



2 Corinthians - Introduction

Author and Title

The apostle Paul is the undisputed author of 2 Corinthians. Although some scholars have questioned whether Paul wrote 6:14-7:1, due to its unique vocabulary and subject matter, these differences are more likely due to the fact that in this passage Paul is quoting a collage of Scripture.

Second Corinthians is actually the fourth letter that Paul sent to the church he founded in Corinth, which is recorded in Acts 18:1-17, together with the house churches in the whole province of Achaia, of which Corinth was the capital. The four letters are:

1. The previous letter mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9.
2. 1 Corinthians as it is recorded in the canon of Scripture.
3. The tearful, severe letter mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:3-4.
4. The letter here under discussion, referred to as 2 Corinthians.

Date

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia around AD55/56, a year or so after writing 1 Corinthians and a year before he wrote his letter to the Romans from Corinth, as recorded in Acts 20:2-3.

Theme

The central theme of 2 Corinthians is the relationship between suffering and the power of the Spirit in Paul's apostolic life, ministry and message. In addition to calling into question Paul's motives in organising a collection for believers in Judæa and questioning his personal courage, Paul's opponents had argued that Paul suffered too much to be a Spirit-filled apostle of the risen Christ. Paul argues that his weakness as an apostle is the very means by which believers are comforted and God in Christ is made known in the world. Paul's sufferings embody the Cross of Christ, while his endurance amid adversity, with thanksgiving and contentment, manifests the resurrection power of the Spirit. Paul's suffering as an apostle is thus the very means God uses to reveal his glory.

Paul therefore sees a close tie between the Corinthians' acceptance of his apostleship and the genuineness of their faith. To reject Paul and his proclamation is to reject Christ himself, since Paul's message, ministry and manner of life are one. This explains why 2 Corinthians is the most personal of all of Paul's letters, filled with deep emotion.

Purpose

Second Corinthians is a response to a complicated history between Paul and the Corinthian church, which must be reconstructed from the evidence available today. Originally, Paul had planned to travel from Ephesus through Macedonia to Corinth on his way back to Jerusalem to deliver the money he had collected for the believers in Judæa. In the meantime, he sent Timothy to visit the Corinthians on his behalf. When Timothy arrived in Corinth, he found that the church was in turmoil, most likely in response to the arrival of Paul's opponents from the east. When Paul learned of this he decided to proceed immediately to Corinth to resolve the issues first, then travel on to Macedonia before returning to Corinth for a second visit on his way to Jerusalem, the proposed 'double favour' or 'second experience of grace' of 1:15.

Paul's visit, however, turned out to be very painful as a result of the church's open rebellion against him. At that time, Paul decided it was best to suffer humiliation and leave, without retaliating, in order to extend mercy to the Corinthians. Once back in Ephesus, Paul sent Titus back to Corinth with a tearful and severe letter, that is now lost, warning the church of God's judgment if they did not repent.

To Paul's great joy, the majority of the Corinthians did repent, which Paul discovered when he met Titus in Macedonia; but there was still a rebellious minority who, under the influence of Paul's opponents, continued to reject Paul and his Gospel. In response, and as yet another act of mercy, Paul wrote this letter from Macedonia in anticipation of his third, impending visit to Corinth before going on to Jerusalem.

The mixed nature of the church in Corinth, not to mention the opponents whom Paul addresses indirectly throughout the letter, explains the complex nature of 2 Corinthians and its sometimes sudden shifts in focus and tone. This has led some scholars to suggest that it is a compilation of as many as six fragments. There is no evidence, however, that 2 Corinthians ever contained less than or more than its present content or that it was arranged in a different order.

Paul's letter is an extended defence of the legitimacy of his apostolic ministry and its implications. It is intended to accomplish three overlapping purposes:

1. To strengthen the faithful majority and the purity of the church, primarily in chapters 1-7.
2. To complete the collection as the expression of their repentance, primarily in chapters 8-9.
3. To offer the rebellious minority one more chance to repent before Paul returns to judge those still rejecting him and his message, primarily in chapters 10-13.

Thus, chapters 1-7 focus primarily on the past track record of Paul's ministry, chapters 8-9 on the present responsibility of the repentant, and chapters 10-13 on the future judgment of those still in rebellion against the Gospel.

