

The Book of 2nd Corinthians

Introduction & Chapter 1:1-11

November 8, 1998

- **Outline of 2nd Corinthians:**
 - Chapter 1 God equips His people through trial, comfort and perseverance.
- **Introduction**
- **Authorship:** Traditionally Paul as substantiated by internal proof.
- **Time of Writing:** ~55 - 56 a.d. probably from Phillipi.
- **Recipients:** Jewish and Gentile believers at the church in Corinth.
- **Purpose:** Convey joy over the faithfulness of the Corinthians in response to his "severe letter".

Corinth was located in an extremely advantageous location owing to the fact that all East and West land travel passed through it, but it was also the confluence point for many sea routes into its two harbors. As a result, it became a city of great diversity with most of its population comprised of Romans, Greeks, Orientals and Jews. The city became quite powerful and influential and known for its licentiousness. This reputation may arise from the fact that the city was the center of immoral worship of the goddess Aphrodite. As the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul found this city to be a very strategic center for the Gospel but not without its trials.

Obviously from the content of this epistle, Paul's first letter was ultimately of good effect. However it appears that in between the first epistle and this one was another letter frequently referred to as the "severe letter" (2 Corinthians 2:4) where Paul wrote strong emotional words. Certainly, the first letter to the Corinthians contained much criticism which included the use of spiritual gifts, behavior at the Lord's table, the collection for famine relief in Jerusalem, marital relations and sexual purity. There is much debate as to whether this "severe letter" was a missing letter or if it in fact is the letter of 1 Corinthians or some even contend that it could be the last three chapters of 2 Corinthians. Regardless, it appears that his letter was delivered to the Corinthians by the hand of Titus and upon the return of Titus, Paul was pleased to receive a good report.

This letter is very personal and is primarily broken into three general sections. The first, covering chapters 1-7 describes Paul's thankfulness for divine comfort and for the manner of response from the Corinthians. The second, covering chapters 8 and 9, deals with generosity and the care for the afflicted in Jerusalem. Finally, the third portion generally attributed to chapters 10-13 marks a change in tone where Paul appears to rebuke the Judaizers who continue to plague his ministry and he defends his ministry in the light of their accusations.

- **Exposition of 2nd Corinthians 1:1-11**

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,¹ To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia:² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- As he does in a number of his other epistles, Paul declares that he is a "sent one" (apostle) of the Lord Jesus Christ. He assumes equality with the other apostles due to the fact that he also was personally commissioned by Jesus. Note also that Paul knows that he was sent not as one choosing to go but by the sovereign hand of God. Paul's conversion although spectacular and unusual in effect, is really not unusual at all. All of us are spiritually dead as evidenced by our hatred of righteousness and our disdain for Christianity prior to conversion. In all cases, God draws the unregenerate to Himself and places within us a love and desire for righteousness, all the while never attempting to get our cooperation or approval before acting.
- Although Titus ultimately became the primary envoy between the church at Corinth and Paul, it appears that Timothy co-authored the letter with Paul as they were probably traveling together at the time in Macedonia.
- As was customary, the letter was primarily directed to a central body within the city of Corinth but also to those who were in the region of Achaia. This practice would have naturally created copies of the letter for circulation which explains how the letters became widely regarded and accepted as appropriate when the canon was compiled two centuries later.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,⁴ who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.⁵ For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.

- In this portion, Paul lays out for us the principles of comfort including the source, purpose and effect of comfort. As

Reformed thinkers, we tend to gravitate to the more objective truths that fill our head with various doctrines. When we do this to the exclusion of portions of Scripture we become equipped with only a *partial* counsel of God.

- Notice that it is the Father who is the source of all comfort and mercy and it is He who comforts us in all our tribulation. Why does He do this? So that His people will be qualified and equipped to comfort others. God grants suffering to His people so that He might teach lessons that can only be learned through such experiences. Without trials, we would not know what comfort was and we would therefore not know how to comfort others.

6 Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.⁷ And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.

- We must understand the process that Paul is articulating. He is teaching us that the typical pattern is one of tribulation, comfort and then endurance. In God's normal providence this is how He teaches us these attributes of His character. Removing comfort will not produce godly perseverance instead it will produce discouragement and despair. But trial followed by comfort produces strong Christians who are then able to comfort others.
- The evil heart wants to rebel against God in a trial. The world likes to think that we have the right to complain during trials because we are all really deserving of something better. But we must acknowledge His sovereignty over all things including the trials. Bad things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people. But notice that God's goodness is not only manifest in His protection from trials it is also seen in His bringing on affliction and the resulting comfort and ultimately the glorious perseverance that blesses the entire body.
- If we hope to skip the step of tribulation then we miss out on the full character of God and we do not understand comforting our brother and we are ungrateful for that which we have. If we hope to skip the step of comfort then we are reduced to an angry stoic.

8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.⁹ Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead,¹⁰ who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us,¹¹ you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many. NKJV

- We see here that Paul himself was under a great trial that brought them to the point of despair. Even though he was a great apostle, Paul's life was filled with various trials and in this particular case, Paul was burdened beyond measure. The most important point to grasp from the verse is the purpose clause in verse 9. Paul teaches that this great trial was given so that he would not trust in himself but in God who raises the dead. Does God want this trust because it makes Him feel important? No, rather it is God's great love for us that compels Him to teach us to trust in Him who alone is trustworthy. He manifests His love for us by teaching us through trials to depend on Him and not ourselves. When we are in the presence of great abundance, it is impossible for us to learn the same lesson of dependence as we do when God grants suffering.
- It is important for us to see the connection between comfort from the God of comfort and the God of resurrection (cf. Acts 20:7-12; 1 Thess. 4:13-18. When a death occurs, what hope or comfort is there? There is only one hope, a resurrection to life. The lost are ensured a resurrection but it is a resurrection not unto life but unto everlasting death and turmoil.
- Paul also teaches that the body helps each other in many ways but especially through prayer so that many may rejoice and be encouraged when God grants the comfort. Although we have many ways of carrying each others burdens, we must not consider prayer as a trivial matter. We should also not forsake the physical blessings which we may provide to those who are suffering.
- Just as it would be wrong for us to abandon or refuse trials or perseverance, it is equally wrong for us to abandon comfort. He who abandons comfort:

..abandons the word of God; 1 Corinthians 14:1-3

..abandons the specific love of God; Philippians 2:1-4

..abandons the Saints of God; 2 Corinthians 1:4

Would somebody really abandon the comfort of God? Yes. Because it is seen as a subjective or soft attribute of God, the Reformed mind, as well as others, tend to de-emphasize the comfort of God and miss out on much because they abandon more than they intend. When we go through a trial, we should pray for wisdom to know that it is a trial. When God grants comfort, we pray for wisdom to know, receive and rejoice in the comfort. Then we pray for wisdom to see trials in others and provide comfort to them demonstrating that God has granted us perseverance.