

## 2 CORINTHIANS

### STUDY GUIDE

#### AUTHOR & DATE

Paul names himself as the author (1 Cor. 1:1) and the content of the book is consistent with Paul's authorship and previous work of 1 Corinthians.

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians while he was in Ephesus on his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey, so most likely around AD 56.

#### CULTURAL BACKGROUND & ORIGINAL AUDIENCE

As a reminder, when Paul writes to the Corinthians, he's writing to a church he established during his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18) with the help of the Jewish-Christian couple, Aquila & Priscilla. Following 18 months in Corinth, the church consisted mostly of former pagans (1 Cor. 12:2), many from lower social classes, (1 Cor. 1:26 ff), slaves (1 Cor. 7:21), and a few wealthier people (1 Cor. 11:22-32).

During Paul's 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey, Paul receives word about sexual immorality within the young congregation and wrote a letter to address that issue. However, that letter has since been lost & apparently failed to achieve its purpose (1 Cor. 5:9). Paul learns later that original problem continued, along with several other issues (1 Cor. 1:11; 16:17), and writes a second letter, 1 Corinthians.

Paul visits Corinth, which didn't go well (2 Cor. 2:1) and a third letter is sent, which is also lost to us. Some believe chapters 10-12 of 2 Corinthians make up part of that letter, but there isn't enough proof to verify that concept. Now, Paul writes a 4<sup>th</sup> letter, what we call 2 Corinthians, from Macedonia to address remaining issues and prepare them for his coming visit (2 Cor. 13:1).

#### LITERARY STRUCTURE

This book is easily divided into three main sections with an introduction and conclusion.

Introduction (1:1-2)
Paul's Explanation of Ministry (1:3-7:16)
Preparation for Jerusalem Collection (8:1-9:15)
Vindication of Paul's Apostleship (10:1-13:10)
Conclusion (13:11-14)

#### ROMAN TRIUMPH PROCESSION

Paul references a specific Roman cultural tradition in this book: the triumph procession. This procession served as a victory parade when a conquering army and its leader would march, with those taken captive in the battle, before the people. Certain spices were burned during the march, creating a fragrance that held two very different meanings for the people involved. For the conquering army, the smell was one of victory. For those who were conquered or taken captive, it

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was the smell of defeat. Paul uses this imagery and connects the fragrance of Christ to communicate two different interpretations by the world – Good News or judgment.

### OBSERVATION WORDS

Take note of what you learn about each of these. For God, Jesus, & the Holy Spirit, note what you learn & also specific references to how Jesus & the Spirit are represented.

- **God, Jesus, Holy Spirit**
- **Comfort**
- **Suffering**
- **Glory**
- **Power**
- **Weakness**
- **Boast/boasting**

### SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- What did God teach YOU in this book?
  
- What did you learn about God the Father through this book?
  
- What were some ways Jesus & the Holy Spirit were represented? What are some things you learned about each of them?
  
- Name the different contrasts Paul uses in the book and what he teaches through those contrasts (Example: comfort/suffering).
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What do you find interesting about Paul's instructions in 2 Cor. 2:5-11?

- In light of the Roman triumph procession, what does the fragrance of Christ (2 Cor. 2:14-16) mean, what does it elicit, and how does it apply to today?
  
- Paul describes the Corinthians as a living letter of his ministry influence. You are also a living letter, so what does your letter say regarding Christ's effect in your life and the influence of others who have poured into you? What does your "living letter" say of your faith and walk?
  
- What do you learn about power through weakness? How do you need to apply this in your own life?
  
- What does it mean to be an ambassador and what is the ministry of reconciliation we've been given? How do you go about this ministry? What does it look like? What do you need to improve upon in your ministry of reconciliation to improve your role as an ambassador of Christ?
  
- How do you live out 2 Cor. 6:14-18 in light of living in a fallen world? What does this passage speak to?
  
- How do you describe godly sorrow? How do you gauge it in others? What are the outflows of godly sorrow vs. worldly sorrow?
  
- What do you learn about giving and generosity? What does it actually indicate? What does giving accomplish?
  
- What do you learn about spiritual authority and how it is to be used, even amidst correcting others? How does this relate to the authority you have as a believer?

- What is Paul's point about boasting? Why do you think he talks about this? What does incorrect boasting demonstrate? What's the difference between boasting in our weaknesses vs. self-deprecation?

**Key Word** – How do you summarize the whole book in one word or short phrase?

**Key Verse** – What verse stands out to you as the summary of the whole book, or a verse that the Lord used to teach you something important. Why did you choose the verse you did?

**Key Chapter** – What chapter summarizes the book, is a turning point, or just stands out to you? Why did you choose this chapter?

### **ASSIGNMENT**

Based on what you learned about spiritual gifts, put into use at least ONE gift and write about the experience. I encourage you to stretch yourself!! Ask the Lord to stir up His gifts within you, be faithful to use what He gives you to serve someone else, then write about what happened.

- What gift did you use and how did you use it? What took place?
- What went well? What scared you? What surprised you? What didn't go well?
- How are some ways you can further strengthen this gift for the future?

Caution: The devil will want to play the "what if" game with your mind. "What if I fail?" "What if I do it wrong?" Every time one of those questions comes up, you refute it with "What if (the opposite)?"

**Example:** "What if I goof it up?"

Answer: "What if I don't?! Plus, the Spirit can overcome my failings!"

**"What if the person doesn't respond?"**

Answer: "What if they do?!"