

What's the Point....of 2 Corinthians?

Mark Garner

In 1 Corinthians, Paul needed to address some deep-rooted problems in Corinth, leaving him anxious both about the Corinthians' spiritual condition as well as his concern about his personal relationships with them. In 2 Corinthians, he has now received positive news about the congregation, and he writes about comfort, hope, God's glory, understanding, reconciliation, as well as some thoughts on what these can mean to us.

Themes In 2 Corinthians

As the apostle phrases it in chapter 4, in this world we may be hard pressed, perplexed, and struck down. Yet he reassures us that even when we must endure these things, at the same time comfort abounds in Jesus, and God will renew us inwardly. God can even use our troubles later to produce comfort for someone else. Sometimes God will allow us to walk through times of sorrow or anxiety, so we might learn to rely on God, instead of on ourselves. As chapter 12 reminds us, our Heavenly Father makes his strength perfect in our weaknesses.

The epistle reminds us to look beyond outward appearances, and it also discusses the time of God's favor, which Isaiah had previously spoken about (in Isaiah 61:1-4). The good news of Jesus brings release from the world's darkness, and comfort to those who are saddened or fearful. He replaces our spirit of despair with a garment of praise and hope that can only come from knowing our God. God alone can restore the ancient ruins in our hearts when we open them to him.

The God Of All Comfort (Overview Of 2 Corinthians)

The apostle opens by talking about times of suffering, reassuring us that our Heavenly Father is the God of all comfort, that through Jesus we can comfort one another, and that God has made many promises that are all 'yes' in Jesus (2 Corinthians 1). Next, he discusses looking at things from God's perspective, instead of from this world's viewpoint; for when we turn to Jesus, he removes the 'veils' from our hearts, so that we can see things more clearly (2 Corinthians 2-3).

In two memorable chapters, we see that our Heavenly Father has given us the treasure of his presence his Spirit in our mere jars of clay, so that instead of despairing, God renews us and enables us to walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 4-5). Then Paul discusses the time of God's favor, what it means to us, and some of the implications of being in God's presence (2 Corinthians 6). Next the apostle expresses his relief and joy over the positive changes in Corinth, and then he encourages them to help one another, particularly those who are in need (2 Corinthians 7-9).

The last few chapters return to the theme of looking beyond this world's appearances, and they give us some things worth pondering (2 Corinthians 10-13). God encourages us not to fight with this world's methods and weapons, instead to remain humble and gracious, not to boast about ourselves, and to accept our weaknesses. Our old self was indeed crucified in weakness, yet we now live in Jesus, and God is with us.

What's the Point....of 2 Corinthians?

Caleb Dillinger

Exactly how many letters are there to the Corinthian church? Many scholars think there are four, with our "1st Corinthians" being the second and our "2nd Corinthians" being the fourth. The reality is Paul was a prolific writer. We have at least 13 verifiable Pauline letters that the church has accepted for hundreds, even near two thousand years. I'm confident he wrote more than that. Some churches (like Corinth and Thessalonica) got multiple letters as did Timothy, while others only received one that we have on record. What exactly made the Corinthian church worth writing multiple times to? That's part of reading - to find out!

Paul has a meaningful relationship with the church at Corinth, and it is that relationship that motivates him to sometimes be harsh and express his disappointment. Chapter 2, for instance, Paul shares that he wasn't wanting another painful visit. Sometimes working with those you love can be painful, especially when sin is involved. And yet forgiveness is key (see 2:7-8).

We read 2 Corinthians in part to learn from the hardship of Christianity. We work with each other, and sometimes that poses problems (see chapter 3). Yet we have a ministry of mercy (see chapter 4) and reconciliation (see chapter 5) that keeps us engaging with one another.

This letter also gives sound wisdom on partnership, that can be applied to marriage and dating as well as ministry work and business. Chapter 6 describes the unequal yoking problem between believers and unbelievers. If you genuinely love God, being with a non believer or non believing group will pose significant challenges.

Chapters 7-9 focus on relationships and particularly giving. Tithing (giving 10%) is not a Christian command. You, as a follower of God are called to give cheerfully. How much? To whom? How regularly? Those are questions you have to answer. But if you want to understand WHY Christians should give cheerfully, 2 Corinthians 8-9 in particular are really helpful.

Chapters 10-13 take on a more dire tone, one of rebuke and warning and sadness and frustration. How could those who really know Paul doubt him and his call? How could those who have heard him preach and teach turn away from the message of the gospel and listen to others who appoint themselves? Paul challenges that narrative and defends himself, boasting not in his greatness, but in the way Christ works in his weakness.

What's the point of reading 2 Corinthians in the 21st century? To see our humanity, our sin, our spiritual relationships addressed and described in very relevant ways. Read, and learn.