

47_Bible Arguments_2_Corinthians

INTRODUCTION TO 2 CORINTHIANS

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Paul's relationship to the church in Corinth has been dealt with more fully under 1 Corinthians. Of special importance is the critical attitude of the Corinthians, who, under the influence of certain Judaizers, had treated Paul very harshly on his second visit. This prompted a very harsh letter (2 Cor. 7:8) from him which is now lost to us. Apparently this humbled them and even brought about the restoration of the one who had insulted Paul (2 Cor. 2:5-11). Thus, when Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, he tried to comfort his erring children and explain further why his harsh words had been necessary. He wanted to assure their complete reconciliation with himself by explaining his methods and motives for ministry (ch. 1-7). Secondly, he wrote to encourage them to complete the arrangements for the gift to the poor saints in Jerusalem. Thirdly, he wrote to vindicate his Apostolic authority so the majority could explain to his Judaistic enemies and the minority why he refused money from the Corinthian church. He had every credential as an Apostle of Christ in contrast to the false apostles who had troubled them.

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SIMPLIFIED OUTLINE OF 2 CORINTHIANS

I. Reconciliation	1-7
A. Comfort and explanation	1
B. Concern and triumph	2
C. New covenant superiority	3
D. Power in trial	4
E. Eternal perspective and reconciliation with God	5
F. Consistency and separation	6
G. Reconciliation with Paul	7
II. Collection	8-9
A. Example and willingness	8
B. Exhortation and praise	9
III. Credentials	10-13
A. Weapons and commendation	10
B. Defense and boasting	11
C. Visions and a thorn	12
D. Admonitions and conclusion	13

OUTLINE OF 2 CORINTHIANS

I. The ministry of reconciliation	1:1-7:16
A. Introduction	1:1-11
1. Salutation	1:1-2
2. Praise to the God of comfort	1:3-7
3. Thanks for answered prayer	1:8-11
B. Explanation for delay	1:12-2:11
1. The motivation of sincerity	1:12-14
2. The explanation of the planned visit	1:15-2:4
3. The forgiveness of the offender	2:5-11
C. The new covenant ministry	2:12-6:10
1. The concern	2:12-13
2. The expectation of triumph	2:14-17
3. The recommendation by changed lives	3:1-3
4. The superiority of the new covenant ministry	3:4-4:6
a. The confidence of ministry	3:4-6
b. The glory of ministry	3:7-11
c. The boldness of ministry	3:12-4:6
1) The freedom to be transformed	3:12-18
2) The subject of preaching	4:1-6
5. The power of ministry	4:7-15
a. God's power through trials	4:7-12
b. Resurrection power in increasing outreach	4:13-15
6. The perspective of ministry	4:16-5:10
a. Eternal glory	4:16-18
b. Eternal bodies	5:1-5
c. Eternal reward	5:6-10
7. The motivation of ministry	5:11-6:10
a. The fear of the Lord	5:11-13
b. The love from Christ	5:14-15
c. The message of reconciliation	5:16-21
d. The urgency of time	6:1-2
e. The commendation in trial	6:3-10
1) Consistency in every way	6:3-7
2) Paradoxes in ministry	6:8-10
D. The exhortations of love	6:11-7:16
1. The reciprocity of love	6:11-13

2. The appeal for separation	6:14-7:1
3. The appeal for reconciliation	7:2-16
a. The encouragement of support	7:2-7
b. The repentance completed	7:8-13
c. The encouragement of Titus	7:14-16
II. The ministry of giving	8:1-9:15
A. The encouragement of example	8:1-9
1. The example of the Macedonians	8:1-7
2. The example of the Lord Jesus Christ	8:8-9
B. The willingness to give	8:10-15
C. The method of administrating the gift	8:16-9:5
1. Doing what is right	8:16-21
2. Dependable men	8:21-24
3. Advance preparation	9:1-5
D. Exhortation to give generously	9:6-15
1. Giving compared to sowing	9:6-11
2. Spiritual benefits of giving	9:12-15
III. The vindication of Apostolic authority	10:1-13:14
A. The extent of authority	10:1-18
1. The weapons of spiritual warfare	10:1-6
2. The authority for edification	10:7-11
3. The commendation from the Lord	10:12-18
B. The evidence of Apostleship	11:1-12:18
1. The method of Apostleship	11:1-15
a. The necessity of defense	11:1-6
b. The answer to a false charge	11:7-12
c. The exposure of false apostles	11:13-15
2. The boasting about suffering	11:16-33
3. The visions and revelations	12:1-6
4. The compensatory thorn	12:7-10
5. The unselfishness of love	12:11-18
C. The admonition to dear friends	12:19-13:10
1. The goal of edification	12:19
2. The fear of coming	12:20-21
3. The resolution of conflict	13:1-4
4. The importance of self-examination	13:5-10
D. Conclusion	13:11-14
1. Instruction	13:11

2. Salutation
3. Benediction

13:12-13
13:14

ARGUMENT OF 2 CORINTHIANS

Paul, with Timothy, wrote to the church in Corinth and all the saints in Achaia in order to assure reconciliation with himself and his ministry (1-7), encourage completion of the collection for the Jerusalem saints (8-9) and defend his apostleship against the minority denying his authority (10-13).

