

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

May 18, 2022

Series - *The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul*

The Corinthian Letters

The Last Letter (Second Corinthians)

Chapter One – *The God of Comfort*

Text – 2 Corinthians 1

Memory Verse – 2 Corinthians 1:3

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

Introduction – Review the Timeline of Significant Events (Dates are approximate)

50 AD - Paul arrives in Corinth during his second missionary journey. (Acts 18 – See excerpts from Acts 18 study - *Turning the World Upside Down Study* beginning on p. 4)

He lodges with Priscilla and Aquila (v. 3).

He worked as a tentmaker to support himself (v. 3; 2 Corinthians 11:7 - 9; 2 Corinthians 12:13 & 14).

After a season of discouraging results by himself, he is reunited with Silas and Timothy and is “pressed in the spirit” (v. 5). God builds a large church there (v. 10 – “much people”)

He has a tremendous ministry to the Gentiles, as well as to the Jews.

He remains there for 18 months.

52 AD - Paul leaves Corinth bound for Jerusalem but stops in Ephesus. He finds a receptive spirit there, so he leaves Priscilla and Aquila there while he travels to Jerusalem.

While he is away, Apollos visits Ephesus and was well received. He was then encouraged to go on to Corinth (Acts 18:26 - 28).

53 AD - Paul returns to Ephesus and remains there for 3 years with tremendous success (Acts 19; Acts 20:31-32).

While in Ephesus, Paul receives some disturbing news regarding carnality in Corinth, particularly gross immorality. He writes them a letter (**The Lost Letter**) dealing with these issues (1 Corinthians 5:9 - 11).

This “Lost Letter” was responded to by a return letter from Corinth. Many questions were raised in this response, which prompted Paul’s second letter (1st Corinthians - **The Long Letter**).

Paul mentions his intentions in this letter to return to Corinth soon (1 Corinthians 4:19; 11:34; 16:8).

Paul sent this letter (1 Corinthians) with Timothy, but it was not well received. Timothy most likely returned to Paul with the bad news that there was still a lot of carnality and division in Corinth.

56 AD - Paul writes a third letter to the church at Corinth. This letter is also not included in the Bible but is referred to in 2 Corinthians (2 Corinthians 2:3 & 4; 2 Corinthians 7). This letter was very sharp and pointed, and Paul seems to almost have regretted writing it. We will call it **The Lamented Letter**.

Paul sent Titus this time with “The Lamented Letter”. Titus returned to Paul (now in Macedonia) with the good news that the church at Corinth had received the message well, and they had for the most part repented.

57 AD - Paul wrote his **Last Letter** (2 Corinthians) to them in response to the news that Titus brought (See 2 Corinthians 2:12 & 13). Titus was the bearer of this letter along with “a brother” (2 Corinthians 8:18; 12:18), which was probably Luke. Paul returns to Corinth just before his return to Jerusalem at the end of his third journey. He stays there for three months, and it is probable that Paul was satisfied that Corinth was going to be all right (Acts 20:1 – 4; Romans 15:23 - 25; 16:1, 22 - 23). It was from Corinth at this time that Paul wrote his letter to the Romans.

Introduction to Second Corinthians

This letter begins with rejoicing due to the turning around of events in the Corinthian church. Though there were still many problems to sort out, Paul received confidence that this church was heading in the right direction. The problems in Corinth had taken their toll on the ministry of the apostle; he was troubled to the point of not being able to perform his duties for the Lord effectively (See 2 Corinthians 2:12 & 13). What a source of relief it must have been when Titus returned with the news that things were better.

I. Commencement of the Letter (vs. 1 – 2)

Note – Achaia is the southern area of Greece. Athens, Sparta, and Cenchrea were in Achaia.

A. Paul’s Calling Reviewed (v. 1a)

1. He was an Apostle by the will of God

What we do for the Lord must be the will of God. We cannot always do what we want to do, and we cannot always do what others want us to do.

