

Message #1

Various Texts

Years ago, there was an attorney who suffered such deep depression that his friends thought it would be wise to keep all knives and razors from him. During this period of his life he wrote: "I am now the most miserable man living. Whether I shall ever be better, I cannot tell." He was wrong. He did get out of his depression and he went on to become one of the best loved Presidents of the United States—Abraham Lincoln.

There is not one of us here who has not experienced discouragement or depression as a believer. It doesn't matter how spiritual we think we are; the fact is there are times when we are low. All of us have had moments when we have been misunderstood. All of us have probably had moments when we have been falsely accused of something we did not do or say. All of us have had times when things were heavy and dark. But it is a wonderful thing to know that there is a God who comforts the depressed (II Cor. 7:6).

There is a book in the Bible that is designed to give us comfort and hope when we are "burdened excessively" or when we "despair even of life" (II Cor. 1:8). It is a book that is needed right now in our world and in our lives. It is a book that is needed when emotions run wild. The book is II Corinthians and in the next weeks we want to take you on a journey through it.

QUESTION #1 – Why study the book?

It will take you about 20 to 30 minutes to read through the 13 chapters and the 257 verses that comprise II Corinthians. But if you take the time to do it, and then take the time to study it with us, your life will be enriched for several reasons:

Reason #1 - Because II Corinthians is one of only 66 inspired books by God.

Most people do not grasp this point, but hopefully we do. God has inspired only 66 books and the assumption He made when He inspired those books is that My people will want to read and understand and know every one of them. Not long ago we received an email from a man from the United Kingdom. He said that one of the things that has caused him to want to listen to every book study and doctrine study we have is this point. He said, and I am paraphrasing, I do not want to get before God having skipped any book God has inspired, and he said that idea really hit me when making this very point on books of the Bible.

When it comes to Greek manuscripts that are available today, undoubtedly one of the most important collections in the world is in Dublin, Ireland, at the Beatty Museum. There is a manuscript that dates to A.D. 250 called "p 46." This manuscript contains "eighty six slightly mutilated leaves (11 by 6 ½ inches), stemming from an original that contained 104 pages of Paul's epistles." Included in this manuscript is II Corinthians (Norman L. Geisler; William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 390).

In 1844, a German named Friedrich Constantine von Tischendorf was looking in a monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai and he found 43 leaves of vellum (made from skin of an animal) containing portions of the Septuagint, in a basket of scraps that the monks were using to light their fires. He immediately purchased the scraps and then in 1859 he went back to look for other things. He was about to return to his home empty-handed when a steward of the monastery showed him a complete copy of the Scriptures that had been made in about A.D. 340.

This famous manuscript is now called the Codex Sinaiticus (a). This manuscript is written in large Greek capital letters on 364 ½ pages measuring 13 ½ by 14 inches and this manuscript contains II Corinthians.

Then, in A.D. 450, a well preserved Egyptian manuscript was found that contained 639 leaves of the Old Testament and 134 leaves of the New Testament with each page measuring 10 ¼ by 12 inches and the first chapters of II Corinthians is in this manuscript.

What this proves is that God preserved II Corinthians in an abundance of manuscripts all over the world.

Furthermore, the early church leaders stated that II Corinthians was an inspired book of God or they quoted from it as being such. Men like Polycarp (A.D. 110); Hermas (A.D. 115); Irenaeus (A.D. 130); Justin Martyr (A.D. 150); Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150); Tertullian (A.D. 150); Origen (A.D. 185); Eusebius (A.D. 325); Jerome (A.D. 340); Augustine (A.D. 400).

Also, in all the major canon listings, II Corinthians is listed as an inspired book of God: Marcion (A.D. 140); Muratorian (A.D. 170); Apostolic (A.D. 300); Cheltenham (A.D. 360); Athanasius (A.D. 367).

Then II Corinthians is listed as an inspired book in all the major council meetings—Nicea (A.D. 325); Hippo (A.D. 393); Carthage (A.D. 397) and Carthage (A.D. 419).

The evidence is overwhelming; II Corinthians is a very rare book truly inspired by God.

Reason #2 - Because we are emotional people and so was the Apostle Paul.

II Corinthians is the most emotional epistle ever written by Paul. Paul had a real personality with real emotions and we get to see them in this epistle. Dr. S. Lewis Johnson made an interesting and true observation when he said if you analyze this epistle from the Greek text it is very difficult to dissect, because Paul was so emotional and was upset about many things (*II Corinthians 1:1-2*, p. 3).

Sometimes we tend to forget that even God's best servants hurt and bleed. Even God's best servants hurt emotionally and have low moments. Paul did and II Corinthians helps us see how he dealt with it. His emotions were filtered through a godly spirituality and we see that in this epistle.

Reason #3 - Because II Corinthians is a book rich in Pauline grace theology.

