

2 Corinthians 1:1-2

Introduction

How does the Gospel apply to changing circumstances?

Because so many of the topics in Paul's letters to the Corinthians are closely related to particular cultural circumstances, they provide the opportunity for us to see how the unchanging Gospel was applied to changing circumstances in the first century.

In both epistles, Paul passionately develops a theology of the cross which is to be applied to all areas of the Christian life. The cross not only justifies, it teaches us how to live and die, how to lead and follow and how to love and serve.

Summary

In 2 Corinthians, Paul applies the theology of the cross to shape Christian ethics, Christian priorities and Christian attitudes, confronting all approaches to Christianity that seek to join an orthodox profession with pagan values of self-promotion.

1. Basic Background

The city of Corinth was one of the great cities of ancient Greece and still a thriving trade and cultural centre in Paul's day. Paul visited Corinth during his second missionary journey (**Acts 18:1-18**).

He labored there for eighteen months during which time local churches were planted made up of believers from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds

Corinth was home to many ethnic minorities, as well as the local people. It was a place with a flourishing reputation for trade, culture and sport.

The city also had its problems. Intellectually alert, materially prosperous yet morally bankrupt, Corinth anticipates the post-modern West by two thousand years, for its predominant theme was the reckless cultivation of the self.

Christians then and now face the challenge of how to make our lives count for Christ in a multicultural society with no fixed moral boundaries.

2. Concerns and Purpose

Why did Paul write 2 Corinthians?

First, some of the problems that he had tried to address in the letter that we know as 1 Corinthians still remained unresolved. Secondly, in one particular area, the situation had become much worse and had reached alarming proportions. A number of

unscrupulous men had infiltrated the church and had begun to undermine Paul's position. It was chiefly to meet this threat that this epistle was written.

3. Outlined Benefits

This letter is extremely valuable to Christians in our day and generation.

First, it is an epistle for Christians who want to stand out.

The believers in Corinth were 'an epistle of Christ' (2 Cor 3:3), which could be known and read by everyone.

Believers should not merge with their surroundings, but are to be 'counter-cultural'.

Secondly, it is an epistle for Christians who care about evangelism.

There is a pressing need in our day to bring the gospel to a growing number of people who are increasingly pagan.

What will give clarity and impetus to the evangelistic task? A biblical understanding of the nature of God, Himself, and the nature of our fellow human beings.

Thirdly, it is an epistle for Christians who care about spiritual growth and maturity.

This letter provides us with a compelling portrait of Paul as he really was, with all his intense passionate longing for the glory of Christ, his self-giving love for others, particularly his fellow Christians, his phenomenal discipline and courage, yet all mingled with a very human vulnerability.

Fourthly, it is an epistle for Christians who care about their churches

When a professing believer is careless in the Christian life, it not only reflects badly on himself, it also undermines the testimony of the local church to which he belongs.

A recovery of biblical church discipline is a pressing need in our day.

Paul has done the churches a great service with his firm yet wise and tender treatment of the situation that affected the church in Corinth

Fifthly, it is an epistle for Christians who care about spiritual leadership.

The future of the Christian cause depends to a large degree on the quality of the next generation of spiritual leaders.

In 2 Corinthians we have a stern warning that we should avoid styles of leadership that are worldly, while at the same time cultivating the kind of leadership that Paul himself showed, a model of loving service based on the character of Christ himself.