

The Epistle of II Corinthians

The Book of A Pastor's Heart

The pastor is Pastor Paul and his heart is revealed in this epistle more than in any other of his writings. There were three different groups who opposed Paul and questioned his apostleship and ministry.

- His own countrymen – he suffered some vicious attacks regarding his integrity from the Jews (false Jewish apostles).
- He suffered at the hands of the Romans.
- He suffered the most at the hand of his own fellow believers. False teachers claiming that Paul was fickle, proud, unimpressive in appearance and speech, dishonest and unqualified had swayed a number of them.

I. Author

The author is conclusively Paul. There are many details that are autobiographically connected with I Corinthians, Acts, Romans and Galatians. Paul identifies himself in II Corinthians 1:1 and 10:1 as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. The testimony of the early church is sufficient to corroborate the internal evidence of the epistle.

II. Background

Paul continued his ministry in Ephesus after writing the first epistle to the Corinthians. Paul had hoped that the firmness of that letter and Timothy's visit (I Corinthians 16:10-11) would have resolved the conflicts that were taking place among the saints there. There were intense church factions and growing opposition to Paul's apostolic authority that would not quit. Though it is not recorded in Acts, it would appear that Paul made a second hasty trip to Corinth to try to resolve some of these problems. The trip was unsuccessful and Paul retreated to Ephesus "with insults of his person and rejections of his authority ringing in his ears and burning his heart (2:1; 12:14, 21; 13:1-2)" There were continual attacks on his integrity and sinning members in church remained unrepentant (12:21). He decided that he would not return to Corinth until they adopted a different attitude toward him (1:23). Paul had sent Titus to Corinth to organize a special love offering for poverty-stricken saints in Jerusalem. When Titus returned, Paul wrote them a letter expressing his burden for them (2:4; 7:18). Since that letter has not been discovered, it has been regarded as another lost letter, making two altogether (I Corinthians 5:9). Paul went to Troas and then on to Macedonia, possibly to Philippi. It was in Macedonia that Titus came to him with a glowing report from Corinth (7:6-16). Revival had broken out and there was now a faithful majority that was again warm and responsive toward Paul and his ministry.

In this second epistle, Paul answered those who still criticized him in warm passionate language. He informed the larger group of his rejoicing over their repentance and shared his burden over the constant opposition of the few. Through this trial and Paul's response to it, we get the best glimpse of Paul's personality.

III. Purpose

1. To further establish Paul's bond of love with the Corinthian believers after they had repented of their sins and their hard attitudes toward him and God.
2. To further defend his apostleship as he shared his calling under the new covenant and his love for God's people.
3. He further instructs the church, reminding them of their commitment to the Christians in Judea.

4. To reveal to them that the Christian is an "ambassador" of God with a spiritual, yet glorious ministry.
5. Paul also wanted them to know that in the midst of all suffering and trials of Christ's sufficiency.

IV. Keys to Understanding II Corinthians

1. Key Characters

- Paul – the author of the letter.
- Timothy – fellow missionary sent by Paul to assist the believers in Corinth (1:1-19).
- Titus – Paul's associate who was sent to check up on the situation in Corinth. He helped to collect money for the church in Jerusalem and delivered a letter for Paul to the church at Corinth (2:13; 7:6 – 8:24; 12:18).
- False teachers – these were in the Corinthian church having disguised themselves as believers (11:13-15).

2. Key Verses

- II Corinthians 3:18 – ***But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*** This verse sums up the heart of Paul's ministry. He longed to see the believer's at Corinth transformed into the likeness of Christ.
- II Corinthians 4:5 – "But we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."
- II Corinthians 5:17 – "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

3. Key Word

- Boast or Glory; both translated from the same Greek word (καύχημα/kauchēma). Such boasting or glorying can be in a good or bad sense.

V. Outline

1. Defense of his ministry (1:1 – 5:21)
 - A. Paul defends his motives (1:3 – 2:17).
 - B. Paul defends his message (3:1 – 5:21).
 - C. Declaration to the church (6:1 – 9:27)
 1. Conduct (6)
 2. Consolation (7)
 3. Cooperation in giving (8:1 – 9:27)
2. Defense of his apostleship (10:1 – 13:14)
 - A. His personal appearance and authority (10)
 - B. His proven apostleship (11)
 - C. His passionate appeal (12)

VI. Observations

1. In I Corinthians 5:1-8, Paul encouraged the church to remove an unrepentant member. In this second epistle (2:6-11), Paul encourages them to receive back that one who had since become repentant.