2. No higher calling or authority (Ephesians 4:11 – 13; Acts 9:1– 16)

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:" (Ephesians 4:11-

13)

"But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:" (Acts 9:15)

3. He was the church planter in Corinth (2 Corinthians 3:1 – 3)

B. Paul's Companion Revealed (v. 1b)

Timothy was most likely the young man that delivered the former letters to the Corinthians, especially 1 Corinthians. It appeared that Timothy was not well received by most of the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 16:10 – 11). Paul re-affirms Timothy's authority. Timothy was acting as an agent for the apostle Paul. Paul had to send the more seasoned Titus with both the Lamented letter, and the Last letter (2 Corinthians). We must remember also that in the local church the Pastor is given authority by God and the church; and the Pastor will sometimes appoint people to positions of leadership. We must submit to their authority as if we were submitting to the Pastor. These leaders also need to be admonished to not exceed the area of authority given them by the Pastor.

C. Paul's Converts Recognized (v. 1c)

1. This letter was addressed to the Church at Corinth.
2. This letter was also addressed to the saints in all of Achaia. There were some saints in Athens (Acts 17:32 - 34), and there was also a church established in Cenchrea (Romans 16:1), which was next to Corinth. It is possible that the problems in Corinth were affecting other churches in Achaia as well.

"And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them." (Acts 17:32-34)

"I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea:"
(Romans 16:1)

D. Paul's Concern Reassured (v. 2)

Paul assures the Corinthians of his love and true concern for them. He wants what is best for the Lord and for them. He prays for grace (unmerited favor) and peace (which comes from being in the center of God's will). Grace is the root of God's blessing and peace is the fruit of God's blessing.

II. **Comfort from the Lord** (vs. 3 – 11)

A. **The Creator of Comfort** (v. 3)

1. We are comforted by the Spirit of God. He is the Comforter four times in John 14 – 16)
2. We are comforted by the Word of God.
3. We should be comforted by the people of God.

B. **The Commission to Comfort** (vs. 4 - 7)

1. Listen, don't lecture.
2. Pray, don't preach.

C. **The Causes for Comfort** (vs. 8 – 11)

1. Because of the Problems in Corinth

Though Paul does not here directly refer to his concern for Corinth; we know that while he was battling the devil in Ephesus, he also was dealing with (via letters) many problems in Corinth.

2. Because Paul was "Pressed" in Ephesus (Asia) (Acts 19; 1 Corinthians 15:32; 16:8 & 9)

III. **Conduct is Determined to be Legitimate** (vs. 12 – 14)

- A. Paul declares that everything he wrote regarding the Corinthians he wrote "in simplicity and godly sincerity." He was not operating in the flesh, which would be very easy to do under the circumstances.
- B. Paul was acknowledged "in part" by the church. This probably means that not all the church at Corinth was for the apostle Paul and submitting to his authority.

IV. **Changes Caused by Lamentation** (vs. 15 – 24)

A. **Paul Declares His Original Plan** (vs. 15 - 16)

It is apparent here that Paul had planned to come to them before this letter for a third visit. However, because of the conditions of the church, he had changed his mind. (vs. 1:23 – 2:2) Paul was now answering those who were critical of Paul's change in plans.

B. Paul Defends His Position (vs. 17 – 18)

Paul stated that when he had planned to come, he was not operating in the flesh; he was not speaking facetiously. He truly meant and planned to come at the time; but God changed his plans. Paul often said as we should, “if the Lord wills”, which places the final approval of all our plans on the shoulders of the Lord.

C. Paul Describes God’s Promises (vs. 19 – 22)

Note – Sylvanus is Silas (Acts 18:5)

What God says he will do, he will do. We cannot be as certain about our plans, because so much of our plans are out of our hands.

Notice the tremendous nugget of truth place here in this passage in vs. 21 – 22. It was God that established and anointed the ministry of Paul; and God also gave him (and us) the seal (Ephesians 4:30) of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. The word “earnest” here means a security deposit. This assures us that all the rest that God says awaits us we can be sure of.

D. Paul’s Decision to Postpone (vs. 23 – 24)

1. He did not want to come “in sorrow.”
2. He instead wrote to them the Lamented letter.

Conclusion

What a tremendous blessing it must have been for the Apostle Paul to finally get the assurance that his converts in Corinth were doing well spiritually. He had great concern for this church, and now, he had the confidence that they were going to be fine.

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." (3 John 1:4)