

Mount Pisgah A.M.E Church

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Bible Study, Wednesday, October 7, 2015

Survey of the Bible

Lesson 49: 2 Corinthians

The Book of 2 Corinthians

The book of 2 Corinthians is a follow up letter to address issues that have arisen in Corinth since the writing of 1 Corinthians. 2 Corinthians is a subsequent piece of correspondence intended to clarify Paul's position and increase the confidence of the Corinthian church.

In spite of the names 1 and 2 Corinthians, from three to five letters have been thought to have been written to Corinth:

- Letter 1: Referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:9 as a prior letter written to address a leader who is living in immorality
- Letter 2: 1 Corinthians – written to address divisions and to defend Paul's apostolic ministry
- Letter 3: A "sorrowful letter," written in harsh tones to address an opposition faction
- Letter 4: 2 Corinthians – written to explain Paul's behavior, encourage giving, and defend Paul's apostolic ministry
- Letter 5: Some have contended that 2 Corinthians 10-13 are actually a separate letter.

Author

As with 1 Corinthians, Paul's is acknowledged as the author both in the letter itself, by early church fathers, and by almost all scholars.

The Times and context of 2 Corinthians

For an understanding of the context of the city of Corinth, refer to the lesson on 1 Corinthians. Since Paul's first letter (written while Paul was in Ephesus during his 3rd Missionary journey), the Corinthian church had been swayed by false teachers and "Judaizers" who called into question Paul's credibility. The report of opposition was apparently brought to him by Timothy. Although it is not reported in Acts, Paul evidently made a brief and "painful" visit to the Corinthians (see 2 Cor. 2: 1, and 2 Cor. 13:1 where Paul declares in 2 Corinthians that an upcoming visit would be his *third* visit to them). He then returned to Ephesus and wrote his "sorrowful letter" to address what he saw and to urge the church to discipline the leader(s) of the opposition (2 Cor. 2:4, and 2 Cor. 7:8). Titus carried this letter. Paul met with Titus in Macedonia and was greatly relieved to hear that most of the Corinthians had repented of their rebellion against Paul's ministry. Paul writes 2 Corinthians in response to the news. All of these events are thought to have occurred within the same year, 56 AD.

Some argue that chapters 10-13 constitute a separate letter because the opposition has resurfaced and Paul has to defend himself again. However, his subject matter in this section seems to deal with a subset of the disciples there, which suggests that although the majority still supports him, he still needs to deal with a minority opposition faction that persists.

To recap, here is a summary of Paul's relationship with the Corinthians:

Paul visits Corinth for the first time (3rd Missionary journey)

Paul travels to Ephesus

Paul receives questions about specific behaviors from the Corinthians
Paul writes Letter 1
Paul hears from Titus of the divisions and issues in Corinth
Paul writes 1 Corinthians (Letter 2)
Paul hears of opposition arising in Corinth
Paul makes “painful visit” to address opposition
Paul writes Letter 3 (painful letter) to address opposition
Paul hears from Titus about the repentance of the majority of the Corinthians
Paul writes 2 Corinthians (Letter 3)
Paul makes his final visit to Corinth

Overview

Second Corinthians describes the anatomy of an apostle, or really of any genuine Christian leader. The Corinthian church has been swayed by false teachers who have stirred the people against Paul, especially in response to First Corinthians. They claim that Paul is fickle, unimpressive in appearance and speech, dishonest, and unqualified as an apostle. Throughout 2 Corinthians Paul explains his apostolic character, conduct, and call in opposition to “impressive” and “qualified” teachers who have influenced the Corinthians. Three major sections are: Paul’s Philosophy of ministry; The Grace of Giving; Vindication of Paul’s Humility and Sacrifice

Outline

- I. Paul’s Apostolic Character, Conduct and Call (1:1-7:16)**
 - A. Introduction (1:1-1:11)
 - 1. Greetings (1:1-1:2)
 - 2. Trouble and God as The God of Comfort (1:3-1:11)
 - B. Explanation of Change in Plans (1:12-2:4)
 - 1. Not due to fickleness (1:12-1:22)
 - 2. Intended to give you time (1:23-2:4)
 - C. Forgiveness / Restoration of Offender (2:5-2:11)
 - D. Paul’s Concern for the Messenger (2:12-2:17)
 - E. Paul’s Philosophy of Ministry (3:1-6:13)
 - 1. Human Hearts More Important Than Credentials/Law (3:1-3:6)
 - 2. A New Covenant Based on God’s Glory Manifest Through The Spirit (3:7-3:18)
 - 3. Glory is an Inner Treasure in Regardless of Outward Appearances (4:1-5:10)
 - 4. Focus on Inner Transformation and Reconciliation (5:11-6:2)
 - 5. Paul’s Willingness to Endure Hardships as an Example (6:3-6:13)
 - F. Paul’s Exhortations to The Corinthians
 - 1. Watch your Associations (6:14-7:1)
 - 2. Paul’s Meeting With Titus (7:2-7:7)
 - 3. Corinthian Response to Paul’s Letter (7:8-7:16)

