

2 Corinthians 1-3 – Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

Paul @ Corinth

Paul's relationship with the Greek city of Corinth began during his second missionary tour.

He spent a year & a half there in right around 51-52 AD.

This was a bit longer than he spent in most places because Corinth was one of the world's great trade centers.

Nearly all trade in the Mediterranean & Greece ended up passing through Corinth.

There were merchants & sailors from all over the Roman Empire in Corinth. Paul knew a strong, vibrant church there had the potential to be a base from which the gospel could reach far & wide.

So he spent a year & a half there, teaching & training.

Satan also knew Corinth was a strategic location so he went to work trying to keep the church from being strong & vibrant.

Paul's letters tell us of the many ways he tried to destroy the church through corruption, division & and false teaching.

After leaving Corinth, Paul returned to Israel, then a short time later set out on his 3rd missionary tour.

He planted himself in Ephesus for nearly 3 years since like Corinth it was a strategic center for reaching the entire region.

While there he received a disturbing report about gross immorality in the church at Corinth & sent a letter with instructions on what to do.

That letter was lost; we don't have it but Paul refers to it in 1 Cor. 5:9.

When further reports reached him about *more* problems & the Corinthians even wrote him with some questions about specific doctrines, he penned 1 Corinthians & sent it with his trusted aide, Timothy; early 55 AD.

Timothy returned to Ephesus with disturbing news about real trouble at Corinth.

There was a man there who had persuaded many in the church that Paul was not to be respected or listened to.

So Paul made a quick trip there which wasn't well received. [12:14, 13:1]

He then fired off a *hard* letter, mentioned in 2:4, reminding the Corinthians of some facts they could not deny. He sent this letter with Titus, then awaited Titus' return with news about how they'd responded.

He made arrangements to meet Titus in the city of Troas.

When Titus was late, Paul decided to sail across to Macedonia & make his way south till he met up with him.

They met in Philippi where Titus told him the Corinthians had turned things around & they were getting better, although a new problem had risen.

That's when he penned this letter – in 56 AD & sent it on ahead, saying that he would arrive there in person shortly after, which he did.

Next to 2 Timothy, which was Paul's *last* letter, 2 Corinthians was Paul's most personal letter.

The situation was this: There was a guy at Corinth who had attacked Paul's credibility.

He said Paul wasn't really an apostle so he shouldn't be listened to.

Paul appealed to the Corinthians on the basis of their personal knowledge of him.

He was the one who'd started the church there. They were his converts, his spiritual children.

And he'd spent a full year & a half there, cultivating & nurturing their development.

They'd gotten to know Paul well & ought to have rejected the attacks on his credibility.

It took a lot of persuasion & patience on Paul's part.

But it explains why he gets so personal in this letter.

Outline for 2 Corinthians-----

I. Greeting • 1:1-11

II. Paul's Ministry • 1:12-7:16

III. The Collection • Chs 8-9

IV. Paul's Apostleship • 10:1-12:13

V. Paul's Plans • 12:14-13:14

I. Greeting • 1:1-11

¹ Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia:

Most of Paul letters begin this way. But as he pens this, it carries a special poignancy because his calling as an apostle was what had been under attack.

The Corinthians have by this time turned things around and returned to confidence in Paul's calling, but only after a long & arduous challenge.

Think back to the story of Paul's conversion in Acts 9.

He was on his way to the city of Damascus, bent on persecuting the followers of Jesus when Jesus appeared to him & revealed to Him he was indeed the Messiah.

Paul went from persecutor to proclaimer in an instant & right there Jesus commissioned him to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

An apostle was like an ambassador; someone officially authorized & sent out to represent the interests of a King & His kingdom.

Paul understood his apostleship in terms of planting churches throughout the Gentile world, which he faithfully did for the rest of his life.

Along with him as he wrote 2 Corinthians was his long time associate Timothy, who not long after Paul wrote this was sent back to Ephesus to pastor the church there.

The letter was of course to the church at Corinth, but take careful note of how Paul

refers to them – as saints, holy ones!

From reading 1 & 2 Corinthians, calling the believers there saints seems a mighty stretch.

They were factious, petty, & arrogant with some serious cases of immorality among them.

Yet Paul still calls them saints because that in fact is what they were in Christ.

Paul's whole appeal to them is to *be* who they really are.

They are saints, so they must stop acting like a bunch of sinners.

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace & peace, the spiritual Siamese twins of Paul's letters.

He unites the Greek greeting of Charis/Grace with the Jewish greeting of Shalom/Peace because Christ has made one new family out of Jews & Gentiles.

Notice how He sources grace & peace in both the Father & Son; another indication of their unity & that Jesus is indeed God.

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.

Paul is quick to pen this because he wants the Corinthians to know he's heard of their repentance and rejoices for it.

