

## Know the Word The Book of Second Corinthians Lesson 1 – Introduction

### 1. Author and Title

As indicated in the opening salutation, Paul is the author of this letter. Both external and internal evidence are very strong in support of Pauline authorship.

To distinguish this letter from the First Epistle to the Corinthians, this letter received the title, *Pros Corinthians B*. The *B* represents the Greek letter *beta*, the second letter of the Greek alphabet.

### 2. Date

2 Corinthians was probably written around A.D. 55-56, from Macedonia (2:13; 7:5), most likely Philippi during the later part of his third missionary journey.

### 3. Audience

Refer to the notes on 1 Corinthians Lesson 1.

### 4. Occasion

Two events may have triggered the writing of 2 Corinthians.

- (1) Titus's return from a recent visit (7:5-7)
- (2) Paul's anticipated third visit to the church (13:1) in light of
  - The church's need to have the collection ready before Paul gets there and
  - Their readiness to embrace some "false apostles... masquerading as apostles of Christ."

### 5. Summary of Paul's involvement with the Corinthian church

- (1) First visit to Corinth: Paul established the church at Corinth during his second missionary journey after he left Athens. (Acts 18:1-17). Paul stayed in Corinth for 18 months after the Lord spoke to him in a vision (Acts 18:9-10). He spent a longer time there than in any other city apart from Ephesus.
- (2) First letter to Corinth (now lost). This is the 'previous letter' that Paul refers to in 1 Cor. 5:9-11, "I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people" (NIV).
- (3) Second letter to Corinth (**1 Corinthians**). When Paul was in Ephesus, he received news about troubles in the church at Corinth. The news came from people who were living in Chloe's house (1 Corinthians 1:11) and from Stephanas, Fortunatas and Achaicus (1 Corinthians 16:17). A letter also came from the Christians in Corinth, asking for Paul's advice about various problems – about marriage (1 Cor. 7), and food sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8).

- (4) Second ‘painful’ visit to Corinth. Paul heard that problems in Corinth were getting worse. So he made a second visit. We have no details of this visit but Paul mentions in 2 Corinthians 2:1, “So I made up my mind that I would not make *another painful visit* to you”. In 2 Corinthians 12:14 and 13:1-2, Paul mentions a third visit to Corinth, so there must have been a second visit.
- (5) Third letter to Corinth (the ‘severe’ or ‘sorrowful’ letter, now also lost). Paul’s second visit was not successful. So he wrote a letter when he was feeling very hurt (2 Corinthians 2:1-4). Some Bible scholars believe that chapters 10-13 in 2 Corinthians are the ‘severe’ letter but there is no consensus about this belief
- (6) Fourth letter to Corinth (**2 Corinthians**).
- (7) Third visit to Corinth: “He (Paul) travelled through that area (Macedonia), speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally *arrived in Corinth, where he stayed three months.*(Acts 20:2-3).

**It should be pointed out that the two lost letters were lost only because they were not intended by God to be part of the biblical canon.**

### 6. Purpose

Of all Paul’s letters, 2 Corinthians is the most personal and intimate. In it he bared his heart and declared his steadfast love for the Corinthians even though some had been extremely critical and very fickle in their affection for him.

What concerned Paul pre-eminently was the presence of false teachers, claiming to be apostles, who had entered the church. They promoted their own ideas and at the same time sought to discredit both the person and message of the apostle. Second Corinthians was written to defend the authenticity of both his apostleship and his message. This was not carried out in a self-protecting spirit, but because Paul knew that acceptance of his ministry and message were intimately bound with the Corinthian church’s own spiritual well-being.

In the process of Paul’s defence, three key purposes emerge:

- (1) Paul expressed his joy at the favourable response of the church to Paul’s ministry (chaps. 1-7);
- (2) he sought to remind the believers of their commitment to the offering for the Christians in Judea (chaps. 8-9); and
- (3) he sought to defend his apostolic authority (chaps. 10-13).