The Ancient City of Corinth

The Acrocorinth is a small but steep mountain 1,886 feet or 575m high on the Peloponnesian peninsula in southern Greece. Ancient Corinth was built at the mountain's foot, benefiting also from the natural spring that provided water for the town. In Paul's day Corinth, although a couple of miles inland, oversaw the territory connecting the Adriatic port of Lechaion on the west with the Aegean port of Cenchreæ to the east. Ships were often portaged between these seaports across this narrow stretch of the Peloponnesian isthmus, approximately 3.7 miles or 6km wide at its narrowest. Several rulers in the 1st Century AD foolishly attempted to construct a canal across the isthmus, but this was not successfully accomplished until the 19th Century.

The famed Greek city of Corinth, renowned for its artistry in bronze, its wealth, and its wanton sexuality, was destroyed in 146BC during a war with Rome. The city was re-founded as a Roman colony in 44BC by Roman freedmen, and the distinct archæological strata in the city centre testify to this gap in its history. Inscriptions from the first one hundred years of the new colony were mostly in Latin, although strong marks of Greek culture were also evident in the art and life of the city.

First Century Corinth followed a Roman city plan based on a rectangular grid. Typical urban structures were built or reconstructed, such as shops, stoas, basilicas, a bouleuterion used for the city council meetings, a gymnasium, baths, public toilets, and a theatre. A few large houses from this period have also been excavated. The centre of town boasted the refashioned Peirene Fountain as a pleasant place from which to draw spring water. To this day a raised speaker's platform stands in the main forum, and a nearby inscription refers to this platform as the *rostra*, equivalent to a *bēma* or tribunal; this is probably the very location where Gallio judged Paul to be innocent, refer to Acts 18:12-17. Some other significant archæological remains date from post-NT times, such as the odeion, a small covered theatre.

In Paul's day the great Doric-style temple, dedicated to Athena or Apollo, from the 6th Century BC remained a central feature in Corinth, and multiple temples to other deities dotted the city. Indeed, when the author Pausanias wrote about Corinth in the mid-2nd Century AD, his description of the city read like a tour guide of pagan monumental sacred sites. Corinth boasted an important sanctuary of Asklepios, the god of healing, where people would come to offer sacrifices to the god and to seek medical care.

Marks of the imperial cult were evident, especially if some are correct in identifying the substantial Temple E as being dedicated to Augustus' sister Octavia, although it may have been for Jupiter.

The famous Hellenistic-era temple of Aphrodite atop the Acrocorinth had been rebuilt as a rather small structure during the 1st Century AD. Scholars debate whether Strabo's account of 1,000 temple prostitutes refers to the earlier Hellenistic temple of Aphrodite or to the Roman one of Paul's day; the former