In the introduction he gave praise to the God of all comfort who uses suffering to produce comforters (1:3-7) and then thanked God for the prayers of many who made his hardships bearable (1:8-11). His failure to visit Corinth (1:12-2:11) had been attributed to vacillation, but he explained that his motives were sincere (1:12-14) and the delay was for their benefit (1:15-2:4). The majority had disciplined the insolent brother who had attacked Paul on his last visit. Since he was now repentant, they ought to forgive him and restore him to fellowship (2:5-11).

In his ministry of the new covenant (2:12-6:10) Paul demonstrated a genuine concern for the saints in Corinth (2:12-13), expecting a triumphant resolution by God's grace (2:14-17). The Corinthians themselves were by their changed lives a recommendation of Paul's ministry (3:1-3).

The new covenant ministry is far superior to the old covenant (3:4-4:6), giving Paul confidence before God. In contrast to the letter which kills, the spirit gives life. Its glory is greater and more permanent. Therefore, God's man can be bold since the veil of spiritual blindness has been removed and the Lord's glory has freedom by the Spirit to transform his own increasingly into his likeness. Christ himself is the subject of preaching, which is done openly, not deceptively, even though unbelievers are spiritually blinded by Satan.

The power of this ministry is evidenced through trials so that Christ's life is revealed in bodies subject to death. This resurrection power causes more and more people to be reached to the glory of God (4:7-15).

A proper perspective of this ministry is that the unseen eternal glory far outweighs external, momentary troubles. Even our bodies, facing present decay and death, will be exchanged for eternal heavenly bodies. In fact, our goal is to please God in view of our eternal reward as long as our present life of faith keeps us away from the Lord and not at home with him, where we desire to be (4:16-5:10).

Motivation for such a ministry includes both the fear of the Lord (5:11-13) and Christ's compelling love in view of his sacrificial substitutionary death. Christ's ambassadors urge reconciliation to God through Christ, resulting in a whole new kind of life experience (5:14- 21). As one of God's fellow workers, Paul had the right to urge prompt response to the message of salvation. His ministry was consistent, even in the face of trial and hardship. Even the paradoxes did not discredit it (6:1- 10).

On this basis, out of genuine love, Paul exhorted his dear Corinthians (6:11-7:16) to separate themselves from unbelievers (6:14-7:1). He also urged them to be reconciled to himself, putting the past behind and manifesting the repentant spirit that would accept both his ministry and those whom he sent to them (7:2-16).

The reconciliation complete, Paul next dealt with another reason for writing, the matter of the collection (8:1-9:15). Motivation was provided by the Macedonian churches, who manifested rich generosity out of their extreme poverty and severe trial. The supreme example was the Lord Jesus Christ, who became poor to make his followers rich spiritually (8:1-9). The basic issue was a willingness to give according to one's means (8:10-15). The gift for the poor saints in Jerusalem was to be administered in a manner above reproach before men and God (8:16-21). Dependable men would come to Corinth and make advance preparation for the generous and willingly given gift (8:22-9:5).

Such generosity was encouraged because generous sowing will reap generous results. The same God who supplies seed will increase it and enlarge the harvest to produce a thanksgiving to God. At issue is not just the material need but many expressions of thanks to God promoting unity among believers and thanks to God for his indescribable gift (9:6-15).

One final matter had yet to be dealt with before the epistle was concluded. This was the vindication of Paul's apostolic authority in view of the minority who were attempting to undermine his position among the Corinthians (ch. 10-13).

Paul's authority extended even to the weapons of his spiritual warfare (10:1-6) in order to build up the believers, not tear them down (10:7-11). Self-commendation has no place among the Lord's servants but, speaking in terms of his own field of ministry, Paul looked to the Lord for commendation (10:12-18).

The situation made it necessary for Paul to defend his apostleship (11:1-6) and answer the false charges of those "super apostles" who claimed Paul took no financial support because he lacked the necessary credentials. Paul chose to burden no one out of love, in contrast to the false apostles who, like Satan, will get what they deserve (11:7-15).

His boasting was about his depravations, not his privileges. None could match the price he had paid to communicate the gospel and maintain a caring concern for those churches for whom he carried responsibility, suffering even in humiliating escapes from his persecutors (11:16-33). He could boast about visions and revelations from the Lord but would rather speak of his weaknesses and thorn in the flesh because in his weakness Christ's power could rest upon him (12:1-10).

Unselfishly and out of love Paul willingly gave and expended himself for their sake (12:11-18). Everything he had said and done was for their strengthening. He feared coming to Corinth in the midst of quarreling and disorder, thus experiencing grief over those who refused to repent (12:19-21). In this third visit he desired a resolution to the conflict. In preparation he urged them to examine themselves to be certain they were in the faith (13:1-10).

In conclusion, Paul instructed them to aim for perfection, listen to his appeal and live in harmony. He asked that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with them all (13:11-14).