

# 2 CORINTHIANS

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Some have compared 2 Corinthians to the ugly twin sister of 1 Corinthians. Why? Because 1 Corinthians gets all the attention between the two. There are so many challenging issues in 1 Corinthians that attracts our attention. Meanwhile, as I've heard it said, 2 Corinthians sits in the corner waiting for someone to ask it to dance. It is not an overstatement to say that 1 Corinthians might be the \_\_\_\_\_[a] familiar of Paul's New Testament letters, and 2 Corinthians might be the \_\_\_\_\_[b] familiar.

## THE EVENTS BEHIND THE LETTER

It seems that Paul wrote at least \_\_\_\_\_[c] letters to the Corinthians, and 2 Corinthians seems to be the fourth. Paul's relationship with the church there began during his \_\_\_\_\_[d] missionary journey in late AD 50 or early 51. He lived in Corinth for a year and a half, and during that time he supported his preaching ministry by working as a tentmaker. After he left Corinth, he settled in \_\_\_\_\_[e] for the next three years. While in Ephesus, he received disturbing news that faithful believers were keeping close company with other believers who were living immoral lives. These immoral believers should have been \_\_\_\_\_[f], but they hadn't been. So, Paul wrote the Corinthians and instructed them to \_\_\_\_\_[g] from these immoral brethren. That was Paul's first letter to them, and he refers to that letter in 1 Corinthians 5:9. As I pointed out in the last lesson, God obviously chose not to include that letter in the New Testament canon.

While ministering in Ephesus on his third missionary journey (1 Cor 16:8-9), Paul received some more troubling news about Corinth from Chloe's family. The church had become quite \_\_\_\_\_[h] (1 Cor 1:10-11), and they were also once again too \_\_\_\_\_[i] of immorality in their midst (1 Cor 5:1-2). In addition, the Corinthians wrote him a letter seeking clarification on a number of issues (1 Cor 7:1). Paul responded to their letter and to the report from Chloe's family with the letter we call 1 Corinthians. During this period, Paul sent \_\_\_\_\_[j] to Corinth to be his representative in helping the church work through these matters in faithful accordance with Paul's instructions (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10-11). We have no idea how long Timothy remained in Corinth.

While 1 Corinthians presumably resolved some of the problems in Corinth, another \_\_\_\_\_[k] soon arose; and this threat was potentially more dangerous to the church there than all the previous threats. False

teachers had emerged or arrived in Corinth, and they were stirring up trouble by attacking Paul's \_\_\_\_\_[l] and credibility. They claimed to be genuine \_\_\_\_\_[m], and suggested Paul was not. As a result, many of the Corinthians began to second-guess Paul's apostolic authority (2 Cor 11:13). Paul sarcastically called them "super-apostles" (2 Cor 11:5, ESV, NIV). We don't know how Paul heard about this threat—maybe he heard it from Timothy—but he obviously felt his personal presence was needed again in Corinth to deal with this situation. So, he made another visit to Corinth that Luke didn't record in the book of Acts. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:14 and 13:1 that he was about to visit them a \_\_\_\_\_[n] time; but Acts records only \_\_\_\_\_[o] visits. So, Paul made this visit between the second and third missionary journey.

We know very little about this trip, but what we do know it didn't go well. It was a complete \_\_\_\_\_[p]. Paul refers to this visit in 2 Corinthians 2:1, and there he calls it a "painful visit" (ESV, NIV). It broke his heart and filled him with grief. Apparently, he was confronted by someone (possibly the ringleader of the trouble or one of the other false apostles) who defied Paul and openly insulted him . . . and no one in the church came to his \_\_\_\_\_[q] (2 Cor 2:5-8, 10; 7:12). He left Corinth and returned to Ephesus angry, heartbroken, and humiliated. From there he fired off a strongly worded letter—a third letter—to the Corinthians. This is often referred to as "the \_\_\_\_\_[r] letter" (2 Cor 2:4; 7:8). God did not add this third letter to the New Testament canon either. This letter was undoubtedly the most emotional and strident of any of Paul's letters. Apparently, he unleashed his anger and his disappointment. Apparently, he scolded the church for not supporting him, and he demanded that the church rise up against the offender and discipline him.

