

2 Corinthians

Theme: The Message and Ministry of Reconciliation

Author: Paul the apostle (1:1; 10:1)

Recipients: The Church at Corinth (1:1-2)

Date of Writing: c. A.D. 56 – 57

Place of Writing: Macedonia

Key Verse(s): 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Purpose in Writing:

1. A defense of Paul's ministry
2. An explanation of the message of Reconciliation
3. An exhortation to grace giving
4. A correction and confrontation of false apostles
5. A declaration of the sufficiency of God's grace

2 Corinthians: The Man of God and the Ministry

Writer: The apostle Paul

Date: c. A.D. 56-57

Style: Personal, Bold, Defensive, Confrontational

Key Verse(s): 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Uniqueness: This is one of Paul’s most intense and personal letters. It is not very systematic, reading more like a journal. These are the words of a man who expresses his deepest feelings about himself and the ministry God has given him.

Introduction and Greeting	Fellowship of the Ministry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suffering and God’s Sufficiency • A New Creation • Reconciliation and the Ministry 	Stewardship of the Ministry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example of Macedonians • Expectation of Corinthians 	Leadership of the Ministry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reply to Critics • Justification of Ministry • False Teachers • Visions, Revelations, Credentials, Warnings 	Conclusion and Farewell
1:1-2	1:3 – 7:16	8:1 – 9:15	10:1 – 13:10	13:11-14
Perspective:	Past	Present	Future	
Issues:	Misunderstandings, Concerns, Explanations, Theology	Financial Faithfulness and Its Motivation	Vindication of Paul’s Ministry	
Tone:	Forgiving, Grateful, Bold	Confident but Challenging	Defensive, Strong	
Key Verses:	“For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord.” (4:5a)	“God loves a cheerful giver.” (9:7b)	“I shall not be put to shame.” (10:8b)	

Introduction to 2 Corinthians

I. Author

Paul is the author of 2 Corinthians (1:1; 10:1). His authorship is almost universally affirmed. The letter tells us much about its author, as he mentions numerous incidents in his own life (11:23 – 12:12). Indeed this is the most autobiographical of Paul's letters and it has been called his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* ("Defense of his life"). Paul speaks with passion and bluntness to the somewhat rebellious and carnal Corinthians. The style and content of the epistle is reflective of one with the authority of apostleship, and is consistent with what we know of Paul's personality and approach to ministry.

II. Date

After writing First Corinthians, Paul visited Corinth (13:1). This was his second visit to Corinth, and it was a painful experience involving a problem of discipline (2:1-6). Paul then wrote to them "the sorrowful or severe letter" (2:4), which has been lost. This was actually Paul's third letter to the church. Titus carried this severe letter to Corinth and then on his return gave good news to Paul when they met in Macedonia (7:6-8). In relief and thanksgiving Paul wrote Second Corinthians from Macedonia probably in the Fall of A.D. 56 or 57, after the Macedonian and Jewish civil new year began in September (8:10). This is the fourth written correspondence from Paul to the Corinthians. The rather precise dating is deduced from the fact that Paul, after sending his letter, visited the Corinthians in order to receive the offering for the saints in Jerusalem. He spent three months in Greece, i.e., Achaia (Acts 20:1-3), afterwards spending the days of unleavened bread at Philippi (Acts 20:6) and planning to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost (Acts 20:16).

III. Purpose

The church at Corinth had been invaded by false teachers, probably Judaizers, who emphasized (1) ritualistic legalism, (2) special knowledge (*gnosis*), and (3) spectacular spiritual experiences. Rhetorically impressive and charismatically endowed, these interlopers were calling into question Paul's apostolic credentials. Apparently they had joined up

with a small but vocal opposition group within the church. Together they were challenging Paul's integrity, ministry, and authority. Charges of insincerity, financial indiscretions, spiritual impotency, and rhetorical ineffectiveness are examples of the accusations that were leveled against Paul. In response, Paul lays bare his soul, and challenges the church to consider carefully his personal life and ministry as it was revealed in their midst. His ministry is impeccable and his message true and life changing (chs. 1-7). He encourages them to prepare for his forthcoming visit (his third) by making ready the poverty relief collection for the church at Jerusalem, which they had started a year previously but had failed to complete (chs. 8-9). He concludes with a vigorous defense of the legitimacy of his apostleship, and a stern warning that he will deal personally with any troublemakers upon his arrival (chs. 10-13).

