



2nd Corinthians

BIBLE CLASS #11

INTRODUCTION:

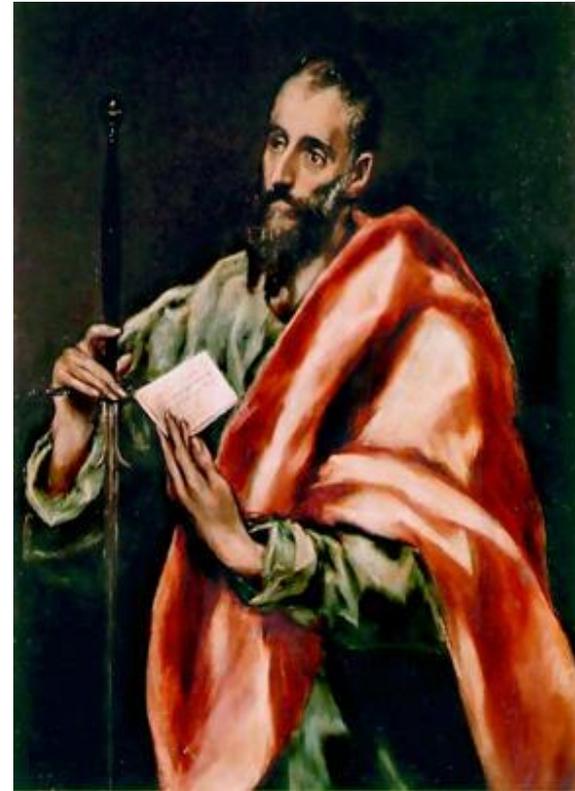
The Second Epistle to the Corinthians, often referred to as 2nd Corinthians, is the eighth book of the New Testament of the Bible. Paul the Apostle and *"Timothy our brother"* wrote this epistle to *"the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia"*. (2 Corinthians 1:1)

AUTHORSHIP:

The Authorship is attributed to Paul of Tarsus. Paul's authorship of 1st Corinthians has never been seriously questioned. From the text itself, we know that Paul wrote at least two other letters to Corinth (see 1 Corinthians 5:9 (letter now lost); 2 Corinthians 2:3–4). *

WHEN AND WHERE WAS IT WRITTEN (AND CONTEXT):

Corinth, which had been destroyed by the Romans, was re-established as a colony by Julius Cesar 46 B.C., and made the capital of the Roman Province of Achaia by Augustus. It was built on the southern extremity of the isthmus connecting the mainland with the Morea, and was on the great line of traffic between East and West. Its two harbors, one at each side of the isthmus, were crowded with shipping and constant bustle and activity. As we saw in 1st Corinthians, the Christian community in Corinth was established by Saint Paul about the year 51 (his second missionary journey) (Acts 18:1–17). According to Acts of the Apostles, then spent approximately three years in Ephesus (Acts 19:8, 19:10, 20:31). The Second Epistle was written several months (some say a year) after the First, in which St. Paul had stated that he intended to go round by Macedonia. Although the New Testament contains only two letters to the Corinthians, the evidence from the letters themselves is that he wrote three, and perhaps four letters: *"I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people"*, refers to an early letter". (1st Corinthians 5:9); Paul refers to an earlier "letter of tears" which may have been written between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. (2 Corinthians 2: 3–4 and 7: 8. 1).



