

New Testament Survey—2 Corinthians

One of the greatest challenges in doing ministry is *people*. When you're pouring your life into people there is great potential for life change. And there's great potential for misunderstanding, and perhaps rejection. It's just the reality of ministry. There is great joy in being a disciple-maker. There is also the potential for great heartache.

That was true for the Lord Jesus. Think about His earthly ministry. He poured His life into people and there were various responses. Some responded with faith and obedience and love. And yet some who responded with faith and obedience and love later disappointed the Lord. Yet His love was unconditional for them and He never gives up on His sheep.

The apostle Paul certainly faced his share of rejection, and not just by unbelievers. He was questioned, maligned, and even rejected by those in whom he invested years of his life. How did he handle it? And how can we learn better how to handle the disappointments that come from misunderstandings and disappointments with people? We find the answers in 2 Corinthians.

- **Who wrote the book?**

--Paul

This is Paul's most autobiographical letter; he gives more information about himself than in any other letter

Discuss: What do we learn about Paul from 2 Corinthians? See the following...

1:1 An apostle; had an associate, Timothy

1:8 Faced hardship, even despair in Asia (why did it happen, acc. to v 9?)

1:15-17 He had planned to visit Corinth twice, but had to change his itinerary to one long visit (this prompted his critics to say his word was untrustworthy)

Q: Why didn't he come as planned? 1:23 "in order to spare you"

2:4 Paul was not a stoic, but a man of deep emotion ("anguish of heart...many tears")

2:12-13 He went to Troas, but did not stay because Titus wasn't there.

2:17 Paul didn't peddle the Word for profit

3:5 He didn't claim personal competence

4:1 Why was Paul in the ministry? Because of God's mercy

4:2 What was Paul's strategy in ministry? Not deception, but setting forth the truth

4:16 Was ministry hard for Paul? "Outwardly we are wasting away"

5:9 What was Paul's #1 goal in life? To please the Lord

6:4-10 What credentials did Paul list as qualifications for ministry?

7:2 What was Paul's request of the Corinthians? Make room for us in your heart

7:5 What did Paul face in Macedonia? Harassed at every turn

10:1-2 Paul defends his ministry.

11:16ff. What kinds of things did Paul say he endured in the ministry?

12:2 What privilege did God give Paul? To see heaven

12:7 What else did God give Paul? A thorn in the flesh

12:20 What was Paul afraid of? Of what he would find when he came to Corinth

13:1 How many times had Paul already been in Corinth? Twice

- **When was the book written?**

--A.D. 55

Apparently, Paul was in Macedonia when he wrote this letter (2:13; 7:5). 1 Corinthians was written to the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2), but this second letter was addressed to include the church in Corinth *and* the saints throughout Achaia (2 Cor. 1:1).

- **Why was the book written?**

The Background: (see Gromacki, 216-7)

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus. After he sent the letter, he stayed in Ephesus to continue his ministry there, and to await the results of his first letter (in which he gave some pretty hard counsel!). He hoped that the double thrust of his letter and Timothy's visit would straighten things out in Corinth. It didn't.

Factions grew worse in the church. Opposition to Paul's authority as an apostle persisted.

Paul (probably) made a quick trip across the Aegean Sea to Corinth to resolve the matters himself. This trip is not mentioned in Acts. However, since in 12:14 Paul said he planned to visit a *third* time, there must have been a second visit between the first (when he evangelized Corinth) and the time he wrote 2 Corinthians. This hasty visit failed. Paul retreated to Ephesus with insults of his person and rejections of his authority ringing in his ears (Gromacki, 217). see 2:1; 12:21; 13:1-2

Two key problems were still unresolved (which prompted Paul to write 2 Cor.). One, false Jewish apostles were attacking Paul's integrity (chs. 10-11). Two, sinning members were still unrepentant (12:21).

Paul decided he would not return to Corinth until the Corinthians adopted a different attitude towards him (1:23).

There is speculation that at this time (after 1 Cor. and before 2 Cor.) Paul wrote a brief letter in criticism of the person who was against him (2:4; 7:12). Titus left Paul to go to Corinth, and could have delivered this letter. This "tearful letter" has been lost.

Things got worse for Paul at Ephesus, so he went to Troas, expecting to find Titus there (2:12-

13). Titus wasn't there. So Paul moved on to Macedonia, possibly Philippi. There, he faced more trouble (7:5), he was comforted when Titus came with a glowing report from Corinth (see 7:6-7).

Revival had broken out in the Corinthian church, and the church was once again warm and responsive to Paul. This prompted him to write 2 Corinthians.

Discuss: If someone attacks your Christian character or your Christian service, how should you respond? What lessons do we gain from Paul's defense?

1. We should not get defensive when our feelings get hurt. Yet we often do. That's not why Paul defended himself in 2 Cor. It wasn't for personal reasons.

2. We should defend ourselves, and seek to clear our name only if the attack is harming the advance of the gospel, and the well-being of the church. Paul's critics were saying he wasn't an apostle (that's calling God a liar!), and that he was lining his pockets with money they had collected for the saints in Jerusalem. Those attacks warranted a response for they were undermining God's work (e.g.—when Pastor Max was fired by the deacons in an unbiblical manner; he warned the congregation).

3. We need not become *defensive* when we defend what God is doing. There's a time to turn the other cheek and overlook an offense.

Test: Should we defend ourselves when the following occurs...

1. When my neighbor throws trash on my lawn
2. When my boss says I'm not doing my job properly
3. When a person from another church says that I am teaching salvation by works in my Sunday School class
4. When a person I've witnessed to at work says I am intolerant of other religions

- **What is the outline of the book?**

(Gromacki, p. 220)

- I. Defense of His Conduct (ch 1-2:11)
- II. Defense of His Ministry (ch 2:12-ch 7)
- III. Defense of the Collection (chs. 8-9)
- IV. Defense of His Apostleship (chs. 10-12:13)
- V. Defense of His Proposed Visit (12:14-13:14)

- **What is the message of the book in one sentence?**

2 Corinthians is a letter in which Paul defends himself against critics who were hurting the church.

- **What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?**

1. *2 Corinthians explains the importance of giving to the Lord's work.*

Discuss: What are some principles that should affect Christian giving?

See chs. 8-9

- a. Wealth isn't the issue. Generosity is (8:3-4).
- b. The place to start is by giving yourself to God (8:5).
- c. Giving shows that we appreciate the grace of Christ (8:9).
- d. God is interested in more than "good intentions" (8:11-12).
- e. We should give with cheerfulness, not grudgingly (9:7).
- f. Giving is a step of faith in which we trust God to meet our future needs (9:8).

2. *2 Corinthians teaches us what new covenant ministry is all about.*

See: 2:12-6:2

Discuss: What are some unique elements in ministering under the new covenant?

3. *2 Corinthians gives us needed warning about how Satan works through false teachers.*

See: 11:3, 13-15

Discuss: What do we learn about Satan from this passage?