The Gospel of God's grace is the Gospel of the Apostle Paul and II Corinthians brings clear understanding to the grace Gospel. **God will only save sinners through faith in Jesus Christ.** Paul preached Jesus Christ (II Cor. 4:5). Paul taught that God reconciles sinners to Himself through faith in Jesus Christ (II Cor. 5:18). Paul was an ambassador for Jesus Christ, not religious works or law (II Cor. 5:20). Paul taught that if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, old things are passed away and all things are new (II Cor. 5:17). He stresses that it is faith that saves and not works (II Cor. 4:13-15). The great doctrine of imputation in that Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin on our behalf so we could become the righteousness of God, is clearly communicated in this epistle (II Cor. 5:20-21).

One of the greatest chapters that show the relationship between the O.T. Mosaic Law and the liberty that one has in Jesus Christ is II Corinthians 3. Paul is strong to say where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty, not legalistic law (II Cor. 3:17). In fact, Paul says legalism kills spirituality (II Cor. 3:6).

Now it is evident that the Corinthian church had lots of problems and issues. There were some very serious, immoral things to which some of these people were yielding. But what intrigues me is that Paul did not back down from presenting grace to this church. He always preaches the true grace Gospel even to those who are carnal. It is true he will warn Grace Age believers to govern their lives in ways that please God in view of a Bema Seat Judgment (II Cor. 5:10), but he never changes his grace message. He does not water down grace to try and scare people into some works righteousness.

Also we get a great glimpse of the doctrine of what happens when a believer dies. In II Corinthians 5, we learn that to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord (II Cor. 5:6). We learn about the Bema Seat Judgment in which we will be judged to receive or lose rewards (II Cor. 5:10). We learn about the great doctrine of reconciliation and imputation and justification (II Cor. 5:18-19). II Corinthians clearly promotes the doctrine of God's grace.

Reason #4 - Because all of us have had people in church life who have criticized us, challenged us and even broken our hearts.

We who have been around church life awhile know that there are times when people let you down and they do and say things that truly hurt.

But of all the negative things we have had happen to us in the Christian life, none compare to what happened to the Apostle Paul. Paul was being insulted by the very people who should have loved him and backed him the most (II Cor. 12:10). His ministry had changed their lives. But instead of supporting him and defending him, they were attacking him.

Some people were attacking Paul because everywhere he went he seemed to end up in trouble (II Cor. 1:8-9).

Some were alleging that he didn't care about them and that is why he had changed plans and hadn't visited them (1:16-17). He was falsely accused about his concept of money. They were mad he hadn't taken their money (II Cor. 11:7, 9; 12:13). Most ministries beg people for their money and they were mad at Paul for not taking their money.

He was falsely accused of not being qualified to be an apostle (II Cor. 11:5; 12:12). He was falsely accused of not caring about his friends in Corinth. He was attacked even for the way he looked and spoke (II Cor. 10:10).

The real reason he is being attacked is because he is dealing with fleshly people in a church who couldn't hold a candle to Paul. These people were involved in all kinds of things and were criticizing Paul.

It is important to see that the way Paul coped with all of this and reacted to all of this is nothing short of supernatural, and the one book of the Bible that shows how he reacted to things and how we should react to things is II Corinthians. In fact, he says that he wrote everything in this letter for their "up building" (II Cor. 12:19). He did tell them the truth, he did confront issues, but he did not write to tear them down; he wrote to build them up and if they would respond to this letter, they would be built up in the faith. He wanted to build up people who were tearing him down.

QUESTION #2 – What was Paul's connection to the Corinthians?

The people of the church of Corinth were messed up in all kinds of ways, but Paul loved those people and he loved that church. He took a very personal and pastoral interest in this church in some ways, as no other church. **Paul visited Corinth three times and wrote four letters**, two of which are inspired and in the Bible and two of which are not. **His connection to the Corinthian church may be summarized by making twelve contact observations:**

- 1) **Paul went to Corinth** and started a church in Corinth on his second missionary journey and spent more than 1 ½ years teaching the Word of God (Acts 18:1-17 (v. 11) (A.D. 50-51).
- 2) Paul left Corinth and went to Ephesus and wrote a letter to the church that is called the "previous letter" or the "lost letter" which we do not have (Acts 18:18-19; I Cor. 5:9-13).
- 3) Paul left Ephesus and went to Jerusalem and then back to Ephesus (A.D. 52-53).
- 4) Paul received a bad verbal and written report from "some of Chloe's house," and in response **he writes I Corinthians while in Ephesus** (I Cor. 1:11; 7:1) (A.D. 54-55).
- 5) Paul sends Timothy and Erastus to Corinth with the letter and to check up on the church (Acts 19:22; I Cor. 4:17; 16:10-11).
- 6) Paul learns of a serious crisis in Corinth caused by Jewish legalists who were attacking Paul's apostolic authority and credibility, and his integrity (II Cor. 10:10; 11:4, 22; 12:6-7).
- 7) **Paul makes a quick second trip to Corinth**, which was a sorrowful and painful visit (II Cor. 2:1; 12:14; 13:1).
- 8) Paul leaves Corinth and goes to Ephesus and wrote a severe letter to Corinth and sends Titus back to Corinth to check up on the church (II Cor. 2:3-9; 7:8-12).

