

2nd Corinthians: Overview of Epistle

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1v1-11 Opening Salutation & Thanksgivings

1v12 - 7v16 Vindication of Paul's Actions

- **1v12 - 2v4 Explanation of Paul's personal movements**
- **2v5-11 Forgiveness of the offending brother enjoined**
- **2v12-13 Leaving for Macedonia**
- **2v14 - 7v4 Glorious character of the apostolic ministry concerning the risen Christ**
 - **2v14 - 3v5 Savour of the ministry, sincerity in the ministry & sufficiency for the ministry**
 - **3v6-18 Excelling glory & superior blessings of the ministry of the New Covenant**
 - **4v1-6 Communication of the ministry by God & His servants**
 - **4v1-5 Character of the servants communicating the ministry**
 - **4v6 Sovereignty of God in communicating the ministry**
 - **4v7 - 5v21 Vessels that God uses for the ministry**
 - **4v7-9 Cost of the ministry to the servants**
 - **4v10-15 Consecration of life to the ministry**
 - **4v16-18 Continuance in the ministry in view of future eternal glory**
 - **5v1-10 Confidence in the ministry in view of future resurrection**
 - **5v11-21 Constraining motives in the ministry of reconciliation**
 - **6v1 - 7v4 Apostolic devotion to the ministry**
- **7v5-6 Arrival in Macedonia, meeting up with Titus**
- **7v7-16 Paul's personal rejoicing in the repentant Corinthians**

8v1 - 9v15 Exhortation to Liberality & Ministering to Saints

- **8v1-5 Notable example of liberality (the churches of Macedonia)**
- **8v6-8 Consequent appeal for liberality**
- **8v9 Greatest incentive for liberality (the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ)**
- **8v10-15 Apostolic encouragement towards liberality**
- **8v16-24 Need for honesty and discretion in the sight of God and men**
- **9v1-5 Further appeal for liberality**
- **9v6-14 Reasons for liberality**
- **9v15 Supreme example of liberality (God gave His unspeakable gift)**

10v1 - 13v10 Vindication of Paul's Apostleship

13v11-14 Closing Salutation

Historical Background to 2nd Corinthians:

Acts 18v1 – 20v3 gives the scriptural historical record of Paul's visits to Corinth in the course of his 2nd & 3rd missionary journeys. Acts 19v21: ***"After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome".*** 1st Cor 16v5-8: ***"Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass (have gone, JND) through Macedonia: for I do pass through Macedonia. And it may be that I will abide, yea, and winter with you, that ye may bring me on my journey whithersoever I go. For I will not see you now by the way; but I trust to tarry a while with you, if the Lord permit. But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost".*** Acts 20v1: Paul ***"departed for to go into Macedonia"***.

2nd Corinthians chs1/12/13 indicate that this was something of a change of plan on the part of the apostle, which required some personal explanation, as it was being used against Paul by his enemies to discredit him.

Ch1v15-16: ***"I was minded to come unto you before, that ye might have a second benefit; And to pass by you into Macedonia, and to come again out of Macedonia unto you, and of you to be brought on my way toward Judaea".*** Ch1v23 ***"Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth".*** Ch2v1: ***"But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness".***

Ch2v13: At Troas ***"I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia"***.

Paul does meet up with Titus in Macedonia (ch7v6-7), probably at Philippi, receiving from him a good report of how that most of the church at Corinth had responded favourably to the 1st epistle, they had repented & sorrowed appropriately, bringing great personal joy to the apostle (see ch7v7-16).

Paul likely wrote 2nd Corinthians from Philippi in Macedonia, about 18 months after the 1st epistle. He sends Titus with the 2nd epistle, indicating that he now feels he can come again to Corinth with joy, not with sorrow, and without having to wield the apostolic rod of judgment against them.

Paul's Reasons for Writing 1st Corinthians Explained in 2nd Corinthians:

Ch2v3: ***"And I wrote this same unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice".*** Paul wrote 1st Corinthians to avoid a personal visit that would be entirely of a corrective nature.

Ch2v4: ***"For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you".*** The 1st epistle was stained with his tears due to their spiritual condition, yet he desired them to be assured of his abundant love for them.

Ch2v9: ***"For to this end also did I write (I have written), that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things".*** The 1st epistle was a test of their obedience to his apostolic commands.

Ch7v12: ***"Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you".*** Paul did not write the 1st epistle just to be vindictive towards the guilty parties, nor out of sentiment for those wronged, but out of true heartfelt care for the Corinthians.

Any corrective ministry, if it is going to be effective, must be given with much love & grace, and in such a way that those receiving the ministry are in no doubt about the genuine love & care of the one giving the ministry.

Circumstances of Paul the Servant in 2nd Corinthians:

2nd Corinthians deals extensively with the servant/minister of God & his service/ministry.

Paul speaks of himself, and fellow workers, as “**workers together**” (ch6v1), as “**ministers (servants) of God**” (ch6v4), and as “**ministers (servants) of Christ**” (ch11v23).

Paul as a servant and his apostleship were being greatly challenged, even at Corinth. The apostles were the object of great persecution & afflictions, “**troubled on every side**” (ch4v8), “**we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears**” (ch7v5).

Ch1v5 “**the sufferings of Christ abound in us**”, and recurring passages of 2nd Corinthians detail **the adversity encountered for Christ** (see ch1v8, ch4v8-9, ch6v4-5, ch11v23-27).

