

2 CORINTHIANS

Introduction

Author. Paul's authorship of this epistle is without disputation (1:1). It is stamped throughout with his style and contains more autobiographical material than any other epistle. The letter is clearly the sequel to 1 Corinthians with the same author dealing with many of the same issues.

Date. Based upon 1 Corinthian 16:5-8 it appears that 1 Corinthians was written from Ephesus before Pentecost in 55 A. D. 2 Corinthians was written later that year before the coming of winter probably from Macedonia (2:13; 7:5).

Occasion. Late in the three year stay of Paul in Ephesus, having had a great deal of contact with the Corinthian church, Paul sent Titus to Corinth to deal with problems there (2 Corinthians 8:6, 16, 21, 22). Paul intended to meet Titus at Troas on his way to Corinth, but when Paul arrived, Titus was nowhere to be found. Being concerned over his friend, Paul continued on his journey to Macedonia (2:12) and finally found him, perhaps in Philippi or Thessalonica. Titus then delivered a positive report to Paul (7:5-7). In response to that report Paul wrote 2 Corinthians.

Based upon the letter itself we can deduce the contents of the report by Titus. Evidently, the Corinthian church had been influenced by false teachers who challenged both Paul's personal *integrity* and his apostolic *authority*. When Paul announced his change of plans to visit the Corinthians once rather than twice (cf. 1:15-18) his adversaries evidently seized this opportunity to charge that Paul's word was not to be trusted. They also charged that he was not a genuine apostle or an authoritative speaker. They probably accused him of using the money collected for the Jerusalem saints for his own pocket. Paul's basic response is an appeal for the Corinthians to consider the integrity of his personal life and the purity of the gospel message. He urges them to prepare for his third visit by completing the collection which they had begun and by dealing with the false teachers and unrepentant ones in their midst.

Message Statement. *The personal integrity and apostolic office of Paul are divinely enabled and therefore genuine.*

Argument

1A PAUL'S DEFENSE: EXPLANATION OF HIS CONDUCT AND MINISTRY 1:1--7:16
Due to the differences in tone and focus of this section as opposed to the last section (10-13) it may be that Paul's words here are addressed toward the Corinthians who were submissive to his leadership while the latter section deals with those who denied his leadership. Paul's emphases in this first section of the book are basically threefold: praise to God for his comfort (1:3-11); a defense of his change of plans, (1:12--2:11); and a positive description of his ministry (2:12--7:16).

1B Salutation 1:1-2

Paul's salutation is rather unremarkable. He does identify himself as an apostle but does not otherwise defend himself in the introduction as one might expect based upon his example in other letters (e.g. Galatians 1:1-2).

- 2B Praise for Divine Comfort in Affliction 1:3-11
Paul rejoices in this section in the confidence that the suffering which he had endured was not in vain; God would use that distress to the spiritual advantage of other. Early in the letter Paul is not afraid to mention his own weakness and personal suffering because it allows him to demonstrate the sufficiency of God in his life (12:9).
- 3B Change of Plans Defended 1:12--2:11
Although Paul had previously communicated his intention to come directly to the Corinthians he later changed his mind (1 Corinthians 16:5-7) and delayed his visit. Evidently his opponents had seized this opportunity to slander Paul's character charging him with vacillation and a lack of trustworthiness. He thus answers the charge and explains his change of plans. He wanted to allow the Corinthians time to deal with an erring brother which they subsequently had done. Paul then recommends grace and restoration concerning the repentant one (2:5-11).
- 4B Glorious Ministry Described 2:12--7:16
The basic purpose of this section is to defend the ministry of Paul against the accusations of his opponents for the ultimate benefit of the Corinthians. As such it is not a well-reasoned treatise but rather an impassioned celebration of God's goodness in the ministry. It is difficult to outline this section as the thoughts flow spontaneously from the mind of the apostle. Themes appear repeatedly and flow from one to another with easy transition making the section difficult to outline systematically. One thought flows easily to the next so that it is hard to determine where one ends and another begins.
- 1C The theme of Paul's ministry: Triumphant in Christ 2:13-17
Paul acknowledges that when he came to Troas he was so discouraged that he did not take the opportunity of an open door which was afforded him there. Nevertheless, in spite of his personal inadequacy, God was able to make him triumph in the ministry as he gave it out with integrity and sincerity.
- 2C The proof of Paul's ministry: The Corinthian converts 3:1-3
Paul insists that he needs no letters of recommendation from others. The message of salvation which he delivered to them had so changed their lives that they were the only credentials that he needed. The thought of the Corinthians being a letter written on hearts leads Paul to his next thought of the glory of his New Covenant ministry, also written on hearts.
- 3C The glory of the new ministry: The new covenant > old covenant 3:4-18
Paul freely admits that he is not sufficient to minister on behalf of God, but that God has authoritatively appointed him as a minister of the new covenant. This ministry provides him with boldness (3:12) and confidence (3:4) enabling him to exercise his ministry.
- 4C The power of the ministry 4:1-15
Paul again admits that the demands of the ministry are too high for a mortal to fulfill. This very fact, however, allows the power of God to be displayed and thus for God to honor himself by maintaining a ministry through the life of a man who could never do so in the power of his own strength.
- 5C The eternal perspective of the ministry 4:16--5:15
The heartaches and sufferings of the ministry would be too difficult for a man to bear were it not for the eternal perspective which the man of God has. Because the weight of eternal glory far outweighs any temporal affliction, the apostle is able to forge ahead with hope that one day we will be clothed with immortality.
- 6C The message of the ministry: Reconciliation 5:16--6:2
Paul can happily bear any insult or rejection in the ministry because of the message of reconciliation which he is able to bear. He rejoices to be able to encourage men to be reconciled to God.
- 7C The purity of the ministry 6:3-13
One of Paul's aims was to have such integrity that no one would have cause to discredit his ministry. Because he had worked so diligently not to offend those in Corinth he now appeals that they open their hearts to him.

