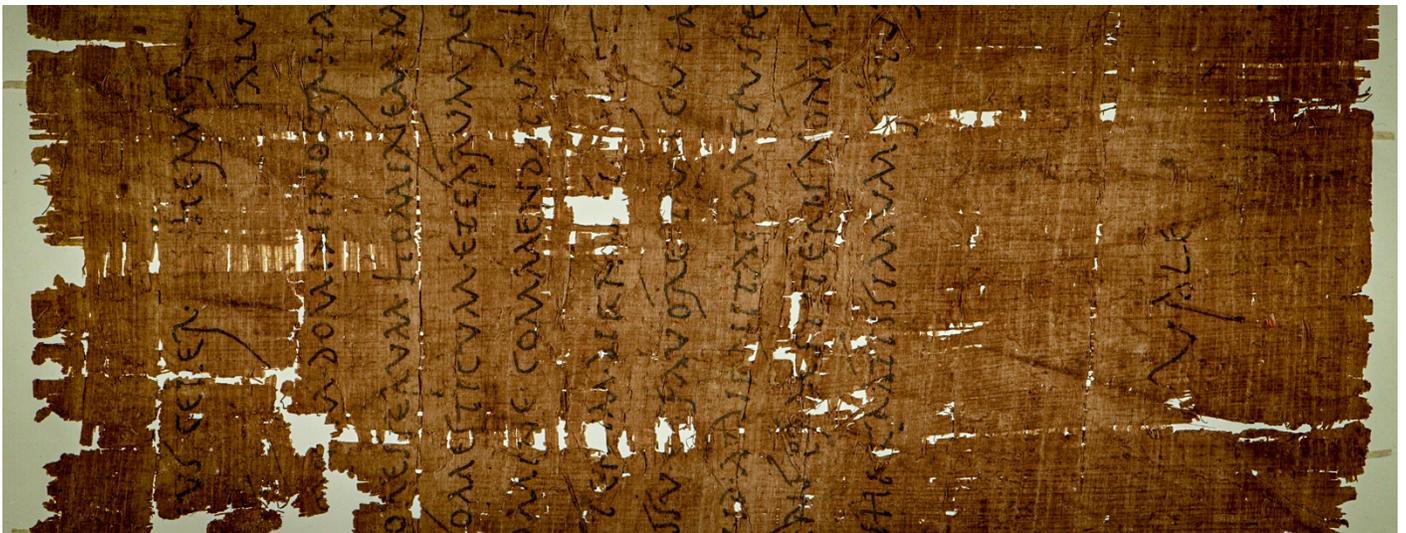


2 Corinthians 2-3

Victory Processions and Patronage

The Big Idea

As Paul negotiates the strained relations with the Corinthian church, he takes on the very basis of cultured Roman society—the social system of patronage. Rather than establishing our place in society (i.e., in the church) according to birth or power or wealth or standing, Paul teaches that our place is born of freedom and life in the Spirit.



Discussion Question: What are the marks of success and standing in our world?

2 Corinthians 2:5-11—The spectrum of discipline in the church

In this section it's apparent that the Corinthian church has chastised someone who was “out of line”, perhaps one of the individuals leading a revolt against Paul's leadership. In 1 Corinthians Paul counsels the church to tighten up on lax moral behavior. How has the church reacted now? What is Paul's concern for the individual who has been chastised? When you are in conflict with another person, which end of the spectrum do you tend toward?

2 Corinthians 2:12-17

vv. 12-13 A travelogue account suddenly drops in. Previously Paul mentions his troubles in Asia (Western Turkey). Troas is on the coast of Western Turkey, and Paul sets out from there to Macedonia, apparently in an anxious search for Titus, perhaps explaining why he didn't make a stop in Corinth. Remember the Corinthians were upset that Paul didn't make a visit to them as promised.

vv. 14-16 Of Triumphal Processions and Sweet/Acid Odors

Paul draws on the image of a triumphal procession with God in the lead—what did triumphal processions look like in Roman times? Who was in the lead of the process? What people followed just behind the leader of the procession (here's a hint, it wasn't the military)?

How does Paul picture himself in God's triumphal procession of spreading the Gospel?

Paul talks of an ambiguous odor—the smell of life and victory to some, the smell of death and defeat to others. Flowers and incense were often part of victory celebrations—how do you think the smells affected those who celebrated the victory, and those who were being humiliated in the procession?

v. 17 The main point of the 2 Corinthians: “For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence”. Paul asserts that he is not in the “Gospel business” for personal profit, but as a servant to the leader.

2 Corinthians 3—Paul takes on the basis of Roman Society

vv. 1-3 What are letters of recommendation, and why would the Corinthians seek them from Paul?

What does Paul assert as his letter of recommendation?

Letter and Spirit—be careful not to impose a law/grace contrast. Though it's in the background, I think Paul is really taking on the Romans standards of society—recommendation letters from patrons were how connections were made, but they also locked people in social strata. Paul asserts this pattern of society only leads to death, and that the Spirit gives freedom and life.

v.4-6 The Source of Paul's Confidence

Paul has no need of social superiors to vouch for him. God alone is Paul's sufficiency to engage in ministry.

v. 7-18 Ministry of death and life

Paul contrasts the ministry of the Spirit with the ministry that Moses did, but keep in mind Paul isn't attacking the Jewish law as much as he's attacking old ways of establishing relationships which were tradition bound, with the new freedom coming from the Lord.

Is there a veil covering the hearts of the Corinthians? What keeps them from seeing God's reflected glory?

Paul asserts his sufficiency to engage in ministry comes from God; what keeps you from feeling sufficient to be a minister of the Gospel?