But they were dependant servants, being sustained & upheld by divine resources, the mercy & comfort of God the Father, the consolation of Christ (see ch1v3-5); “**our sufficiency is of God**” (ch3v5).

They were also strengthened by the glorious character of “**this ministry**” (ch4v1) entrusted to them, “**this treasure**” (ch4v7) of “**the gospel of the glory of Christ**” (ch4v4), and thus “**we faint not**” (ch4vs1,16).

Paul experienced **a ministry of grace, the sustaining grace of Christ**; “**My grace is sufficient for thee**” (ch12v9).

General Structure of 2nd Corinthians:

Ch1-7: **Vindication of Paul’s actions**, with a large parenthetical section (ch2v14 – ch7v4) detailing **a ministry of glory**, linked with **the gospel of Christ**; ch4v4 “**the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ**”.

Ch8-9: **Exhortation to liberality, a ministry of giving**; linked with **the grace of Christ**; ch8v9 “**For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ...**”.

Ch10-13: **Vindication of Paul’s apostleship, a ministry of reproof** of false teachers/apostles, linked with **the gentleness of Christ**; ch10v1 “**Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ**”.

Ch1-7: A theme of **forgiveness** of the offending, but now repentant, brother who they had to put away in 1st Cor 5; ch2v7 “**ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him**”, i.e. **a ministry of restoration** (ch2v5-11).

Ch8-9: A theme of **fruitfulness**; in relation to “**ministering to the saints**” (ch8v4, ch9v1), giving on the ground of grace (ch8) and of righteousness (ch9); such liberality would “**increase the fruits of your righteousness**” (ch9v10).

The apostle gives 3 particular examples of liberality for believers to follow:

1. The abounding grace of the churches of Macedonia, flowing out of their devotion to the Lord (ch8v1-5).
2. The greatest incentive for liberality that we have in our Lord Jesus Christ (ch8v9).
3. The supreme example of liberality, i.e. God who gave His own beloved Son (ch9v15).

Ch10-13: A theme of **faithfulness**, in connection with the vindication of the credentials & apostleship of Paul. Paul goes to great lengths to emphasise the integrity of his character, and the confirmation of his credentials as an apostle, preserving his moral authority, so that his own ministry & teaching was not discredited (see 1st Tim 4v16). In further defence of his apostolic authority, he speaks of “**visions and revelations of the Lord**” (ch12v1), and he relates his experience of being caught up to the 3rd heaven, into Paradise, and “**the abundance of the revelations**” (ch12v7) that he had been given.

Ch2v14 – Ch7v4: The Parenthetical Section of 2nd Corinthians

Up to ch2v13, the personal pronoun “*I*” predominates, as Paul explains his personal movements as an apostle.

Ch2v13: Paul speaks of his unrest when at Troas relating to not meeting up with Titus, “*I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia*”.

At this point in the epistle, Paul breaks off this personal narrative and explanation of his movements, and he picks up the chronological narrative in ch7v5 “*For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side ...*”.

The large intervening parenthetical section deals with the character of service or ministry that God had given to Paul & his fellow apostles. The predominant personal pronoun in this section changes from “*I*” to “*we*”, referring now to Paul & his fellow apostles.

From ch7v5, the personal pronouns change back predominantly to “*I*”, as Paul speaks of his personal joy upon hearing of their response to his 1st epistle, and how that they had been brought to repentance; “*I rejoiced the more*” (ch7v7), “*Now I rejoice*” (ch7v9), “*I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things*” (ch7v16).

From ch2v14 – ch7v4, we learn of the apostolic ministry, how that the apostles had been given a glorious ministry linked with the risen Christ & the gospel of Christ. They were “*unto God a sweet savour of Christ*” (ch2v15); they had been made “*able (competent / sufficient) ministers of the New Covenant*” (ch3v6); they were making known “*the gospel of the glory of Christ*” (ch4v4); they were constrained & motivated in the ministry by “*the love of Christ*” (ch5v14); they had been given by God “*the ministry of reconciliation*” (ch5v18); they were moving in devoted service as “*ambassadors for Christ*” (ch5v20); and they were “*workers together*” (ch6v1) in proclaiming the grace of God and the wonderful day of God’s salvation.

Ch2v14: Paul is thankful to God for **the victory they experienced in Christ**.

Ch2v14-16: There is **the savour of the ministry of Christ**; unto God, it was a “*sweet savour*” of His beloved Son.

Ch2v17: There was apostolic **sincerity in the ministry of Christ**.

Ch3v1-3: Paul confirms their **commendation to the ministry of Christ**.

Ch3v4-5: For such a significant ministry, their **sufficiency for the ministry of Christ** was of God.

Ch3v6-18: We have **the enjoyment of the ministry of Christ**, linked with the glorious character of **the ministry of the New Covenant**, and contrasting the superior blessings of the New Covenant in Christ versus the old covenant of the law given by Moses.

The New Covenant is a ministration:

- of the Spirit (v6), not the letter.
- that brings life (v6), not death (v7).
- of righteousness (v9), not condemnation.
- of excelling & remaining glory, not a fading glory (v10-13).
- that brings liberty (v17), not bondage.
- that brings present transformation (v18), not spiritual stagnation.