

2 Corinthians Suffering and Comfort

Read 2 Corinthians 2:1-11; cf. 1:12-24

Paul and the church of Corinth

It is clear in the passage and its extended context (1:12-24) there has been some significant confrontation between Paul and the church of Corinth. Based upon a number of relevant passages we can put together a rough outline of Paul's interactions with the church in order to give us an idea of what the conflict was about. One helpful timeline comes from Murray Harris in his commentary¹:

- Paul spends 18 months in Corinth at the end of his 2nd missionary journey (Acts 18:1-8; ~ 50-52 AD.)
- After Paul leaves Priscilla and Aquila remain (18:18-19) and Apollos later arrives to teach (18:22-19:1; 1 Cor. 1:12, 3:4-6, 16:12).
- Paul writes a letter prior to 1 Corinthians we do not have (1 Cor. 5:9-11; ~ 55AD).
- Paul receives news of bickering and divisions in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:11; chs. 1-4).
- A delegation from Corinth arrives to which Paul responds in 1 Cor. 5-6; 7-16. After which the whole letter likely comes to Corinth by the delegation (1 Cor. 16:17).
- Despite the first letter things get worse in Corinth necessitating Paul's "painful visit" (2 Cor. 2:1). Someone representing others in the church speaks against Paul (2 Cor. 2:5-8, 10; 7:12).
- Titus is sent to deliver a "severe letter" to Corinth which we likely do not have (2 Cor. 2:3-4, 6, 9, 7:8, 12; though some argue its 2 Cor. 10-13).
- Paul suffers an affliction in Asia (Acts 19:23-20:1; 2 Cor. 2:12-13). He travels on to Macedonia to organize collections (2 Cor. 8:1-4).
- Titus meets Paul in Macedonia with a good report of the Corinthian church's response to his severe letter (2 Cor. 7:5-16).
- Paul writes 2 Cor. 1-9 possibly while in Illyricum (Rom. 15:19-21).
- Other teachers, "super apostles," outside the church stir up Corinth (2 Cor. 10-13).
- Upon receiving fresh news from Corinth Paul writes 2 Cor. 10-13 (2 Cor. 8:17-18, 22; ~56 AD).
- Paul writes Romans while in Greece, possibly Corinth specifically before taking the collection to Jerusalem (Acts 20:2-4; 21:17; 24:17; Rom. 15:25-28; 16:23; ~ 57AD)

We know there were issues of immorality and factions within the church from 1 Corinthians. But it seems most likely the confrontations between Paul and Corinth in 2 Corinthians have to do with his leadership. Many seemed to have questioned Paul's ministry and apostolic authority. They were especially impressed with traveling teachers who they deemed more eloquent, with larger followings, and thus more successful. Throughout the letter Paul is arguing mark of Christian ministry is not worldly success but whether it is "crossed-shaped", or as some call it, having a cruciform character.

¹ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 101-105.

Questions

1. In 1:12-24 Paul appears to be responding charges he is unreliable. He assures them that 1) God is faithful whether he visits them or not and that 2) he did not visit them as originally planned for good reasons. What good reasons does Paul seem to have based on vv. 1:23-2:4?
2. With so much difficult confrontation with Corinth, what motivates Paul to continue his relationship with them? What often motivates you in the midst of conflict?
3. Whenever we have significant conflict with another person we all have a default approach (such as fight or flight). What is your tendency and how does that help or hurt conflicts you have been in?
4. Paul instructs them to forgive the wrongdoer, saying he has suffered enough. What is forgiveness? Why is it so needed?
5. What do you say to those who say forgiveness is not enough to make up for a wrong? Is there such a thing as “cheap forgiveness”?
6. It is deeply important for us today to reflect upon how the gospel informs all of our conflicts (cf. v.10). Can we have reconciliation with forgiveness? Forgiveness without justice or without truth? Or unity even without any conflict? Reflect upon interpersonal conflicts *before* you discuss bigger issues.
7. Paul says he also wrote to test their obedience. He connects the need for forgiveness with not being outwitted by Satan. In what ways do you need to grow in obedience to Christ in the midst of whatever conflicts you face?