**7. Key Themes**

1. The <i>cross</i> of Christ, embodied in the suffering of Paul, His apostle, unmasks the wrong teaching of ‘false apostles’ and ‘servants of Satan.’	11:13-15
2. Paul is a <i>servant</i> of the new covenant (3:6). His ministry and message of the cross brings the Spirit of the Living God and God’s righteousness to believers.	3:3,6-9; 5:14-5,21
3. <i>Endurance</i> in the midst of troubles, and <i>Christ-like behaviour</i> , are the greatest display of God’s presence, power, and glory in this fallen world. The grace of God, modelled by Paul, makes such behaviour possible.	1:12-14; 6:1, 14-7:1; 9:13-15; 12:7-10; 13:4
4. The presence and power of the Holy Spirit <i>transforms believers</i> into the image of God seen in Christ. Believers embody the new creation of the new covenant by living for the sake of others. This is made possible by the reconciliation of God brought about by the cross.	3:18; 4:4,6; 5:15, 17-21
5. Repentance expresses itself in holiness, which is defined as a love for God and His church and love for our neighbours	6:14-7:1; chs. 8-9
6. Christ, as Saviour, is also the universal Judge, who will one day pass judgment on all people according to their deeds. In anticipation of this day, the Spirit transforms those in whom He dwells as a guarantee of the ‘eternal weight of glory’ to come for believers at the resurrection.	1:14,22; 3:6,8-9,18; 5:5,9-11.

(Source: ESV Study Bible)

**8. Key Word(s)**

While the general focus of this epistle is Paul’s “defence” of his ministry and authority, a key word that surfaces is “comfort” (occurring 11 times in 9 verses). As we face the various dilemmas of life, we must all learn to find our comfort in God who is the God of all comfort.

**9. Key Verses**

- **4:5-6.** For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said “*Let light shine out of darkness,*” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
- **4:16-18.** Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.
- **5:17-19.** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

## 10. Christ as Seen in 2 Corinthians:

Christ is seen as our comfort (1:5), Lord (1:14), triumph (2:14), liberty or freedom for a new life (3:17), light (4:6), judge (5:10), reconciliation (5:19), gift (9:15), owner (10:7), and power (12:9).

## FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION (ALONE or in 2's or 3's)

Spend some time reflecting on what God is trying to say to you through this verse:

**“For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ. And so through Him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God.” (2 Cor. 1:20)**

### (1) Have You Said Yes to All of God's Yes to You?

Are you living in the fullest enjoyment of God's YES to you in Christ Jesus? Or are you responding to God's YES with a NO, or NOT NOW, or MAYBE. What makes you sometimes say NO, NOT NOW, or MAYBE when God clearly says YES?

**(2) When you make promises, are you guilty of saying Yes and No at the same time? What can you do to make good all the promises you have made? Or should you be more careful not to say YES too quickly? (Read 2 Cor. 1:12-24).**

## OUTLINE OF 2 CORINTHIANS

MAIN SECTIONS	CHAPTER	VERSES	SUBJECT
INTRODUCTION	1	1-11	Greetings and Praise to God
THE APOSTLE'S MINISTRY	2	12-24	Integrity of Paul's motives and conduct
		1-4	
	3	5-11	Ministering forgiveness
		12-17	Ministers of the new covenant
	4		Ministry of glory
	5		Ministry of treasures in clay jars
	6		Ministry of reconciliation
	6	14-18	Ministry through hardships
Call to separation			
7		Ministry in sorrow and joy	
		Ministry of giving – generosity	
MINISTRY TO THE SAINTS	8		Principles
	9		
DEFENCE OF THE APOSTLE'S MINISTRY	10		Authority and area of mission
	11	16-33	Countering false apostles
	12	1-10	• Paul's sufferings
		11-21	• Paul's vision of glory and weakness • Paul's concern for the Corinthians
13	1-10	Final Warnings	
	11-14	Final Greetings	
CONCLUSION			