- 9) Paul leaves Ephesus and goes to Troas and Macedonia and searches for Titus to get a report about what was going on in Corinth (II Cor. 2:12-13) (A.D. 56).
- 10) Paul found Titus, who reported that the worst of things were over in Corinth, but that there were still a few problems, specifically allegations about him (II Cor. 7:6-16).
- 11) **Paul wrote II Corinthians while in Macedonia to defend himself** and to try and straighten them out and also encourage them for their proper response (A.D. 56).
- 12) **Paul made his third and final visit to Corinth** (Acts 19:21; 20:2-3; II Cor. 13:1) (A.D. 57).

Now it is obvious from this historical sketch that Paul had a lot of interest and contact with this church of Corinth. The thing that is so amazing about this is that the Corinthian church was one of the most carnal and problematic and fleshly groups of people in existence. Yet Paul and God cared for these sinners. You would naturally think Paul would have had a lot of contact with the intellectuals of Athens, the educational capital of the world. But instead, he was working with the struggling believers in Corinth.

QUESTION #3 – Who wrote II Corinthians?

II Corinthians was written by the Apostle Paul. Murray Harris, who wrote a Greek commentary on II Corinthians said, “One of the areas in which there is a consensus among NT scholars is that Paul was the author of II Corinthians.” Even liberal scholars like F.C. Baur admit II Corinthians was written by Paul.

Proof #1 - II Corinthians says it was written by Paul. 1:1

The opening words of II Corinthians are as Pauline as they can be.

Proof #2 - II Corinthians is clearly written in Pauline style.

The sentence structure, the way he uses clauses and words is purely Pauline. Pauline doctrines are developed in this book and relationship statements demand this book be written by Paul. A text like II Corinthians 12:14 and 13:1, which says he is coming to Corinth a third time only, makes logical sense if Paul is writing the statement.

Proof #3 - Church leaders from history say it was written by Paul.

II Corinthians was written by Paul and that point has never really been questioned. For example, Eusebius, the famed church historian, said that Paul “was obviously and unmistakably the author of the fourteen epistles” (*Church History*, p. 108). Eusebius was convinced Paul also wrote Hebrews, so he listed Paul’s books from Romans to Hebrews, which total fourteen.

QUESTION #4 – What was happening in Corinth that caused Paul to write II Corinthians?

Corinth was a wild, immoral place. Many of these Corinthians had been saved out of a life of heathen, immoral sin. Paul had written I Corinthians to try to straighten out these believers. As we already mentioned, it did seem to somewhat work.

However, apparently some in the church were lapsing back into their old sinful lifestyles (II Cor. 12:20-21). Some apparently were heading back up to the Temple of Aphrodite to get involved in idolatrous worship and in sexual immorality (II Cor. 6:14-16; II Cor. 7:1; 12:21). As a result of their flesh sin, they were attacking Paul's credibility. Some were attacking his apostleship, saying he really wasn't an apostle (II Cor. 11:5; 12:11-12). Some were saying he could write good letters, but he didn't look good and he couldn't talk good (II Cor. 10:10). Some were saying that he was so arrogant he would not take their money, but would take it from other churches.

Here is something critical to see and learn: **sometimes when believers drift into fleshly sin, they will blame the minister or lash out against the church. The problem really isn't the minister and the problem really isn't the church; the problem is them.**

QUESTION #5 – Where was Paul when he wrote II Corinthians?

Paul was in Macedonia (II Cor. 7:5; 8:1; 9:2-4) and certain ancient manuscripts say he was in Philippi when he wrote it. Paul alludes to the Philippians as Macedonians (Phil. 4:15; II Cor. 11:9). But it is also possible that Paul wrote this while in Thessalonica or Berea, which were also cities in Macedonia.

QUESTION #6 – What is the purpose of II Corinthians?

If you have ever ministered to someone and then had that person turn against you and turn to follow those leading them the wrong way, then this letter is for you.

The purpose of II Corinthians is to get God's people to think accurately and factually about Paul and to get the Corinthians to turn from their own fleshliness to a spiritual godliness. Paul's desire was to comfort them, build them up in the faith and not tear them down. **Paul wanted these Corinthians to realize they had made some good progress, but they still needed to make more progress.**

As one commentator said, Paul wanted to preserve his apostleship and preserve the church.

There is a commercial on TV in which an owner of a clothing chain says "you are going to like the way you look, I guarantee it." Well if you go through II Corinthians, "you will like this book, I guarantee it" and if you apply it to your life, "God will like the way you look."