Paul gave \_\_\_\_\_[s] the mission of taking this explosive letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 7:5-16), and Paul was very, very anxious about how Titus' mission would go. In fact, it seems that Paul's anxieties over Titus' success almost overwhelmed him as he waited for news (2 Cor 2:12-13; 7:5). Apparently, the arrangements with Titus were that they would meet in \_\_\_\_\_[t] after a set period of time, maybe as long as six months. 2 Corinthians 2:12 tells us that Paul went by land up to Troas, probably in AD 55, but he was crushed when Titus wasn't there. Though there was an open door for ministry there (2 Cor 2:12), Paul's concern over the situation in Corinth prevented him from taking full advantage of it (2 Cor 2:12-13). Anxious and restless, Paul just couldn't bring himself to wait for Titus at Troas any longer. So, desperate to find Titus, Paul went on to \_\_\_\_\_[u] (probably Philippi). Finally, at long last, he and Titus found each other, and the news that Paul had been on pins and needles waiting to hear was wonderful news. Titus told him that the Corinthians—or most of them—were genuinely remorseful, had \_\_\_\_\_[v] of their hurtful behavior toward Paul, had punished the

offender, and they reaffirmed their loyalty to him (2 Cor 7:7). This news brought Paul indescribable \_\_\_\_\_[w] and \_\_\_\_\_[x] (2 Cor 7:5-7).

Buoyed by Titus' positive report, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, his fourth letter to the church. He wrote this highly emotional letter from Macedonia (possibly from Philippi) as he prepared for his upcoming return visit to Corinth (2 Cor 12:14; 13:1). He probably sent it back to Corinth with Titus (2 Cor 8:16-18). Although the situation in Corinth had improved dramatically, he knew the church wasn't out of \_\_\_\_\_[y] yet. The \_\_\_\_\_[z] apostles hadn't given up. They were still there. The rebellion against Paul had not been totally put down, and a minority of the Corinthians were still confused or loyal to rebel leaders. So, in 2 Corinthians Paul \_\_\_\_\_[aa] the false apostles and their followers head on as he vigorously \_\_\_\_\_[bb] his apostleship against their attacks.

## PAUL'S OPPONENTS IN CORINTH

Who were these men who had come to Corinth and presented themselves as superior in authority to Paul himself? Paul didn't specify the exact nature of their false teaching, but in a sense it doesn't really matter. \_\_\_\_\_[cc] doesn't care what people believe as long as they don't believe the \_\_\_\_\_[dd]. However, we can glean from 2 Corinthians several characteristics of those who were trying to usurp and undermine Paul's authority.

- They considered themselves Christians and, as was already pointed out, they considered themselves to be "apostles of Christ" (2 Cor 11:5; 12:11-13). Paul makes it clear, though, that they are "\_\_\_\_\_ [ee] apostles" (2 Cor 11:13), and as such they are ministers of Satan who disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness (2 Cor 11:14-15).
- They were proud of their \_\_\_\_\_ [ff] pedigree. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 11:22: "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I." By emphasizing their "Jewishness," perhaps they were suggesting that they're truly able to represent the religion of the Jewish Messiah.
- They probably boasted about having \_\_\_\_\_ [gg]. It seems they believed that such experiences were a clear sign of their apostolic claims and their superiority to Paul. Although Paul knew such experiences were irrelevant, he played their game (but he did so under protest; he despised the game of boasting) and recounted a vision he had fourteen years earlier (2 Cor 12:1-5).
- They apparently felt their \_\_\_\_\_ [hh] ability was a clear sign of their superiority over Paul. Rhetoric was highly prized in

Greek culture, and they pointed out that Paul wasn't a very polished speaker (2 Cor 11:6).

## THE UNITY OF 2 CORINTHIANS

No one questions the authorship of 2 Corinthians. All agree that Paul wrote it. But the “\_\_\_\_\_ [ii]” of 2 Corinthians has been the subject of a lot of debate. So, what do I mean by its “unity”? When scholars discuss the “unity” of 2 Corinthians they are debating whether or not it was originally a \_\_\_\_\_ [jj] letter written by Paul to the Corinthians. Some believe it was *not* a single letter. Instead, they believe 2 Corinthians contains two separate letters—or even four or five—that somehow became “fused” into the letter we know today. In other words, some think 2 Corinthians is a \_\_\_\_\_ [kk] of different letters from Paul to the Corinthians. Their main argument is that Paul's \_\_\_\_\_ [ll] abruptly changes between chapters 1-9 and 10-13. In chapters 10-13 Paul erupts into harsh tones of anger and disappointment after expressing exuberance and joy in chapters 7-9. The harsh, attacking tone of chapters 10-13 have led some to conclude that this was the “harsh/severe letter” that Paul referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:3-4.

