

The Half Hour That Changes the World

2 Corinthians

Book 47

Basic Question behind the book:

Why should I bother to listen to the minister or Church Council? How does authority work in the Church?

Summary of book:

2 Corinthians brings some relief after the heavy discussions to be found in 1 Corinthians. While in the first epistle we can see Paul shouting at his church from the pulpit, in this one he sits beside us by the fire, sharing some intimacy of heart. Some of the problems haven't gone away. In fact we have a whole new area of discipleship to consider in this epistle, namely financial giving. It is much more autobiographical in tone, giving us insights into his character and experiences of life and ministry (including persecution) like no other book in the New Testament. This is a letter of encouragement and reassurance. It is worth noting that the understanding of the cross as God's reconciling of the world to himself is first found here. A basic structure would be:

1. 1:1 - 7:16 Paul explains his ministry
2. 8:1 - 9:15 Paul encourages their generosity
3. 10:1 - 13:14 Paul enforces his authority

Vital Statistics:

Purpose: To affirm Paul's ministry, defend his authority as an apostle, and refute the false teachers in Corinth.

Author: Paul.

Recipients: To the Church in Corinth, and Christians everywhere.

Dating: If 1 Corinthians was written in AD 55 and there is another correspondence (now lost) between that epistle and this one, then we're talking about AD 56 - 57 for the date of composition.

Setting: Paul had already written three letters to the Church at Corinth, two of which are now lost. In 1 Corinthians (the second of these letters), he used strong words to correct and teach. Most of the Church responded in the right spirit, but there were also those who questioned his authority to challenge them in such a way. Our letter, 2 Corinthians is Paul's response.

Other Reflections:

There are some beautiful passages in 2 Corinthians that still touch our lives today. In Chapter 1 we have God described as the God of all comfort. In Chapter 3 we have a lovely description of the glory of the New Covenant. Chapter 4 speaks of treasures in jars of Clay. Chapter 5 speaks of the ministry of reconciliation. There are touching autobiographical writings in chapter 6 and 7. There is teaching on giving in chapter 9 and what about Paul's thorn in his flesh and the sufficient grace of God in chapter 12. Read it, learn from it, love its beautiful and masterful imagery. Beyond all these well-known and beloved passages it is worth remembering that this book concerns itself with issues of authority in the life of the Church and how it works.

"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." (5:20)

"The Lord said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.... For when I am weak, then I am strong.'" (12: 9-10)