

## THE BIG READ (8)

### 2 Corinthians

#### A. Introduction

1. The New Testament begins with the four Gospels that tell the story of Jesus' earthly life, and Acts which traces the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome

After these, the remainder of the New Testament is made up of epistles or letters that were sent to individual Christians or churches.

These letters address specific situations in the lives of believers and through them we are taught how to live as God's people.

After 1 Corinthians comes another letter written to the church in Corinth by the apostle Paul, 2 Corinthians.

It is likely that he wrote this letter while he was in Macedonia in AD54/55, so a year or so after he wrote 1 Corinthians.

2. Although this letter has been given the title 2 Corinthians, it is unlikely that this was the second thing that Paul wrote to this church.

We know that Paul planted a church in Corinth around AD51/52, and according to Acts 18:1-18, spent a year and a half there to establish and strengthen it.

But after he left some issues to do with the beliefs and behaviour of some of the members of the church had arisen.

Some servants of a Christian lady called Chloe had reported to Paul that there were divisions in the church (1 Corinthians 1:11), as well as sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 5:1).

In response Paul wrote to them a letter (number 1), to which the Corinthians responded with a letter of their own that raised some additional questions (1 Corinthians 7:1).

Paul then wrote to them again, a second letter, which we know as 2 Corinthians, that addressed the problems in the church and answered the questions being asked by the church.

3. After Paul sent 1 Corinthians, his co-worker Timothy, visited the church in Corinth.

"If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am." (1 Corinthians 16:10)

While there, Timothy discovered that within the church there was opposition to Paul, so Paul made a trip to Corinth himself (known as 'the painful visit').

"So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you." (2 Corinthians 2:1)

It has been suggested that during this visit, Paul was verbally assaulted by a member of the church and the other members did nothing about this.

This resulted in another letter (number 3) being written by Paul, that was a severe letter.

"For I wrote to you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you." (2 Corinthians 2:4)

"Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it – I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while – yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led to repentance." (2 Corinthians 7:8-9)

4. When Titus visited Corinth, he discovered that Paul's letters had been well-received and had been used by God to bring about some of the desired changes.

The man committing sexual immorality had been disciplined by the church and this led to him repenting of his sin.

"If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent – not to put it too severely. The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him." (2 Corinthians 2:5-8)

However, another problem had arisen, the so called 'super-apostles', who had been undermining Paul's ministry.

The church had again started to reject Paul as leader, because unlike these impressive new leaders present in Corinth who were rich and successful, Paul was poor, unimpressive and suffering.

There was also the continuing issue of the collection for the church in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-4).

5. So, having heard Titus' report, Paul now writes another letter (number 4) – 2 Corinthians.

A letter where he upholds his ministry.

A letter where he reminds them about their commitment to the Jerusalem church.

A letter where he deals with these 'super-apostles'.

6. These three concerns provide a structure to this letter.

Chapters 1-7: Paul defends his ministry to the church.

Chapters 8-9: Paul appeals to the church for generous giving.

Chapters 10-13: Paul warns the church about the 'super-apostles'.

## **B. Things to look for**

1. How Paul defends his ministry.

He says, "Look at the effect my ministry had on people".

"You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." (2 Corinthians 3:3)

He says, "Look at the message I preached and the methods I used".

"Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways, we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." (2 Corinthians 4:2)

"For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." (2 Corinthians 4:5)

He says, "Look at what I was prepared to endure to make Christ known".

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed, perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed." (2 Corinthians 4:8-9)

He says, "Look at my motives".

"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

Ultimately, what Paul is saying to them, is that they should be able to see that he is a true representative of Christ because his ministry is like that of the One he represents.

## 2. How Paul appeals to the church to be generous in their giving.

He reminds them of the generosity of the Macedonian churches.

“And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.” (2 Corinthians 8:1-4)

He reminds them of the generosity of Christ.

“I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:8-9)

## 3. How Paul exposes the ‘super-apostles’.

He does this by making clear to them what a genuine apostle is.

Unlike the super-apostles who boast about themselves, genuine apostles boast about Christ.

“But, “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.” (2 Corinthians 10:17-18)

Unlike the super-apostles who are all about their achievements, genuine apostles are all about their non-achievements, because they show Christ’s power at work in him.

“If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.” (2 Corinthians 11:30)

“But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

He does this by making clear to them what these super-apostles were.

“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)

## C. Who is Jesus?

### 1. Jesus is weak.

He became poor.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor.” (2 Corinthians 8:9)

He suffered and died.

“For sure, he was crucified in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 13:4)

### 2. Jesus is strong.

He fulfils all of God’s promises.

"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ." (2 Corinthians 1:20)

He transforms us into His likeness.

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

He reveals to us the glory of God.

"For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:6)

He makes us into new creations.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

He reconciles us to God.

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them." (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

He bears our sin and makes us righteous in God's sight.

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

He makes us spiritually rich.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9)

His grace is sufficient for every need His weak people have in this life.

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weakness, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

#### **D. How then shall we live?**

##### 1. Embrace.

The life of Jesus – weakness, suffering.

"For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body." (2 Corinthians 4:11)

The generosity of Jesus.

"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 8:7)

##### 2. Examine.

Has your life been transformed?

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realise that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test?" (2 Corinthians 13:5)