I completely reject the notion that 2 Corinthians is a patchwork of two or more letters which Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. I'm convinced it was a \_\_\_\_\_ [mm] letter, and there's one simple reason why I believe it: *there is not a shred of evidence from early translations of the Bible or from the writings of the church fathers that 2 Corinthians ever existed as two or more separate letters.* To my knowledge, not a single person ever proposed that 2 Corinthians was a patchwork of letters until the \_\_\_\_\_ [nn] century. If a \_\_\_\_\_ [oo] about a New Testament letter doesn't emerge until more than 1700 years after it was written, it should be viewed with extreme skepticism.

But what about the difference in \_\_\_\_\_ [pp] between the two sections of 2 Corinthians (chapters 1-9 and chapters 10-13)? That difference in tone should not be \_\_\_\_\_ [qq]. It's not all about love and concern for the Corinthians in chapters 1-9 and all about Paul defending himself and attacking his opponents in chapters 10-13. In chapters 1-9 Paul also defended himself (e.g., 1:17; 4:2; 5:12-13), and he rebuked false teachers (e.g., 2:17); while in chapters 10-13 he also expressed love and concern for the Corinthians (11:11; 12:14-15; 13:9).

When the plan of 2 Corinthians is considered, the reason for Paul's change in tone is perfectly \_\_\_\_\_ [rr]. Chapters 1-9 are addressed to the \_\_\_\_\_ [ss] (cf. 2 Cor 2:6) who repented because of the severe letter. Chapters 10-13, on the other hand, are addressed to the unrepentant \_\_\_\_\_ [tt] who were still clinging to the false

apostles (the “some” or “certain people” in 2 Corinthians 10:2 who still regarded Paul as if he “walked according to the flesh”).

## LESSONS FROM 2 CORINTHIANS

- No church has ever been exempted from Satan’s attack on the \_\_\_\_\_[uu].
- The enemies of truth must try to destroy the credibility of the \_\_\_\_\_[vv] in the eyes of people. This means, destroy the credibility of the \_\_\_\_\_[ww].
- We should always be concerned about the spiritual \_\_\_\_\_[xx] (3:18) and the spiritual \_\_\_\_\_[yy] (11:2-4,29) of the church.
- God gives us strength to accomplish our \_\_\_\_\_[zz], and the glorious \_\_\_\_\_[aaa] is our mission (3:4-6; 4:7).
- \_\_\_\_\_[bbb] preaching and teaching will get a hostile reaction from the world (4:8-9).
- Don’t be overly impressed with impressive \_\_\_\_\_[ccc] and \_\_\_\_\_[ddd] ability (11:5).
- Sometimes loving someone means you must be \_\_\_\_\_[eee] (2:4-5).
- God can use \_\_\_\_\_[fff] for our spiritual benefit (12:7-10).

## KEY PASSAGES FROM 2 CORINTHIANS

- 2 Corinthians 4:5, 7
- 2 Corinthians 5:1-5, 6-8, 9-10
- 2 Corinthians 6:14-18
- 2 Corinthians 7:10
- 2 Corinthians 8:1-5
- 2 Corinthians 9:6-8
- 2 Corinthians 12:6-10

## FILL-IN-THE-BLANK ANSWER KEY

[a] most	[ss] majority
[b] least	[tt] minority
[c] four	[uu] truth
[d] second	[vv] apostles
[e] Ephesus	[ww] Bible
[f] disciplined	[xx] growth
[g] separate	[yy] safety
[h] divided	[zz] mission
[i] tolerant	[aaa] gospel
[j] Timothy	[bbb] faithful
[k] threat	[ccc] resumes
[l] authority	[ddd] speaking
[m] apostles	[eee] tough
[n] third	[fff] suffering
[o] two	
[p] disaster	
[q] defense	
[r] severe	
[s] Titus	
[t] Troas	
[u] Macedonia	
[v] repented	
[w] joy	
[x] relief	
[y] danger	
[z] false	
[aa] confronted	
[bb] defended	
[cc] Satan	
[dd] truth	
[ee] false	
[ff] Jewish	
[gg] visions	
[hh] speaking	
[ii] unity	
[jj] single	
[kk] patchwork	
[ll] tone	
[mm] single	
[nn] 18 <sup>th</sup>	
[oo] theory	
[pp] tone	
[qq] overstated	
[rr] understandable	