2. Personal Application: Persecution only comes to those who live their faith. Any believer that sets out to obey Christ should expect it. It comes from two sources: A. The unsaved and B. The saints in the church who don't want to obey Christ. As a minister of God, Paul had to expect that "Roast Preacher" would be part of the main diet of some of the saints and even the "aints." Paul had really stepped on their toes in I Corinthians, calling them carnal and spiritual babes. When Paul attacked their sins, they set out to attack his character and his teaching.

The Lord has a way of bringing our lives into balance. If we only had blessings, we would become proud and boastful. Could it be that the Lord allows us to have burdens along the way to keep us humble and dependent upon Him?

3. Paul uses very descriptive words in II Corinthians that indicate the physical, mental and emotional pain that he was going through when he wrote the book.
- | | | |
|------------|-----------|---------------|
| - Weak | - Labor | - Stripes |
| - Distress | - Sorrow | - Fightings |
| - Anguish | - Tumult | - Beatings |
| - Tears | - Peril | - Affliction |
| | - Fasting | - Persecution |
4. Lost Letters – Paul in the Corinthian Epistles makes reference to two letters, which we consider today as "lost" since they have not yet been discovered. It is important that we recognize that not everything the apostles wrote had the authority of Scripture. Even though God may have prompted these lost letters, only the writings God wanted preserved for all generations were collected into the New Testament Canon. There are other references in the New Testament to others letters that were lost.
- Church leaders wrote a letter to various groups of believers following the Council at Jerusalem to inform them of decisions made. Acts 15:19-29 gives us a brief summary of this letter, but the letter itself has never been found.
 - In Colossians 4:16, Paul refers to a letter he wrote to the Laodicean church that has not been discovered.
 - Paul's Four Letters to the Corinthian believers:
 1. A letter warning believers to stay clear of sexually immoral people (I Corinthians 5:9).
 2. I Corinthians
 3. A stern letter of reprimand (II Corinthians 2:4).
 4. II Corinthians
 - 5. Famous Lines often quoted:
 - God loves a cheerful giver (II Corinthians 9:7).
 - A thorn in the flesh (12:7). This was the term Paul used to describe what he suffered throughout his ministry. We are not certain what this "thorn in the flesh" was, but Paul felt it was something to keep him from getting conceited. Some think that it was problems with his eyes while others think it was pain from being stoned, from beatings and other physical problems (imprisonment, shipwreck, etc.).
 - 6. John Phillips provides an interesting contrast between I and II Corinthians worth noting.

I Corinthians

- Insight into the life, character and conditions of the church.
- Objective and practical
- Deliberate
- Warns against pagan influences
- Deals with questions on marriage, freedom, spiritual gifts, and order in the church.

II Corinthians

- Insight into the life, character and conditions of the apostle Paul.
- Subjective and personal
- Impassioned
- Warns against Judaistic influences.”
- Deals with the problem of false teachers forcing Paul to defend his authority and the truth of the message he preached.

7. In II Corinthians 3:6-18, Paul demonstrated the superiority of his ministry over that of the Judaizers by contrasting a number of beliefs and approaches to ministry.

Judaizers

- Old Testament
- Faith plus works
- The letter of the Law
- Kills
- Ministration of death
- Condemnation

Paul's Ministry

- New Testament
- Faith alone
- The spirit of the Law
- Gives life
- Ministration of the Spirit
- Righteousness

8. Principles of Confrontation in II Corinthians (II Corinthians 7:9). Sometimes rebuke is necessary, but it must be used with caution. The purpose of any rebuke, confrontation, or discipline is to help people, not hurt them.

Method

- Be firm and bold
- Affirm all you see that is good
- Be accurate and honest
- Know the facts
- Follow up after the confrontation
- Be gentle after being firm
- Speak words that reflect Christ's message not your own ideas.
- Use discipline only when all else fails.

Reference

- 7:9; 10:2
- 7:4
- 7:14; 8:21
- 11:22-27
- 7:13; 12:14
- 7:15; 13:11-13
- 10:3, 12-13; 12:19
- 13:2