He's been in a long battle with them in which both his previous visit & letter were severe.

But now that Titus has brought him word that they've come to their senses & complied with his instructions, he's comforted, and wants to make sure they are as well.

What Paul writes here is an important insight.

When we endure trial and look to God for help, the mercy He shows not only provides assistance for that moment, it also forges a testimony of our personal experience of the goodness & faithfulness of God so that we can encourage others who are going through hard times to look to God.

5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.

The "sufferings of Christ," are the hatred & opposition from the world we face for identifying with Jesus.

He warned that if the world hated Him it would hate us for following Him.

But not to fear, for He has overcome the world.

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.

The reason Paul & his companions suffered the hostility of the world was because they would not give up on their mission of winning the lost & deepening their walk with God.

Paul's perseverance had led to the Corinthians hearing the Good news & coming to faith.

He would have had a much easier life if he'd just kept quiet & stayed home.

But Paul wasn't interested in having an easy life – He only wanted to be faithful.

If that meant hardship & discomfort, so be it.

But Paul had walked with God long enough to know that it wasn't always hard.

There were times of great blessing & comfort too.

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. 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.

The Corinthians had heard that Paul had been through some tough times in Ephesus and were praying for him.

He thanks them for their prayers and tells them how really dicey it had been.

While we can't be sure of the details, what Paul was referring to was probably the riot that had happened in Ephesus at the instigation of the silver workers.

It was a major civil disturbance & quite dangerous for Paul as the rioters were calling for his head!

Paul had almost given it to them and would have had it not been for some close friends who talked him into leaving

Looking back, Paul realized how narrowly he had escaped death & thanked God for preserving him.

He considered the Corinthians prayers for him as part of the reason he was still alive.

II. Paul's Ministry • 1:12-7:16

Paul has now finished his greeting and launches into the body of the letter which aims at bringing some much needed perspective on the trial they'd all just been through with the guy who'd challenged Paul's calling as an apostle.

A. Paul's Plans • 1:12-2:4

12 For our boasting is this:

Here's where we stand; here's our position & confidence . . .

the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity

singleness; one thing, no hidden & ulterior motives

and godly sincerity,

Living before the face & eyes of God, not trying to cover anything up.

not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.

Paul always lived by the grace of God but when living among & dealing with the Corinthians, he'd been even more aware of his dependence on the Lord because of the corruption of the city & difficulty of the work there.

Think of it this way; if you went to plant a church in Port Hueneme you know you're face some challenges & difficulties.

But if you wanted to start a church in the middle of the Strip in Las Vegas, well that's a whole different can of worms.

Corinth was New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles & Las Vegas all rolled into one.

Paul was keenly aware of his need to trust in the grace of God while working there & dealing with the Corinthians.

13 For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand.

Paul's critic had accused him of being insincere & dishonest so he tells them he has no ulterior motive.

Now I trust you will understand, even to the end ¹⁴ (as also you have understood us in part), that we are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus.

He calls them not to forget their roots. He was the one who'd led them to faith,

15 And in this confidence I intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit— ¹⁶ to pass by way of you to Macedonia, to come again from Macedonia to you, and be helped by you on my way to Judea.

At the end of 1 Corinthians, in 16:5-7, Paul said that he hoped, God permitting, to spend some time with them soon.

He repeats his previous plans; plans that hadn't worked out because God hadn't permitted them to.

17 Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No?

He focuses on this issue of his visiting them because it had been the main point of attack by his critic.

Paul said he'd visit Corinth if God permitted.

Paul's opponent made a big deal of his not visiting, saying it showed Paul wasn't being led of the Spirit and if he wasn't led of the Spirit, then he wasn't an apostle and ought not be listened to.

Paul refutes the idea that he spoke out of turn or was being led by the flesh rather than the Spirit.

18 But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No. ¹⁹ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us— by me, Silvanus, and Timothy—was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. ²⁰ For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. ²¹ Now He who establishes us with

you in Christ and has anointed us *is* God, ²² who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. ²³ Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth. ²⁴ Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.

We covered these verses in depth in a message title *By Faith We Stand* 4 weeks ago,

2:1 But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow. ² For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me? ³ And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is *the joy of you all*. ⁴ For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.

Paul had both visited them and when that visit turned into an unproductive time of argument, he withdrew & instead wrote a hard letter.

Though he yearned to see them and be restored to a healthy relationship with them he decided he wouldn't return to Corinth until they'd made the needed changes.

Titus is the one who'd taken the hard letter & had not met up with Paul to give him a report on how they'd reacted.

Titus had been delayed because he waited in Corinth until they repented and followed through on the corrections Paul prescribed.

Rejoicing at their reconciliation, Paul sat down and penned this letter making sure they understood all that he'd done in the past was motivated by his deep love for them.

