



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Class Series Notes

Paul's Intense Defense

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A - Revisiting the Church of God in Corinth

(Reviewing Some Things from Part 1)

1. With regard to location, politics, culture, worldviews, and population, what kind of city was Corinth as it existed in the mid-first century AD?
2. What challenge did Corinth pose for Christianity?
3. Briefly describe Paul's interactions with the Corinthian church as we are able to discern them from the evidence of the New Testament. Visits? Letters? Treatment? Issues?
4. How many letters did Paul apparently write to the church in Corinth? In the box below, diagram the development of that correspondence.



5. Our focus is on a part of 2 Corinthians. Briefly describe the nature of this letter. With what big puzzle does it present us?

B - Another's Summary of 2 Corinthians

"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 organizing a collection for believers in Judea (8:20-21; cf. 2:17; 12:14-18) and **questioning his personal courage** (10:10-11; 11:21), 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 (1:3-11) and God in Christ is made known in the world (2:14-17; 4:7-12; 6:3-10; 11:23b-33). **Paul's sufferings embody the cross of Christ, while his endurance amid adversity, with thanksgiving and contentment, manifests the resurrection power of the Spirit (12:7-10)**. Paul's **suffering as an apostle is thus the very means God uses to reveal his glory** (1:3-4, 11, 20; 4:15; 9:11-15; 10:17-18).

A Broad Outline of 2 Corinthians

- I. Paul's Defense of His Legitimacy as an Apostle (1:1-7:16).
- II. Paul's Appeal to the Repentant Church in Corinth Regarding the Collection (8:1-9:15).
- III. Paul's Appeal to the Rebellious Minority in Corinth (10:1-13:14).

ESV Study Bible

"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."¹

Questions to Consider

1. From the above, identify and list the problems Paul's critics and opponents had with him.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
2. What was Paul's response? What evidence did he give for it?
 - a. Response:
 - b. Evidence:
3. What does it mean to say that "2 Corinthians is the most personal of all Paul's letters"?

¹ *The ESV Study Bible*, English Standard Version® (ESV®). Copyright © 2008 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved. Bible Works v. 9 module. Italics are as they appear in the study Bible. Bolded items are my emphasis.

C - How Do We Explain This?

1. As we have already noticed, the problems between Paul and the Corinthians seemed to have lessened, if not been resolved. At least, that is the sense we get from 2 Corinthians 1-7, and may explain why he would venture to bring up the matter of the collection (2 Cor. 8-9).
2. How, then, are we to explain the abrupt change in tone and language found in chapters 10-13?
 - a. From 10:1-11:15, we see these ideas.
 - 1) Spiritual warfare: someone's out to get us (10:1-6; 11:3, 14-15).
 - 2) If anyone is confident (persuaded) he is Christ's, Paul has just as much confidence, even more; this is so despite the criticism he was receiving from his detractors (10:7-11).
 - 3) Comparisons: right and wrong standards (10:12, 18).
 - 4) Humble boasting (10:13-17).
 - 5) Paul's aim, battle, and strategy are contrasted with the rhetorical standards of his detractors (11:1-6).
 - 6) A history of behavior toward the Corinthians that followed the suffering-to-glory example of Jesus (11:7-11).
 - 7) A direct charge against the "false apostles" (*pseudapostoloi*) (11:12-15).
 - b. From 12:1-13:10, see these ideas.
 - 1) Paul's humbling "thorn in the flesh" — "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weakness, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (v. 9; 12:1-10). (If *this* is self-serving, as his critics charged . . . ; see 2:17; 8:20-21; 12:14-18).
 - 2) An authentic, beneficial ministry that never took advantage of the Corinthians (the charges apparently were stirred by outside agitators) (12:11-18).
 - 3) A concern for "upbuilding" (v. 19) and earnest desire that sins will not continue in people who remained impenitent (12:19-21).
 - 4) A call for self-examination: a time of reckoning is coming (when he *will* show them his actions can be as bold as his letters!); Paul's aim was all about them (13:1-10).
3. Some think the abrupt change shows that Paul wrote (at least) four Corinthian letters. How so?
4. If 2 Corinthians 10-13 once formed an independent letter that was later attached to chapters 1-9 to make the one letter we now have, we would expect some evidence of that to be found in the many manuscript copies of Paul's letters that have survived. Such evidence is

lacking.² D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo have suggested another possibility. See what you think.

Paul hears Titus's good report and immediately sets out to communicate his relief. That letter is fairly long and, with Paul otherwise involved in his ministry in Macedonia (1:16-17; 2:12), "it is not unreasonable to suppose that the completion of the letter was delayed for weeks, or even longer; the phenomenon of unfinished letters is not entirely unknown today, and our letters are usually much shorter than 2 Corinthians! If during that time Paul received additional information about the situation in Corinth and learned that it had once again plummeted into the disastrous state presupposed by 2 Corinthians 10-13, the abrupt change of tone at 10:1 would be accounted for. In other words, one might reasonably postulate that after finishing chapters 1-9, but before completing the letter and sending it off, Paul received bad news from Corinth and changed his tack in the final chapters of the epistle."³

As we move forward, we will look more closely at 11:16-33, what it shows about Paul's perseverance, and what it can teach us as we live the life of faith.

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² Compare, for example, Ephesians 1:1, where various translations have a note to the effect that "the earliest and most important MSS [manuscripts] omit 'in Ephesus'" (cited from NET, but see also NASB, NIV, NRSV, ESV). In addition to the manuscript evidence are other items of interest. A very early list of accepted books lists a letter "to the Laodiceans". Students of Ephesians note Paul's more general and less personal tone and references. Such evidence has led some to posit that "Ephesians" was a circular letter intended both for the church in Ephesus and for others nearby. As manuscript copies were made, the blank left in 1:1 was filled in with the name of the city to which a specific copy was taken. My point is not to argue for or against that conclusion, merely to show that the question about the addressees of the letter arises because of the manuscript evidence. The situation with 2 Corinthians is different.

³ D. A. Carson & Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 434.