

Study 1: Introduction to 2nd Corinthians

Some things had changed as a result of the first letter, but things in the church are still not a pretty picture. The factionalism had still not been resolved, and the Judaisers had arrived and tried to discredit Paul.

Like the first letter, in this study we will see just how did Paul deal with such situations, and how he approached the issues. There are more great lessons to be learned on how to deal with such situations as we again put the Corinthian church under the magnifying glass.

Introduction

Date and Occasion of the letter

Introduction to the problems

Brief outline of the letter

Homework and preparation for next week:

- Read chapter 1 and 2 in a single sitting.
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Work through the introduction and conclusion, and identify the key themes.

Notes for Study 1: Introduction to 2nd Corinthians

Introduction

Like the first letter, the second was written to a specific church. The second letter is intensely personal, and at times the connections between the first and second letters are hard to make. Both letters are full of “*doctrine*”, and it is as if the lid were taken off the congregation so that we can look at what is happening inside.

Some things had changed as a result of the first letter, but the inside is still not a pretty picture. The factionalism in the church had still not been resolved, and the Judaisers had arrived and tried to discredit Paul.

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Date and Occasion of the letter

After his stay in Ephesus, Paul was planning to move on, and outlined his travel plans in 1:16:5-6. He sent Titus to Corinth to correct the problems, and was expecting to meet him at Troas (2:2:12-13). He consequently changed his plans, and went into Macedonia first. He responds to the Corinthians criticism of the change in the second letter (2:1:15-24).

As Paul “*passed through*” Macedonia, he describes his feelings at this time in 2:7:5-7

“For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn--conflicts on the outside, fears within. ⁶ But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, ⁷ and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.” (NIV)

He is still quite concerned about what was happening in Corinth, and why Titus had not joined him at Troas. He finds Titus either in Thessalonica or Philippi, where he gets the report from Corinth, and immediately writes the second letter.

(For a longer discussion on this time, refer to my Acts study 29:Chapter 20)

Date

This puts the date of the letter as late AD 57 during Paul’s third missionary journey, and only about 6 months after the first letter, most likely from Philippi.

Occasion

Titus had reported back to Paul on the state of things in Corinth. Whilst he was received well, things were still not as they ought to have been. The factionalism had not been resolved, and despite Paul’s previous instruction, they had failed to have the collection ready. There were also the Judaisers who had arrived as false prophets and were masquerading as the apostles of Christ.

The occasion of the letter is therefore Paul’s response to the news from Corinth, and his instructions to them to sort out the matters before he arrived in person to sort them out himself.

Introduction to the problems

The introduction (2:1:1-7) and the conclusion (2:13:1-14) provide us with an insight to the key things that Paul wants the Corinthians to learn and apply from the letter.

Paul’s apostleship and authority had apparently been challenged. He writes as *an apostle of Christ Jesus (2:1:1)*, when the Corinthians had been *demanding proof that Christ was*

speaking through him (2:13:3). As an apostle, he had not failed the test (2:13:6), and he could not do anything that was against the truth, but only (those things that were) for the truth (2:13:8). If there was any doubt about who Paul was, they themselves knew full well that the Lord gave him the authority (of an apostle) (2:13:10).

God is a God of comfort and compassion (2:1:3). Despite all our troubles we ourselves are comforted by God (2:1:4). Just remember the sufferings of Christ (2:1:5) who was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by God's power (2:13:4). Though some people might think we are weak, we display the same kind of weakness and power as Christ (2:13:3-4).

It is time for the Corinthians to examine and test themselves (2:13:5) as this is the third time that he has had to correct them, and he previously gave them a second warning (2:13:2). Even though God is a God of compassion and comfort (2:1:3) Paul will not hesitate to set things in order and will not spare those who sinned earlier when he comes (2:13:2). The reason that he is writing the letter is so that he will not need to be harsh in the use of his authority when he comes in person (2:13:10).

Brief outline of the letter

The letter is difficult and hard to follow. One writer¹ describes it as:

“...something like turning on the television in the middle of a very complicated play. People are talking and things are happening, but we're not at all sure who some of the characters are or what the plot is. In fact, in coming to this letter from 1 Corinthians, one has the sense of entering a new world...”

2:1:1-11	Introduction
2:1:12 -2:2:13	Explanation of a change of plans
2:2:14 – 2:7:4	Paul as a minister of the New Covenant
2:7:5 - 16	The Explanation renewed
2:8:1 - 2:9:15	Have the collection ready
1:10:1-2:13:14	Defence against false apostles
2:13:1- 10	Final Exhortations
2:13:11 - 2:13:13	Final Greetings

¹ Fee & Stuart “How to Read the Bible Book by Book” ISBN 0-310-21118-2 p.333
Study of Corinthians by Graeme Offer

As an exercise, circle or highlight the key thoughts from the introduction, and also those from the conclusion, and then link them together. Make a list – with special attention to those that appear in both places. (*Quoted from NIV*)

^{2CO 1:1} Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia:

^{2CO 1:2} Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

^{2CO 1:3} Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. ⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. ⁶ If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. ⁷ And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

^{2CO 1:8} We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, ...

^{2CO 13:1} This will be my third visit to you. "Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." ² I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, ³ since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. ⁴ For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you.

^{2CO 13:5} Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test? ⁶ And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. ⁷ Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. ⁸ For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. ⁹ We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection. ¹⁰ This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority--the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.

^{2CO 13:11} Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

^{2CO 13:12} Greet one another with a holy kiss. ¹³ All the saints send their greetings.

^{2CO 13:14} May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.