

A Study of 2 Corinthians: “Hot under the Clerical Collar”

2 Corinthians 1

The Big Idea

In the book of 2 Corinthians the Apostle Paul is struggling to salvage his relationship with the church in Corinth. The law/grace debate we find in Paul's other letters is, for the most part, in the rear-view mirror. This city, which is located deep in Greece, is strongly influenced by Gentile manners and ways of thinking which present a challenge to Paul's theology and pastoral manner. Although Paul could have shaken the dust off his feet and left the church to other leaders, instead he seeks reconciliation with mercy and sharp discipline, sincerity and self-deprecation.



Considerations as we begin 2 Corinthians:

2 Corinthians is a notorious conundrum because of its abrupt changes of topic—many have suggested that multiple letters from Paul have been stitched together. In the opening chapters we will see an account of Paul's travels woven into theological reflections on his fractured relationship with the Corinthian church.

Order of letters to Corinth? 2 Corinthians 2:4 Paul refers to a “letter of tears”—is this 1 Corinthians, or another lost letter, or is it buried in 2 Corinthians itself?

1 Corinthians is a book filled with church controversies and Paul writes to effect reconciliation within the church. However, at the beginning of 1 Corinthians there is evidence that some are turning away from Paul's authority, instead looking to Peter or Apollos or some other leader. Factions were breaking out in the church. 2 Corinthians plunges us deeper into the problems of authority and leadership and the work of reconciliation is now between Paul and the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 1:1-2—Epistolary greeting
Notice who is with Paul as he writes.

2 Corinthians 1:3-7—Divine comfort as a source for ministry
Have you experienced an “affliction” that, in turn, became a source of consolation for others?

Paul has some severe things to say to the Corinthians in this letter—why do you think he begins with this very pastoral statement?

2 Corinthians 1:8-11—First travelogue
Paul in Asia (where is Asia in the Roman Empire?)
In the midst of a possible death sentence, where does Paul put his hope?

2 Corinthians 1:12-14—Paul’s ‘boast’
In Greek the word ‘boast’ is *kauchesis*. The debate is more about the source of Paul’s boasting. In the Greek world where pride and accomplishment are the source of authority and leadership, the Corinthians are enamored with bold demonstrations of power. What are the two sources of Paul’s boasting?

2 Corinthians 1:15-2:4—Recounting what happened
Paul is accused of vacillating—of saying one thing then doing another. Apparently, he promised a visit to Corinth, but then didn’t come.
Why did Paul not come to Corinth as he had said?
Who sets Paul’s itinerary?
What other reasons did Paul have for not coming?
What did Paul do in lieu of another painful visit?

Verses 17-22—Is God trustworthy or not? Is Paul trustworthy or not?
Have you ever experienced of what seemed to be a “no” from God that turned out to be a greater “yes”?

In the midst of the unstable changes of life, where does Paul keep pointing the Corinthians to look?

Summary questions for discussion:

How do we characterize Paul’s approach to conflict with the Corinthian church so far?

We often approach Paul as a “super-apostle”—how does this reshape your impression of Paul?

How does Paul’s approach to conflict shape or reshape your approach to conflicts in your life?