:17-18

Godly character is evident in the lives of those he has chosen to send as his representatives.

PREPARATION FOR VISIT 12:19-13:10

In light of his plans to visit them soon, Paul warns them to repent of their sin and to judge themselves.

He fears that he may come and find some who are still unreconciled to him.

If they don't correct the problem he will have to demonstrate the full weight of his apostolic authority.

Desire for our edification 12:19-21

Warning to judge ourselves 13:1-10

CONCLUDING COMMENTS 13:11-14

Final exhortations 13:11-12

Paul concludes the letter with several exhortations which will lead them toward perfection.

Final greeting 13:13

Benediction 13:14

Paul prays that God will grant them the qualities which they need most: grace, love and fellowship—all of which come from God.

What principles for our lives does Paul reveal?

How should we put them into practice today?