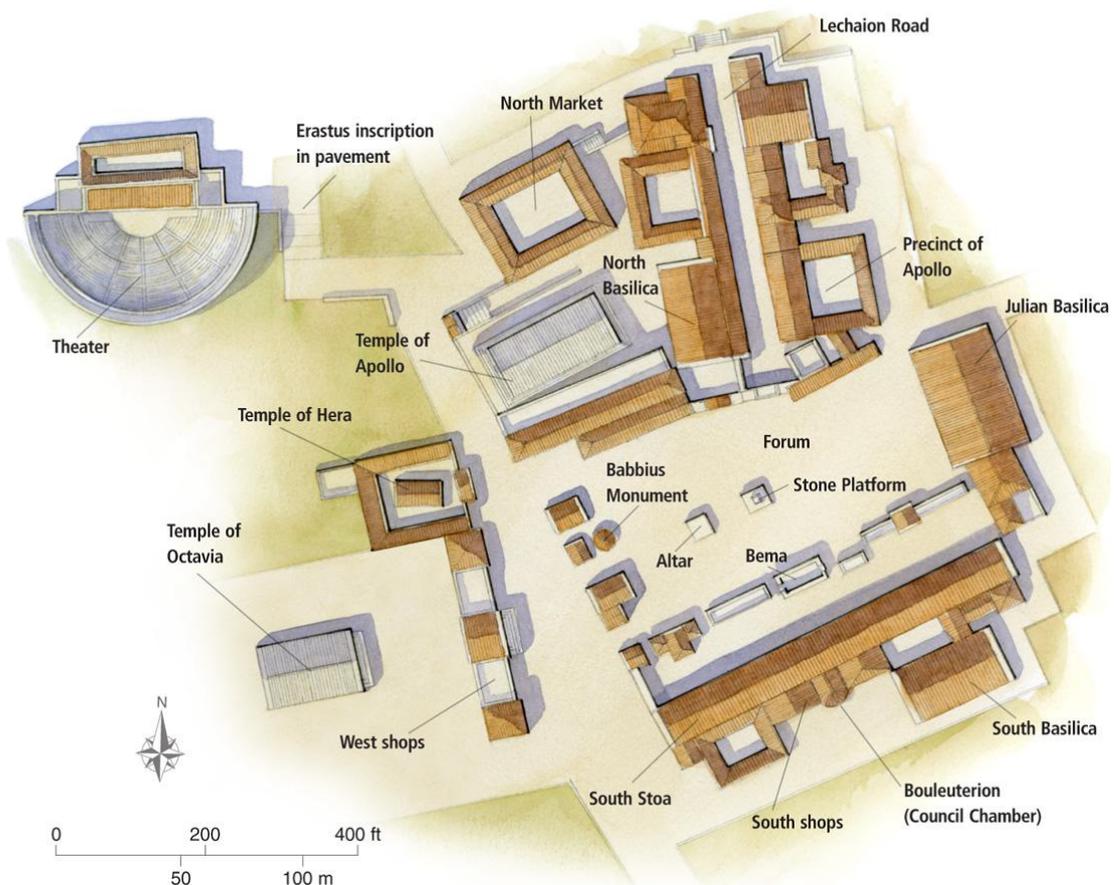
seems more probable (Strabo, Geography 8.6.20c). In any case, in Roman times, wanton sexuality would have been common at such a port city.

For other important archaeological features refer to comments made on 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, i.e. the Isthmian games, 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1 referring to the meat market, Acts 18:4 for the synagogue and Judaism, and Romans 16:23 for the inscription relating to Erastus.

Corinth in the Time of Paul (circa AD60)

The city plan shows those features of the city of Corinth that archaeologists have so far identified as dating from the time of Paul. Others remain to be discovered by future archaeological excavations.

CORINTH IN THE TIME OF PAUL (C. A.D. 60)



Summary of Salvation History

God brought about salvation through the weakness of Christ's crucifixion, in fulfilment of Psalm 22 and Isaiah Chapter 53. Christians in turn are to find strength in Christ and not in themselves.

Key Themes

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Verses</u>
1 The Cross of Christ, embodied in the suffering of his apostle, unmasks the erroneous teaching of 'false apostles' and 'servants of Satan'.	11:13-15.
2 In fulfilment of Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:26-27, Paul is a servant of the new covenant (2 Corinthians 3:6), whose ministry and message of the Cross mediates the Spirit of the living God and God's righteousness to believers.	3:3; 3:6-9; 5:14-15, 5:21.
3 Endurance amid adversity and Christ-like behaviour, both made possible by the grace of God and modelled by Paul himself, are the greatest display of God's presence, power and glory in this fallen world.	1:12-14; 6:1; 6:14-7:1; 9:13-15; 12:7-10; 13:4.
4 The presence and power of the Spirit transforms believers into the image of God seen in Christ, which is the dawning of the new creation characterised by the righteousness of God. Believers therefore embody the new creation of the new covenant by living for the sake of others. This is made possible by the reconciliation with God brought about by the Cross.	3:18; 4:4-6; 5:15; 5:17-21.
5 Repentance expresses itself in holiness, which is defined as a purity-producing love for God and his church and a unity-creating love for one's neighbour.	6:14-7:1; Chapters 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; 1:22; 3:6; 3:8-9; 3:18; 5:5; 5:9-11.

Writing Style

Second Corinthians is an informal occasional epistle, with a disjointed organisation and numerous asides that are introduced without smooth tie-ins to the preceding material. The letter is also a missionary manual, based on the author's real-life missionary experiences. The usual conventions of the epistle appear early and late with the epistolary salutation, thanksgiving, and closing. The conventional paraenesis, that is, list of moral exhortations, is absent.