B. The Offender's Punishment • 2:5-11

5 But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent—not to be too severe. **6** This punishment which was *inflicted by the majority is* sufficient for such a man, ⁷ so that, on the contrary, you *ought* rather to forgive and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. **8** Therefore I urge you to reaffirm *your* love to him. **9** For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. ¹⁰ Now whom you forgive anything, I also *forgive*. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, ¹¹ lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

We looked at vs. 5-11 in depth 3 weeks ago in a message titled *Getting Along*.

C. Titus' Absence • 2:12,13

12 Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, 13 I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.

Paul wants the Corinthians to get just how concerned he was about being reconciled to them.

He was supposed to meet Titus in Troas & while he waited, it proved to be a fruitful time as he ministered the Gospel.

But he was preoccupied with one thing – how things were going in Corinth. So when Titus didn't show up at Troas when they'd arranged, Paul left Troas & sailed west to Macedonia, hoping to meet Titus on the road south toward Corinth.

If you know anything about Paul, this gives you an idea of just how torn up he was about the rift between himself & the Corinthians!

Paul didn't just walk away from an open door to preach the Word of God.

D. The Ministry's Nature • 2:14-6:10

1. The triumph of the ministry • 2:14-17

14 Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. 15 For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? 17 For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

We looked at this 2 Sundays ago in the message *The Fragrance of Christ*.

2. The commendation of the ministry • 3:1-5

3:1 Do we begin again to commend ourselves?

He wants to make sure things are settled now & that his calling as an apostle is settled.

Does he need to start from scratch with them?

This is a rhetorical question that expects a resounding “No!” from the Corinthians.

See, Paul wants to drop all the silliness that's happened and go on.

Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?

There were some false teachers running around, guys referred to in v. 17, who carried written endorsements of other ministry.

Some of them claimed to be apostles and had letters of certification of their ministry from Jerusalem.

They were forged, but they impressed some.

Paul asks, “Do we need papers, written endorsements?”

² You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men;
³ clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.

Paul nails it! We don't need letters of endorsement; *you* are the proof of our calling!

The church at Corinth is our endorsement.

⁴ And we have such trust through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God,

Paul gives the credit for the Conversion of the Corinthians to God.

He didn't convert them, God's Spirit did – but He used Paul as the agent of the Gospel.

Since the role of an apostle was to expand the interests & influence of the Kingdom of God, the church at Corinth was all the proof of apostleship[Paul needed and they ought to see that once & for all.

3. The basis of the ministry • 3:6-18

5b . . . our sufficiency is from God ⁶ who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

As I shared recently on a Sunday, the man who was the focal point of opposition to Paul was more than likely the same guy Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Cor. to disfellowship because of his incestuous relationship with his step-mother.

The guy had counter-attacked by denying Paul's apostleship & questioning his integrity.

Well, it took awhile before the Corinthians realized Paul was right & disciplined the guy.

That wasn't the end of the problems at Corinth.

Titus brought Paul word that his old enemies the Judaizers had arrived in Corinth & were beginning their same old tricks.

Paul will take them head on later in the letter but here he plants some seeds of the coming conflict.

He shows how the new covenant supersedes the old.

God did not give the Law as a way to make people holy but rather as a way to show them they weren't & never could be by their own efforts.

The Prophet Jeremiah foretold all this when he spoke of the new work God would do by His Spirit, giving His people a new heart, one that would keep the spirit, not just the letter of the law.

⁷ But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, ⁸ how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?

While the Law of Moses was glorious as a picture of the holiness & perfection of God, it had no power to produce holiness in people.

This is why the light of Moses' face diminished after giving the word of God to the people.

The fading glory of his face was a symbol that while the Law is itself glorious, it doesn't produce glory – it only stands as a standard; one that reveals the inability of fallen men & women to achieve.

But it was always God's intention that people would then look for deliverance, run to the salvation He provided through the offering of His Son.

That's what the Law always pointed to – Jesus.

He is the glory that surpasses the law.

9 For if the ministry of condemnation had glory,

The law - condemns

the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.

The Gospel – makes righteous.

Let's get this straight once & for all →

- 1) Righteousness isn't produce by our effort.
- 2) Righteousness is the possession of One - Jesus.
- 3) It's given to those who look to Him in faith.

10 For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels.

What Paul means by that is iffy until we look at the next verse.

11 For if what is passing away

The law – the old covenant . . .

was glorious, what remains

The Gospel . . .

is much more glorious.

What Paul means in v. 10 then, is that the glory of the New Covenant is so great it makes the glory of the Old covenant like nothing.

12 Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—¹³ unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. ¹⁴ But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the *veil* is taken away in Christ. ¹⁵ But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. ¹⁶ Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty. ¹⁸ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

We looked at these verses last Sunday in the message titled, *Progress*.