

## 2 Corinthians (July 30)

### Reading 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians illustrates the power of God's grace in approaching the serious problems at Corinth – also effective in the face of similar situations of the churches of today. Paul's application of the gospel (rather than a legalistic tone) had a salutary effect. The individual offender (probably the one excommunicated in 1 Corinthians 5) repented and was reinstated in the church. Through the gospel the majority of the members found reconciliation with Paul and with each other. There was a special effort to show their gratitude by joining in the collection for their Christian brethren at Jerusalem. A minority, who had not been completely convinced by Paul's first letter, was to receive additional application of the gospel when Paul would soon be present in person.

### Author and Date

Paul is the author of this letter. It is stamped with his style, and it contains more autobiographical material than any of his other writings. The available evidence indicates that the year AD 55 is a reasonable estimate for the writing of this letter. From 1 Corinthians 16:5-8 we conclude that 1 Corinthians was written from Ephesus before Pentecost (in the spring) and that 2 Corinthians was written later that same year before the onset of winter. It was written from Macedonia.

### Recipients and Purpose

The opening salutation of the letter states that it was addressed to the church in Corinth and to the Christians throughout Achaia (the Roman province comprising all the territory of Greece south of Macedonia).

The Corinthian church had been infiltrated by false teachers who were challenging both Paul's personal integrity and his authority as an apostle. Because he had announced a change in his itinerary, with the result that he would now pay the Corinthians one long visit instead of two short visits, these adversaries were asserting that his word was not to be trusted. They were also saying that he was not a genuine apostle and that he was putting into his own pocket the money they had collected for the poverty-stricken believers in Jerusalem. Paul asks the Corinthians to consider that his personal life in their midst was always honorable and that his life-transforming message of salvation was true. He urges them to prepare for his impending visit by completing the collection they had started a year previously and by dealing with the troublemakers in their midst. He warns them that he means what he writes.

### Structure

The letter falls naturally into three sections:

- Paul explains the reason for the change of itinerary (chapters 1-7)
- Paul encourages the Corinthians to complete the collection in preparation for his arrival (chapters 8-9)
- Paul stresses the certainty of his coming, his authenticity as an apostle, and his readiness as an apostle to exercise discipline if necessary (chapters 10-13)

### Blessings for Readers

As you study 2 Corinthians, consider the marvelous example Paul gives of a thoughtful Christian leader striving to unite a wounded congregation. Note especially how he emphasizes God's work among them through the gospel, which comforts and heals the congregation. If you have experienced disappointments and hurt feelings at church, allow 2 Corinthians to assist in your healing.

Paul also describes the generous heart of those who have received God's grace. He contrasts the faithful Macedonian believers, so ready to give to the poor and needy, with the disorganized and begrudging Corinthians, who question Paul's motives for collecting the offering. God grant us wise and generous hearts that think clearly about giving for the needs of others!