- II. The Grace of Giving (8:1-9:15)**
 - A. The Example of The Macedonians (8:1-8:6)
 - B. Encouragement to the Corinthians (8:7-8:15)
 - 1. The Example of Christ (8:8-8:9)
 - 2. God Will See You Through Your Follow-Through (8:10-8:15)
 - C. The Integrity of The Delegation (8:16-8:24)
 - D. Readiness to Give Encouraged (9:1-9:5)
 - E. Encouragement to Give (9:6-9:15)

1. Principles of Giving (9:6-9:7)
2. Promises from Giving (9:8-9:15)
 - a) Supply (9:8-9:11a)
 - b) Resulting Praise of God (9:11b-9:15)

III. Vindication of Paul's Humility and Sacrifice (10:1-13:14)

- A. Paul Answers His Accusers (10:1-10:18)
 1. Appearance of Cowardice (10:1-10:2)
 2. Paul Fights A Different Kind of Fight (10:3-10:11)
 3. Boasting In What Glorifies God and Builds Faith (10:12-10-18)
- B. Paul Defends His Apostleship (11:1-12:13)
 1. Godly Jealousy (11:1-11:4)
 2. Comparison with "Super-Apostles" (11:5-12:10)
 - a) Sacrifice versus Entitlement (11:5-11:15)
 - b) Suffering Versus Accomplishments (11:16-11:33)
 - c) Humility versus "Impressive Spirituality" (12:1-12:10)
 3. Apostleship is Proved by Love and Concern (12:11-12:13)
- C. Paul Announces his Upcoming Visit (12:14-13:10)
- D. Final Greetings (13:11-13:14)

Some Keys to understanding The Book of 2 Corinthians

- In arguing to defend his apostleship, Paul demonstrates the character of a true apostle of Christ. One who is willing to bear the "marks of Christ" (Gk – *stigmata*), rather than one who is "polished," "qualified," and "accomplished."
- Paul struggles to balance "firmness" with humility and sensitivity in order to make his point that in Christ (unlike in secular leadership) aggression does not equal effectiveness or influence
- 2 Corinthians demonstrates the model of giving as a manifestation of one who has the heart of Christ.
- Paul attempts to paint a clear contrast between a Greco-Roman understanding of what constitutes a "strong" leader, and what leadership (headship) in Christ looks like. For Paul, weakness (i.e. the thorn in the flesh) is a strength, because it begs the need for complete reliance on God's sufficient grace and allows God's power to shine through.
- Paul emphasizes to the Corinthians the need to "examine oneself." In Paul's context, this means to examine what type of Christian one will be:
 - One who, like Paul, is characterized by humility, focus on spiritual things, sacrifice, and generosity.
 - One who, like the "super-apostles," are characterized by a sense of entitlement, a focus on outward appearances and displays.

Some Lessons from 2 Corinthians

- God is the God of all comfort – when we need comfort, God *has* delivered us, *is* delivering us, and *will* deliver us.
- There is no fickleness in the promises of God. They are YES and AMEN. – we can count on them. Believers have within them the Spirit of God as guarantee.
- Forgiveness is essential if we want to win the victory over Satan. Satan can score points in our lives when we harbor resentment and unforgiveness.
- At times people WANT to follow leaders who have impressive credentials, however sometimes these credentials mask a lack of character. It is important to look deeper, at things like compassion, humility

- We carry within us an INDESTRUCTIBLE gift (the Holy Spirit), which has inseparably bonded with our spirits and guaranteed us eternal victory. The “us” that we see on the outside (body, soul) may have to go through endless wear and tear, and may in fact be “wasting away,” that which is essential (our essence) is being renewed daily.
- If we continue to view the world with a “circumstantial” or “external” lens, we will constantly be discouraged at the worsening conditions. However if we “walk by faith and not by sight,” if we see that God is bringing a NEW reality that is not based on what we have historically perceived, we can be encouraged in spite of the troubling thing that we see and experience every day.
- When believers die, they go immediately to be with the Lord – there is NO intervening stop. ALL people will eventually go before the judgment seat of Christ. For believers, this will be to determine REWARDS, not entry into glory. For those who have rejected God, however, their *entry* will be judged solely according to their deeds. Those whose names are in the book of life will enjoy eternity with God (See Rev. 20:11-15)
- When we die, our earthly bodies degrade, but we are clothed with a NEW exterior in which we will live eternally.
- Giving is a demonstration that we have the heart of Jesus.
- We give our SELVES first (acknowledge the Lordship of Christ), THEN we give our substance.
- “Boasting,” or bragging about “my ministry” and “what I’ve accomplished,” or even “my testimony” for that matter, is only helpful if its focus is to glorify God or to build faith, not to glorify self or impress people.
- Only WE (with the help of The Spirit) can really “examine ourselves” to see whether we are operating with proper motives and according to the teachings of the gospel.