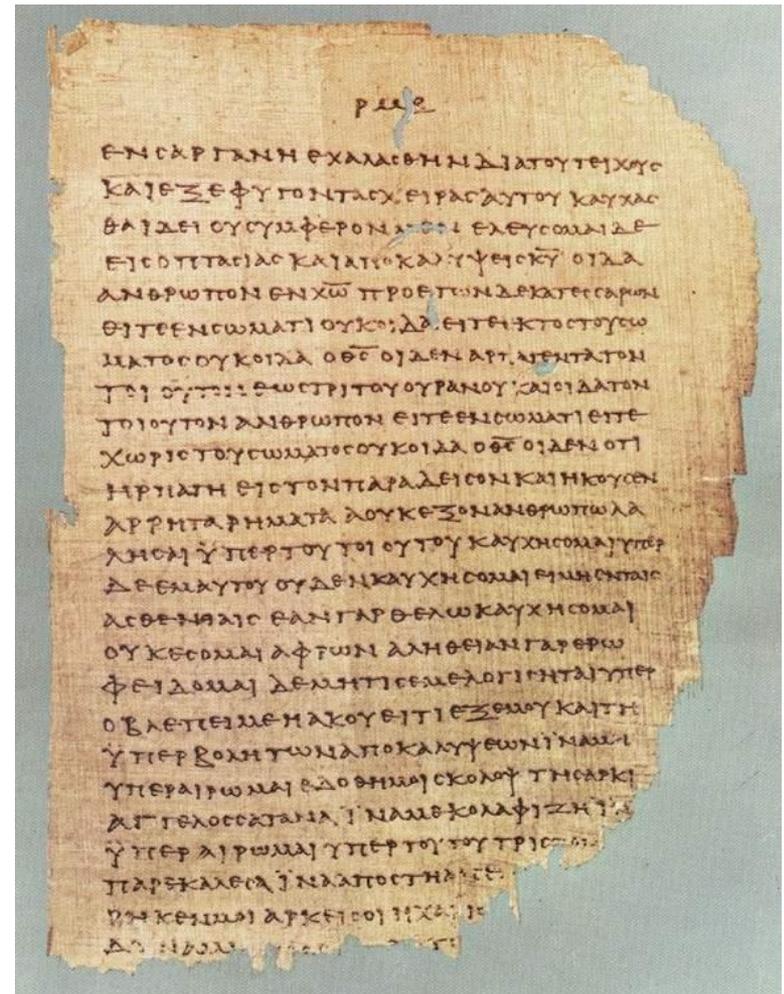
OVERVIEW:

2nd Corinthians, though not written with the same degree of care and polish as the First, is more varied and spontaneous in style. It was written with great emotion and intensity of feeling, and some of its sudden outbursts reach the highest levels of eloquence. It gives a deeper insight than any other of his writings into the character and personal history of St. Paul. Paul opens up his heart and manifests his feelings.

While 1st Corinthians is very objective and practical, 2nd Corinthians is more subjective and personal. Paul had to defend his actions and apostleship, not only in Corinth. Classical Bible scholar J.J. Lias in his book on 2nd Corinthians writes: *“Human weakness, spiritual strength, the deepest tenderness of affection, wounded feeling, sternness, irony, rebuke, impassioned self-vindication, humility, a just self-respect, zeal for the welfare of the weak and suffering, as well as for the progress of the church of Christ and for the spiritual advancement of its members, are all displayed in turn in the course of his appeal.”*

As we had discussed before, there were different groups, *“false apostles”*, who did not preach the Gospel of Jesus and questioned Paul’s authority, as well as *“judiazers”*, people who claimed that one needed to become a Jew before being able to become Christian.

Biblical scholar Rabbi Samuel Sandmel explains 2nd Corinthians in this way: *“In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, he again refers to himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and reassures the people of Corinth will not have another painful visit but what he has to say is not to cause pain but to reassure them of the love he has for them. It was shorter in length in comparison to*



the first and a little confusing if the reader is unaware of the social, religious, and economic situation of the community. Paul felt the situation in Corinth was still complicated and felt attacked. Some challenged his authority as an apostle and compares the level of difficulty to other cities he has visited who had embraced it, like the Galatians. He is criticized for the way he speaks and writes and finds it just to defend himself with some of his important teachings. He states the importance of forgiving others, and God's new agreement that comes from the Spirit of the living God (2 Corinthians 3:3), and the importance of being a person of Christ and giving generously to God's people in Jerusalem, and ends with his own experience of how God changed his life".



CONTENT OF 2nd CORINTHIANS

- Paul speaks of his spiritual labors and course of life, and expresses his warm affection toward the Corinthians (2 Cor. Chapters 1-7):

Paul's sincerity and constancy which comes from the grace of God: ***"For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you, with the simplicity and sincerity of God, [and] not by human wisdom but by the grace of God"***. (2nd Corinthians 1: 12). Paul calls for the community to have mercy for offenders: ***"If anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure (not to exaggerate) to all of you. This punishment by the majority is enough for such a person, so that on the contrary you should forgive and encourage him instead, or else the person may be overwhelmed by excessive pain. Therefore, I urge you to reaffirm your love for him"*** (2nd Corinthians 2: 5-8). **In contrast to the Old Testament, Jesus is true freedom:** ***"To this day, in fact, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts, but whenever a person turns to the Lord the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."*** (2nd Corinthians 3: 15-17).

Paul's ministry is centered in Jesus "For we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for the sake of Jesus. For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of Jesus Christ" (2nd Cor. 4: 5-6).

In Christ, we are a new Creation: "For the love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; therefore, all have died. He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Consequently, from now on we regard no one according to the flesh; even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him so no longer. So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come". (2nd Cor. 5: 15-17).