- 8C The anticipated response 6:14--7:16
 Paul now gathers his thoughts to a twofold conclusion: 1) separate yourselves from false teachers (6:14--7:1) and 2) accept Paul and his message (7:2-16) who only rebuked them because he loves them and longed to see them moved to godly repentance.
- 1B PAUL'S EXHORTATION: THE COLLECTION FOR THE SAINTS AT JERUSALEM 8:1--9:15
 These two chapters seem to stand alone in the book separating the chapters of apostolic vindication. However, this section is probably not completely unrelated to Paul's attempts to vindicate his character. He had instructed the people to begin making this collection in his first epistle (1 Corinthians 16:1-3) and now encourages them to complete their initial intentions of generosity (2 Corinthians 8:6). In addition, it seems clear from Paul's defense elsewhere in the letter (11:7-12 and 12:13-18), that the false teachers had attempted to discredit Paul because he was not worthy to receive money. Since they were so anxious to make money from the "ministry" they must have been forced to twist Paul's selflessness by representing it as incompetence on his part. Paul now discusses the proper view and use of money and perhaps, in the process, vindicates his personal integrity.
- 1B Generosity Encouraged 8:1-9
 Paul reminds the Corinthians of the generosity of the Macedonian churches as he appeals them. He then reminds them of the ultimate sacrifice for others: the incarnation of Jesus Christ.
- 2B Advice and Arrangements for the Collection 8:10--9:5
 Paul was resolute that the messengers should be accompanied by other men so that there would be absolutely no doubt concerning the careful and honest handling of all contributions. He was so determined to present a proper testimony that they took *pains to do what is right, no only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men* (8:21). He also directs that the people give from a willing heart for the purpose of providing financial equality for the Jerusalem saints. The purpose was not for those in poverty to give to those without need, but rather to relieve the poverty of the Jerusalem saints who were enduring difficult times.
- 3B Generosity Rewarded 9:6-15
 Paul reminds the givers that not only will God supply their need but that they are giving opportunity for God to receive praise from their ministry. Not only this, but the hearts of the Jerusalem saints will go out to them.
- 1C PAUL'S SECOND DEFENSE: VINDICATION OF HIS APOSTOLIC MINISTRY 10:1--13:14
 This section, as opposed to the first seven chapters, seems to be addressed to those who have attacked Paul in Corinth. Here the tone is negative and the focus is specific as the apostle answers particular charges against him.
- 1B Paul Responds to the Charge that He is Weak and Cowardly 10:1-11
 Paul acknowledges these charges against him (10:1, 10) as he sarcastically parrots the words of his enemies. He insists, however, that when he comes to Corinth the reality of his boldness will be demonstrated although, he would hope that would not be necessary.
- 2B Paul's Confrontation of False Apostles 10:12--11:15
 Paul reminds the Corinthians that those who were making merchandise of them were comparing themselves by themselves and therefore were not wise. In addition, they were attempting to lead those whom they had not won to Christ. Building on another's foundation was a practice the apostle would not presume to do. The false teachers who preached "another Jesus" had convinced some people in Corinth that Paul's selflessness and willingness to support himself was in reality the result of a haughty, unloving spirit. Paul insists that he will not stop boasting of such selflessness and attributes these charges and these false apostles to their original satanic source.
- 3B Paul's Apostolic Credentials 11:16--12:13
 Paul responds at this point to charges against the authenticity of his apostolic office. He reluctantly details the suffering and insult he has endured in the ministry, trying to make the obvious point that if his position were self-appointed for his own benefit, he would have abandoned it long ago.
- Paul insists that he actually has received such special revelation that he was forbidden to speak of it. Instead, to keep Paul from being proud of his revelation God had afflicted him with some kind of thorn to remind him of his humanity, ultimately so that Paul would realize that God's grace was sufficient (12:8). Paul's final appeal is to the sign miracles which accompanied every apostle (12:12-13).

- 4B Paul's Recommended Response for the Corinthians 12:14--13:10
Paul reminds the Corinthians that he will soon be with them again, encouraging them to test themselves and repent when necessary. His desire is to use his authority to build them up and not to destroy.
- 5B Conclusion 13:11-14
Paul's benediction includes each member of the Trinity. Otherwise, it is unremarkable.