Occupying prominent places in the body of the letter are an extended defence of the author's life and ministry and a formal boast in a spiritualised version of it. The letter is heavily occasional, meaning that it is filled with references to specific events in Paul's life and ministry. In the background can be seen the familiar genre

of autobiography. Second Corinthians is also a missionary appeal letter that requests spiritual and financial support.

Second Corinthians mingles a number of stylistic features or ingredients, including self-portraiture, lyric outbursts of emotion, denunciation of opponents, sarcasm, threats, and expressions of personal affection. Further, the style is very personal and autobiographical, filled with references to Paul's own life. Exalted style frequently surfaces, with impressive vocabulary, catalogues or lists, parallel constructions, and rhetorical embellishments such as contrast and paradox.

The inferred literary intentions of the letter are as follows: to provide a vindication of the author's life in the standard literary genre known as *apologia pro vita sua*; to paint a portrait of the author and his life in such a way that the reader in his imagination becomes the author's travelling companion; to inspire the reader with the literary and rhetorical flourishes that appear in abundance; to win the reader with its aphoristic flair; and to persuade readers to support faithful and genuine ministry of the Gospel.

The Setting of 2 Corinthians (circa AD55-56)

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia a year or so after writing 1 Corinthians, during his third missionary journey. He had just finished his three-year ministry in Ephesus and was visiting the churches in Macedonia as he made his way to Corinth. In Macedonia he met Titus, who had returned from Corinth with news about the church there. See the regional map.



Outline

- I. Paul's Defence of His Legitimacy as an Apostle (1:1-7:16)
 - a. Salutation (1:1-2)
 - b. Paul's Thanksgiving after Affliction (1:3-11)
 - c. Paul's boast (1:12-2:17)
 - i. The Postponement of Paul's Visit (1:12-2:4)
 1. The content of Paul's boast (1:12-14)
 2. The reason for Paul's first change of plans (1:15-22)
 3. The reason for Paul's second change of plans (1:23-2:4)
 - ii. Forgiveness for the Offender (2:5-11)
 - iii. Paul's Anxiety in Troas (2:12-17)
 - d. Ministers of the New Covenant (3:1-18)
 - i. The reality of the Spirit in Paul's ministry (3:1-6)
 - ii. Paul's interpretation of Exodus 32-34 (3:7-11)
 - iii. Paul's application of Exodus 32-34 to his own situation (3:12-18)
 - e. Paul's encouragement in his ministry (4:1-6:13)
 - i. Treasure in Clay Jars (4:1-15)
 1. The new covenant dawning of the new creation (4:1-6)
 2. The new covenant power of the resurrection (4:7-15)
 - ii. Living by Faith (4:16-5:10)
 - iii. The Ministry of Reconciliation (5:11-6:13)
 1. The new covenant ministry of reconciliation (5:11-6:2)
 2. The new covenant support for the legitimacy of Paul's ministry (6:3-13)
 - f. The Temple of the Living God (6:14-7:1)
 - g. Paul's Joy at the Church's Repentance (7:2-16)

- II. Paul's Appeal to the Repentant Church in Corinth Regarding the Collection (8:1-9:15)
 - a. Encouragement to Be Generous (8:1-15)
 - b. Commendation of Titus (8:16-24)
 - c. The Collection for Christians at Jerusalem (9:1-15)
- III. Paul's Appeal to the Rebellious Minority in Corinth (10:1-13:10)
 - a. Paul Defends His Ministry (10:1-18)
 - i. Paul's defence of his humility as an apostle (10:1-11)
 - ii. Paul's defence of his authority as an apostle (10:12-18)
 - b. Paul and the False Apostles (11:1-15)
 - c. Paul's Sufferings as an Apostle (11:16-33)
 - d. Paul's Visions and Revelations (12:1-10)
 - e. Paul's final defence and appeal to the rebellious (12:11-13:10)
 - i. Paul's Concern for the Corinthian Church (12:11-21)
 - ii. Further Warning (13:1-10)
- IV. Final Greetings and Benediction (13:11-13)