

2 Corinthians

Summary

Second Corinthians is the fourth letter sent by the apostle Paul to the church in Corinth. Paul planted the church in Corinth (Acts 18) and spent a year and a half serving the new believers there. After his departure, the Corinthians struggled with their former worldly lifestyle and with understanding doctrine. False teachers were spreading rumors and tearing down Paul's ministry, causing the people to have distrust in Paul. In response, Paul sent his fellow worker and friend, Titus, to help them. He also sent a letter (the third letter to them, referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:4 and 7:8-9) to defend his character and the true nature of his ministry. Paul later joined Titus in Macedonia, and Titus reported that as a result of Paul's letter, a majority of the Corinthians had repented. Their trust in his character and their faith in the gospel had been restored. In response, Paul wrote to the church once again, commending the believers for their repentance, affirming his love for them, and reminding them of the truth. He also further defended his apostleship, character, conduct, and the reason for his ministry. As a result, this letter is one of Paul's more personal letters, and it is very biographical in nature. Modern-day readers learn about the depths of what Paul went through in order to proclaim the gospel to everyone he could reach. This book is a fantastic reminder to believers about how important the gospel message should be to us. Paul serves as an example that giving one's life to Christian service will have many trials, but God will give us the strength to walk through hardships and give hope and encouragement to those who witness our lives lived for Him.

Author

Both 1 and 2 Corinthians are known to be written by the apostle Paul and written to the church in Corinth. Both letters reflect Paul's writing style and unique theological signature and they contain more autobiographical references than any of his other writings.

Date

The date given by most scholars for the fourth letter to the church in Corinth is around late A.D. 55 or early A.D. 56.

Primary Characters

Paul (2 Corinthians 1-13)

Titus (2 Corinthians 2, 7, 8, 12)

Timothy (2 Corinthians 1)

Historical Moments

Paul Writes His Fourth Letter (his second recorded letter) to the Church in Corinth (2 Corinthians 1)

Paul References His Third Letter to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 2:3-4)

Paul Mentions His Previous Visit to the Corinthians (a visit, not when the church was founded) (2 Corinthians 1, 2, 7, 13)

Paul Mentions His Journey to Troas to Attempt to Find Titus (2 Corinthians 2)

Paul Mentions His Journey to Macedonia, Where He Wrote this Letter (2 Corinthians 2)

Paul Mentions His Intentions to Visit the Corinthians a Third Time (2 Corinthians 12-13)

Major Theological Themes

The High Calling of Christian Ministry - As Paul seeks to defend his love for the church in Corinth and the integrity of his ministry, he summarizes what the life of someone in Christian ministry entails. Those who serve God will face many hardships, which may include persecution, accusations, beatings, imprisonment, hunger, sleeplessness, and much hard work. However, Paul considers these things worth it for the sake of proclaiming the gospel. Paul also reminds them of his ultimate motive, which was to further the gospel; not for personal benefit, but for the benefit of those he preaches to and to the glory of God. Christians today should be challenged by this and be reminded to have the same perspective.

Unity in Doctrine, Love in Discipline - As Paul reminds the Corinthians of his genuine love for them, he exhorts them to take this knowledge and recognize that he preaches to them with unselfish motives. He compares the true gospel with the false claims other men had been making at the time. These claims were confusing the church and caused them to doubt Paul's integrity. Throughout the letter of 2 Corinthians, Paul reminds them of key doctrinal truths: 1) the love of Christ should be the main motivation for ministry work, 2) Christ is the source of all strength, 3) God's approval is what really matters, and 4) we will all stand before God someday to give an account as to how we lived. Paul also tells them that

those who preach false doctrine should not be tolerated, which the Corinthian church had previously been doing. Though Paul encourages patience for those in the church who are sinning, Paul is very harsh on false teachers. Paul knows that anyone who is preaching a gospel other than the true one of Christ is misleading God's children. Because of Paul's overwhelming love for the Corinthians and his desire to see God's real truth proclaimed, Paul urges them to take this very seriously. However, Paul emphasizes that any type of church discipline should always be done in love and that Christians should desire unity.

Lessons Learned from 2 Corinthians

Lead in Love with Transparency, Humility, and a Servant's Heart - Many people may think that in order to be a leader, they need to have the knowledge, take charge, and demonstrate authority over others. However, Paul argues in 2 Corinthians that leadership comes from a heart of love and a desire to reflect Christ. This is revealed in a person's transparency, humility, and service. Paul shares with the Corinthians exactly who he is and what he went through in order to minister to them and others. He takes comfort in the fact that this is all that God asks of him. Paul mentions many times that he is speaking boldly and sincerely to these new believers so that they will see his true heart and his message will not be jeopardized. This should encourage and challenge us that as we serve others, we should do so with integrity and transparency. We must also remember that we answer to God over anyone else; he sees our hearts and the motives we have for our work, especially in ministry. We are called to serve, spread the gospel, and minister to others out of selfless love for Christ, and love for one another, just as Paul did.

Your Life Is Not Just for You - It is extremely obvious that relationships are very important to Paul. He explains that they are also important to God, and therefore, should be important to all believers. Paul reminds believers that even the suffering they experience is not only to produce good character in the sufferer, but it is also for the encouragement of those who witness it. At many different points throughout the letter, Paul explains the personal difficulties he endured in order to preach the gospel to many people. Today, we see the lasting effects of these hardships and trials (physical, emotional, and spiritual) that he went through for the sake of the gospel. Paul's letter encourages believers today that when we suffer, we are able to identify with Christ and feel His comfort through the Holy Spirit. We are also then able to comfort others and encourage them with the comfort we ourselves receive from God (2 Corinthians 1:4). In addition, Paul exhorts the church in Corinth to be generous and support those who are in need, not only from their own abundance but out of the confidence that Christ will provide for them. The main message of this is summed up in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, *For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.* While it is hard to remember

the truth that our lives on earth do not belong to us, this book shows us that we can experience the blessings and joys that come from living a life of service to Christ.