

“Few portions of the New Testament pose as many problems for translators and interpreters as does 2 Corinthians. Few, therefore, are the preachers who undertake a systematic exposition of its contents. For those undaunted by its demands, however, an intimate picture of a pastor’s heart may be found as the Apostle Paul shepherded the wayward Corinthians and revealed a love which comes only from God.”<sup>1</sup>

### Paul’s interactions with Corinth after establishing the church there:

- Paul left Corinth in the fall of AD 52, taking Aquila and Priscilla with him as far as Ephesus (Ac 18.18-28)
- During Paul’s subsequent ministry in Ephesus, AD 53-55/56, Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians (now lost) (1 Cor 5.9)

1 Cor 5.9 ¶ I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people;

- Later, Paul learned that his first letter was misunderstood, and that there were additional problems in Corinth (1 Co 1.11). Near this time, an official delegation from Corinth arrived with questions (1 Co 16.17)
- Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in response to the situation and the questions, approx. AD 54/55
- Paul sent Timothy to Corinth (perhaps bearing the letter) (1 Co 4.7, 16.10), but apparently the Corinthians remained hostile
- Paul took the time to visit Corinth himself, calling it “the painful visit” (2 Cor 1.15, 2.1, cf. 13.1) [This involved a change in plans from 1Co 16.5-9.]
- Back in Ephesus, Paul sent another letter by Titus, a “grievous letter” (2 Cor 2.4, 7.8-9, 12.14)
- Paul left Ephesus after the silversmith’s riot (Ac 19), heading for Corinth by way of Macedonia, hoping to see Titus with news from Corinth, initially not finding him, but rejoicing that the “grievous letter” was well received (2 Cor 2.12-13, 7.5)

<sup>1</sup> David K. Lowery, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 550–51.

- Prior to arriving in Corinth, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians; partly as a pastoral letter (ch. 1-9) and partly in response to news of further problems in Corinth (ch. 10-13). [Carried by Titus to Corinth.]
- When Paul arrived in Corinth, all was well, with Paul staying for three months at the end of the Third Missionary Journey (Ac 20.1-4) [Paul wrote Romans at this point, during his stay in Corinth.]

## The Message of 1 & 2 Corinthians

G. G. Findlay says 1 Corinthians is *“the epistle of the cross in its social application.”*<sup>2</sup>

“First Corinthians provides a glimpse of life inside one first-century church, and far from saintly it was. Yet that is the reason Paul wrote this letter—to make positional sanctification practical.”<sup>3</sup>

1 Corinthians written to correct fleshly living, which caused these problems in the church:

- Party spirit — much division
- Immorality and toleration of immorality — spiritual pride
- Public quarrels — lawsuits against each other
- Misunderstanding of marriage issues
- Argumentation over separation from idolatry
- Relations between men and women (head coverings)
- Abuses of the communion table
- Misunderstanding of spiritual gifts, esp. tongues
- Misunderstandings about resurrection
- Undiscipline about giving

---

<sup>2</sup> G. G. Findlay, “St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, ed. William Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, n.d.), 739.

<sup>3</sup> David K. Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 506.

We could call 2 Corinthians *the epistle revealing the heart of pastoral application*.

In 2 Corinthians, new difficulties have arisen, and others remain.

- Presence of false teachers, undermining his teaching and authority
- Ongoing misunderstandings about the offering

“The breach between Paul and the Corinthians was not simply over theological issues but had its roots in Corinthian cultural values that clashed with Christian values he wanted them to adopt.”<sup>4</sup>

### Three main topics in 2 Corinthians

1. To defend Paul’s ministry against the hostility and suspicions raised by false teachers present in the Corinthian church (1-7)
2. To exhort Corinthian readiness for the offering they already pledged to support (8-9)
3. To defend Paul’s apostleship and denounce those who opposed him and consequently also opposed Christ (10-13)

### Paul’s purposes in 2 Corinthians

1. Vindicate / re-establish his apostleship (13.10) [clearly establishes apostolic authority for the whole church through time as well — doctrine of inspiration]
2. Minor purposes:
  - a. Rejoice in gospel effectiveness (2.14-17)
  - b. Instruct concerning a penitent offender (2.5-11)
  - c. Further the plans for the offering (ch. 8-9)

The remarkable thing to note is that despite Paul’s strong language, the Corinthian church preserved these two letters for the rest of the church to share.

---

<sup>4</sup> David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 30.