

**Men's Sunday Night**  
**The Book of 2 Corinthians**  
**"Finding Strength in Weakness"**  
**Introduction - 2 Corinthians**

The second letter of Paul to the Corinthians is probably the least known of all his letters. It has sometimes been called "Paul's unknown letter." It represents the most personal letter written by the apostle's pen. In our First Corinthians study we looked at the church at Corinth. We noted that this letter is very instructive for today because the church in California is very much like the church that was in Corinth. In our last study we even referred to this letter as "First Californians." But in Second Corinthians we are looking at Paul; he is the one in focus as he lays himself open and reveals himself to the church. This is a very personal letter from the heart of this mighty apostle. Here we see him more clearly, perhaps, than anywhere else in Scripture. We call this Second Corinthians, but it should, perhaps, be called Fourth Corinthians, because it is the last of four letters that Paul wrote to the church there. Two of these letters have not been preserved for us.

Paul began the church in Corinth somewhere around 52 or 53 A.D. He stayed there for about a year and a half; then he went to Ephesus, where he remained for a few weeks, and then he went on a quick trip to Jerusalem, returning again to Ephesus. While he was at Ephesus, he wrote a letter to the church at Corinth which is lost to us. It is referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:9, where Paul says he wrote to warn them about following a worldly lifestyle. In response to that letter, the Corinthians wrote back to him with many questions. They sent their letter by the hands of three young men who are mentioned in 1 Corinthians. In reply to that letter, Paul wrote what we now call 1 Corinthians. In it he tried to answer their questions, exhorting them and instructing them in how to walk in power and in peace; and he tried to correct many problem areas in the church. Evidently that letter did not accomplish all that Paul intended. There was a bad reaction to it, and in this second letter we learn that he made a quick trip back to Corinth. How long that took we do not know. Paul calls it a "*painful*" visit. He had come with a rather sharp, severe rebuke to them, but again he did not accomplish his purpose; again there was a great deal of negative reaction. So when he returned to Ephesus, he sent another brief letter, in the hands of Titus, to Corinth to see if he could help them. Now Titus was gone a long time. Transportation and communication were very slow and difficult in those

days. Paul, waiting in Ephesus, grew very anxious to hear what was happening in the church there. He became so troubled that he left Ephesus and went to Troas and then up into Macedonia to meet Titus. There in Macedonia, probably in the city of Philippi, he and Titus came together. Titus brought him a much more encouraging word about the church, and in response to that, out of thanksgiving, Paul wrote what we now call Second Corinthians, although it was really the fourth of a series of letters. This letter is in direct contrast to the tone of 1 Corinthians, for it is intensely personal and filled with the deep emotions of the dedicated apostle. If 1 Corinthians “takes the roof off” the church at Corinth and lets us look in, then 2 Corinthians “opens the heart” of Paul and lets us see his love and concern for the work of the Lord. In the first letter, Paul is the instructor, answering questions and setting matters right; in this second letter he is the loving pastor, the minister of Christ, pouring out his life that his spiritual children might be perfected in the faith. No letter in the New Testament reveals the true character of the Christian ministry as does this one. No letter says so much about Christian giving, suffering, or spiritual triumph.

### **Overview on the City of Corinth**

- A major city of Greece situated on the Cape of Corinth between the Ionian Sea and the Aegean Sea.
- In New Testament times, perhaps the most celebrated city of the Roman Empire, second only to Rome.
- Less than 100 years old at the time of Paul.
- A “planned” city rebuilt from ashes by the Roman emperors.
- A transportation hub for both land and sea travel. Though not a seaport, its location on a cape linked two seaports and two bays. To save time and avoid potential disasters of sailing around Greece, shippers transported passengers and their goods across the cape and reloaded them onto ships on the other side.
- Greece’s leading commercial center for trade, agriculture, and industry.
- Host city to numerous athletic events, gladiatorial contests, theater productions, and the Isthmian Games, one of four major athletic festivals of the Greeks.

- A major center for pagan religions. More than twelve temples have been excavated at Corinth, including the magnificent temple of Apollo, with its 38 Doric columns 24 feet high. The temple of Aphrodite, goddess of love, employed at least 1,000 temple prostitutes. The city had a widespread reputation for gross immorality.
- A city of diverse peoples and cultures, including Greeks, Roman colonists (mostly retired army veterans and freedmen), and Jews, some of whom migrated there during persecution under the emperor Claudius (Acts 18:1).

### **Author**

Paul, the Apostle

**DATE: A.D. 56-57**

There is an indication that the Epistle was written almost immediately after hearing of the church's repentance (2 Cor. 7:2-16). The letter was probably written from the province of Macedonia, more specifically from the city of Philippi.

### **To Whom it is Written**

*"The church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia"* (2 Cor. 1:1).

### **Purpose**

Paul had several purposes in mind when he wrote this letter:

1. To commend the church for disciplining the offender (1 Cor. 5), and to encourage them to forgive and receive him (2 Cor. 2:6-11).
2. To explain why he had apparently "changed his plans" and not visited them as he had promised (1 Cor. 16:3-7; 2 Cor. 1:15-22).
3. To answer those in the church who were questioning his apostolic authority (2 Cor. 10-12).

4. To answer those who accused him of wrong motives (2 Cor. 4:1-2).
5. To encourage the church to share in the offering for the Jerusalem saints (2 Cor. 8-9).
6. To prepare them for his planned visit (2 Cor. 13).

### **Favorite Verses in 2 Corinthians**

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”	2 Cor. 3:17
“We have this treasure in earthen vessels.”	2 Cor. 4:7
“Persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.”	2 Cor. 4:9
“We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen .... The things which are not seen are eternal.”	2 Cor. 4:18
“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”	2 Cor. 5:7
“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”	2 Cor. 5:17
“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”	2 Cor. 6:14
“For God loves a cheerful giver.”	2 Cor. 9:7
“A thorn in the flesh.”	2 Cor. 12:7

### **Special Features**

Second Corinthians is “The Most Personal of Paul’s Epistles.” It opens up his life for all to see. It shows that he was human, just like all other men; he experienced joy and pain, victories and setbacks.