

Read the Bible in a Year

Week 16 – September 19th, 2021

Read on Your Own this Week:

Psalm 46-48

Luke 17-20

Readings in Class:

2 Corinthians 1-13

Joshua 1-8

Overview of 2 Corinthians

Who are the Apostles? What is their work? How is this work fulfilled in the Church? And what does Christ achieve through them all? These are the sort of questions that Paul aims at in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians.

Prominent throughout this letter is the pattern of life that conforms to Christ. Everything in life is found within the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Whether that be suffering, comfort, reconciliation, and even our thoughts, they all will be made captive to Christ and answer to Him. This is no small comfort when knowing that what has happened to Christ in his death and resurrection is now at work in us!

2nd Corinthians is perhaps the fourth letter that Paul has written to this congregation within the span of a few months to a year. In 1 Corinthians 5:9, Paul had said he had written them a brief letter prior which is now lost. And in 2 Corinthians 2:4, Paul also stated that he had written them a very painful letter prior to 2 Corinthians which is possibly now lost too. Some commentators think that 2 Corinthians 10-13 is that painful letter because of the tone and sudden topic change without a bridge to it. Whatever the case may be, it was all done by the hand of Paul.

Paul's work in the Corinthian congregation is aimed at them participating in the reconciliation that Christ has achieved on the cross. It appears that the time of factions in the congregation is being worked at and Paul seeks to bring healing to them, while also defending his apostolic ministry from being undermined by people in the congregation who claim to be "super apostles." This two-pronged purpose drives St. Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians.

Brief Outline of 2 Corinthians

1. Greeting (1:1-2)
2. Berakah Prayer (1:3-7)
3. Pastoral Review of the Corinthian Church (1:8-5:10)
4. The Ministry of Reconciliation (5:11-7:16)
5. Participation in Relief Efforts for Jerusalem (8:1-9:15)
6. Paul's Defense of His Apostleship (10:1-13:10)
7. Closing (13:11-14)

1 Corinthians 5 & 2 Corinthians 2: Readers from 1 Corinthians 5 will remember the man who was excommunicated from the church because he had married his stepmother. He was sent out to Satan, as Paul puts it, in order for him to desire to return to Christ. The problem was that the Corinthians thought that forgiveness meant that all bets on the law are off the table. But such lawlessness destroys faith and the life that Christians are now living.

In 2 Corinthians 2, Paul makes note of bringing back forgiving the trespasser. We are not explicitly told whether this is the same person or not. But certainly the congregation in Corinth has had to go through tough disciplinary actions to keep the Church from being corrupted. The methods of excommunication, however, were successful as it drove this person to return to the Church. In the repentant person's tears and in the congregation's tears, Paul joins his with them all and tells on them to forgive and reconcile. We do know that the church of Corinth was alive and well at the turn of the century as a letter from Clement in Rome was sent to them about new issues bubbling up in the congregation.

The Collection of Gifts to Jerusalem: In the bulk of Paul's letters is the mention to the various churches of a relief effort to be mobilized to send gifts to Jerusalem. The Christians in Jerusalem are experiencing a famine and are short on material supplies. So Paul arranges for congregations across the Mediterranean area to collect an offering to be sent to them. Since they benefit from the Mother church in Jerusalem, they should also be sending them relief and comfort in their sorrows and to share in them. In chapters 8-9 come some of the riches themes in the New Testament about how Christians can suffer and share in life together across vast distances and how they are one body in Christ.

This charitable giving was a vast witness to the Roman world as time went on. In the mid-second century, in a situation that was noted rather unpleasantly by the Roman Government is a story that several dozen people, Christians included in that number, were held captive. While the Roman Government didn't do anything for their release, Christians mobilized in their churches to raise the funds to secure their freedom. People everywhere took note of Christian generosity, that still to this day, gives freely of its own accord as a response to share in Christ as Paul makes note here in 2 Corinthians.

Paul's Apostleship: Part of Paul's letter has Paul defending his apostolic ministry. It is not that Paul thinks much of himself. But that of the office that Christ has called him to exercise. The "super-apostles" as Paul calls them said that they were more eloquent and equipped than Paul is and therefore should be listened to more than Paul. They also list Paul as being inferior than the other apostles to degrade his witness and therefore the authority of Paul's office.

Paul then spends time being a fool (and indirectly chastising the super apostles) by listing his great deeds, and also noting, unlike them, that these great deeds are marked by great suffering, even demonic suffering in order that Paul may not boast in himself but depend on God. Much can be said in our era about this, a church with great deeds should be marked by great suffering in Christ and a reliance only on Christ's grace.