**THE LOVE OF
CHRIST
COMPELS US.
- 2 Corinthians
5:14**

- He gives specific directions regarding the collection that was to be made for their poor brethren in Judea (2 Corinthians Chapters 8; 9): Paul turns to a new topic, the collection for the church in Jerusalem. There is an early precedent for this project in the agreement mentioned in Galatians 2:6–10. According to Acts, the church at Antioch had sent Saul and Barnabas to Jerusalem with relief (Acts 11:27–30). Subsequently Paul organized a project of relief for Jerusalem among his own churches. Paul commends the generosity of the Macedonians: "We want you to know, brothers, of the grace of God that has been given to the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their profound poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For according to their means, I can testify, and beyond their means, spontaneously, they begged us insistently for the favor of taking part in the service to the holy ones, and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and to us through the will of God". (2nd Corinthians 8: 1-5).

Paul's vision broadens to take in all the interested parties in one dynamic picture. His language becomes liturgically colored and conveys a sense of fullness. With a final play on the words *charis* (Graces) and *eucharistia* (thanksgiving), he describes a circle that closes on itself: the movement of grace overflowing from God to them and handed on from them through Paul to others is completed by the prayer of praise and thanksgiving raised on their behalf to God. (2nd Cor. 9: 11-15).

- He defends his own apostolic claim (2 Corinthians Chapters 10-13), and justifies himself from the charges and insinuations of the false teacher and his adherents, and opens up about the true Christian

meaning of weakness: "Belonging to Christ...so do we": these phrases already announce the pattern of Paul's boast in 2 Corinthians 11:21–29, especially 2 Corinthians 11:22–23. "For building you up and not for tearing you down": Paul draws on the language by which Jeremiah described the purpose of the prophetic power the Lord gave to him (Jeremiah 1: 9–10; 12: 16–17; 24: 6). The Lord appointed Paul, and if he boasts, he boasts only in the Lord: "We are not boasting beyond measure, in other people's labors; yet our hope is that, as your faith increases, our influence among you may be greatly enlarged, within our proper limits, so that we may preach the gospel even beyond you, not boasting of work already done in another's sphere. "Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord." For it is not the one who recommends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord recommends." (2nd Corinthians 10: 15-18).

Paul speaks and compares the true apostles from false ones: *"And what I do I will continue to do, in order to end this pretext of those who seek a pretext for being regarded as we are in the mission of which they boast. For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, who masquerade as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan masquerades as an angel of light. So it is not strange that his ministers also masquerade as ministers of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds."* (2nd Corinthians 11: 12-15).

Paul equates weakness in the Lord is strength: *"Although if I should wish to boast, I would not be foolish, for I would be telling the truth. But I refrain, so that no one may think more of me than what he sees in me or hears from me because of the abundance of the revelations. Therefore, that I might not become too elated, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan, to beat me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me, but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong."* (2nd Corinthians 12: 6-10).

2 Corinthians 12:8-10

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, 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.

In his final warning and exhortation, Paul speaks about the importance of repentance: *“Have you been thinking all along that we are defending ourselves before you? In the sight of God we are speaking in Christ, and all for building you up, beloved. For I fear that when I come I may find you not such as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish; that there may be rivalry, jealousy, fury, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. I fear that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, immorality, and licentiousness they practiced.”* (2nd Corinthians 12: 19-21).

Despite weakness and affliction, his ministry has been accompanied by demonstrations of power (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:3–4). Signs of an apostle: visible proof of belonging to Christ and of mediating Christ’s power, which the opponents require as touchstones of apostleship (2 Corinthians 12: 11; cf. 2 Corinthians 13:3).

He ends by stating: *“Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?”* (2nd Cor. 13: 5).

2nd Corinthians contains 13 Chapters, and originally was written in Greek.

2nd Corinthians is divided as follows:

I.) 1:1–11 – Greeting

II.) 1:12 – 7:16 – Paul defends his actions and apostleship, affirming his affection for the Corinthians.

III.) 8:1 – 9:15 – Instructions for the collection for the poor in the Jerusalem church.

IV.) 10:1 – 13:10 – A polemic defense of his apostleship

V.) 13:11–13 – Closing greetings

RESOURCES USED AND RECOMENDED:

- NAB Bible, at: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/index.cfm>

- Agape Bible Study at: http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/Agape_Bible_Studies_Menu.php

- Pauline Chronology: The Life and Missionary Work of St. Paul of Tarsus. Material provided by Rev. Felix Just, S.J. at: http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Pauline_Chronology.htm

- New Testament Letter Structure, from Catholic Resources by Felix Just, S.J.

At: http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/NT_Letters.htm#Edited

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