IV. Unity of the Epistle

Some critical scholars have questioned the unity of this epistle. Some have argued that 6:14 – 7:1 is an interpolation. More often chapters 10 – 13 have been challenged. Some see these last four chapters as either (1) “the sorrowful or severe letter” mentioned in 2:4, or (2) a fifth Corinthian correspondence later attached to our Second Corinthians. To these questions it should be noted that (1) all manuscript evidence supports the unity of the epistle, (2) early church tradition is unanimous in its affirmation of the epistle's unity, and (3) a proper understanding of the literary genre of the letter supports its integrity. There is no compelling reason to reject the unity of Second Corinthians.

V. Genre

Second Corinthians seems to be patterned after the “apologetic discourse” of antiquity. There is an initial note of thanksgiving coupled with mutual encouragement. The body of the defense then reviews areas of misunderstanding and seeks to clear them up by restatement or additional evidence that sheds new light on the situation. Factual, emotional, and moral proofs are set forth, and the tone of the argument varies from appeal to warnings (or threats) to confident assurance of a positive response from the audience. A formal, climactic conclusion is usually present (a peroration). Second Corinthians, when viewed as a unity, conforms to this pattern or structure quite nicely.

VI. Structure

This epistle naturally divides into three major sections (chs. 1-7, 8-9, 10-13) as the following outline reveals:

2 Corinthians

The Man of God and the Ministry

A call to preach the Word of Reconciliation

A call to perform the Work of Reconciliation

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| I. | <u>Paul Extols the Fellowship of the Ministry</u> | chapters 1-7 |
| II. | <u>Paul Encourages the Stewardship of the Ministry</u> | chapters 8-9 |
| III. | <u>Paul Explains the Leadership of the Ministry</u> | chapters 10-13 |

To be a successful minister in these three areas we must have:

1. a sense of urgency.
2. a soul of purity.
3. a stamp of quality.

The God Who Makes All Things New ***2 Corinthians 5:14-21***

- I. In Christ we participate in the miracle of reconciliation. (vs. 14-17)**
1. Being reconciled to God gives us a new *passion*. (vs. 14)
 2. Being reconciled to God gives us a new *priority*. (vs. 15)
 3. Being reconciled to God gives us a new *perspective*. (vs. 16)
 4. Being reconciled to God gives us new *possibilities*. (vs. 17)
- II. To men we proclaim the message of reconciliation (vs. 18-19, 21)**
1. God is the *author* of reconciliation (vs. 18)
 2. God is the *agent* of reconciliation. (vs. 19, 21)
 - a. Christ alone *provides the way* of reconciliation (vs. 19-20)
 - b. Christ alone *accomplished the work* of reconciliation (vs. 21)
- III. For God we perform the ministry of reconciliation. (vs. 19-20)**
1. We possess the precious gospel of reconciliation (vs. 19)
 2. We represent the pursuing God of reconciliation (vs. 20)
 - a. We announce the message with God's authority
 - b. We appeal to men with God's humility.

“When God Accomplishes His Most Perfect Work”

2 Corinthians 12:1 – 10

When God accomplishes His most perfect work:

- I. Spiritual ecstasy will teach us the wisdom of consistency 12:1-6
 1. Great spiritual experience will be supernatural 12:1-4
 2. Great spiritual experience can be inspirational 12:4
 3. Great spiritual experience must be educational 12:5-6

- II. Personal difficulty will lead us to the wisdom of dependency 12:7-9
 1. Personal difficulty is purposeful/proper 12:7
 2. Personal difficulty is permitted 12:7
 3. Personal difficulty can be painful 12:7
 4. Personal difficulty is persistent 12:7
 5. Personal difficulty is profitable 12:8-9
 - a. It can lead to serious prayer 12:8
 - b. It can lead to spiritual provision 12:9

- III. Supernatural sufficiency will guide us in the wisdom of humility 12:9-10
 1. Denounce human pride 12:9
 2. Desire heavenly power 12:9
 3. Develop an honest perspective 12:10