

**PAUL'S
SECOND EPISTLE
TO THE
CORINTHIANS**

.....

**LUTHER E.
SCHWARTZKOPF**

LIVING WAY
BIBLE STUDY

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Each lesson should be stapled together according to the number of the lesson in the right-hand corner of the page. The P.A. questions for the next week should be attached after the author's narrative for the current week, as they will be the home study for the next class session.

The first meeting of the class is an introduction to the study. Since the members of the small groups have no P.A. questions to discuss at the first meeting, they may use the time to get acquainted or to tell what they hope to receive by studying this course. At the first meeting, the lecturer presents background information about the course, using the Introduction lesson as a guide.

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PAUL'S SECOND EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS

LUTHER E. SCHWARTZKOPF

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The Letter of Paul to the Colossians

The Epistle of James

The First Epistle of Peter

The Second Epistle of Peter & Jude

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Graduated from Concordia College (Milwaukee) in 1940 and Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) in 1945

Received degree in Sociology and graduate studies in Counseling Psychology from California State University (San Bernardino, CA)

Spent entire ministry in the Southern CA District (1945–1988)

Missionary-at-large, E. Sierra area (1945–48)

Immanuel, Oceanside and Fallbrook (1948–50)

Trinity, San Bernardino (1950–72)

First full-time Director of Arrowhead Lutheran Camp (1972–88)

Served on District Bible Institute staff; developed and taught courses: How to Study the Bible and God's Purpose for Lutheran Women

Graduate Bethel Bible Series, Bible Study Institute

Served twenty (20) years on Synodical District Mission Services Department, six years as chairman

Retired from full-time ministry in 1988. With wife (Ruth) moved back to Bishop, CA to be with grandchildren and enjoy the outdoor activities as well as the beauty and majesty of the High Sierras

Called to Glory — May 13, 2006

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“Paul’s experience with the people of Corinth vividly demonstrates the power and sufficiency of God’s awesome Grace.”



THE SUFFICIENCY AND POWER OF GOD’S GRACE

Back when George W. Bush was making a run for the presidency of The United States, one of his campaign promises was that he would do something about the increasing threat of terrorism. Little did he know at the time that this would suddenly become his top priority. The horrific events of September 11, 2001 and subsequent intelligence information made it clear that members of Al-Qaeda had already slipped into our country and set up anti-USA terrorist cells in many places. In his televised speech to the nation, our president sent chills up and down the spines of those who were watching, as he declared all-out war on terrorism, echoing the call to action used by Todd Beamer to rally the heroes on Flight #93 over Pennsylvania on the fateful day: “Let’s Roll!”

It was the threat of “spiritual terrorism” which motivated the apostle Paul to write this second letter to the Christian congregation in the Greek city of Corinth. Because of his bond with this congregation, Pastor Paul felt a personal responsibility for the spiritual well-being of this church that he had founded (2 Corinthians 1:14). As we get into our study of this rich letter, we will discover the ways in which the cohorts of Satan himself “hijacked” the leadership of the congregation. They were “hell-bent” (literally) on carrying members to spiritual and eternal doom.

In this emotional letter, the apostle demonstrates his strategy for dealing with the insidious forces of spiritual terrorism, and he clearly

recommends it to his readers in chapter 12:9. Here it is formulated succinctly in the words Jesus spoke to him following his persistent “three-peat” prayer to God to remove his so-called “thorn in the flesh”: “My grace is sufficient for you!”

AUTHOR

Without question, the author of this letter is “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus,” as stated in the very first verse of the letter and mentioned again in Chapter 10:1. Although Paul mentions Timothy, this does not mean that Timothy was co-author. Since the people in Corinth knew Timothy quite well, Paul must have felt that it would be appropriate to include him in the greeting portion of the letter.

The contents of the letter corroborate the authorship of Paul. It is by far the most personal of Paul’s letters. It has all the characteristics of Paul’s literary style and brings us more autobiographical material than any of Paul’s writings.

ORIGINALLY INTENDED READERS

As stated in the salutation, the letter was originally written for the Christians in the city of Corinth, as well as other believers “in Achaia,” a Roman province which took in all of Greece south of Macedonia. Corinth was the capital city of the province.

The strategic physical location of the ancient city of Corinth had a lot to do with the development of its character as one of the most commercial cultural centers in the area. It was located on the isthmus, which at that point was only about ten miles wide. The captains of merchant ships heading both east and west had a choice of routes. They could elect to sail a distance of 200 miles around the southern tip of Peloponnesus, and take on the risk of having

to deal with violent storms and treacherous currents. The other option for ancient sea-captains was to unload their cargo on one side of the isthmus and have it transported overland. If the vessel was not too large, it could be loaded onto a wheeled vehicle and hauled across the narrowest part of the land on a paved road. The captain would then reload his cargo and be on his way.

Taxes from this activity and other commercial ventures, along two prominent trade routes that crossed each other in Corinth had contributed to the wealth of the city. The city was also renowned the world-over as host to the biennial Isthmian Games, which brought many visitors and large sums of money to the city. The Temple of Aphrodite, the Greek “goddess of love and beauty,” stood atop the hill at whose base the original city was built. Fans of the goddess came to Corinth in droves to take part in the sensual rituals associated with the worship of Aphrodite, who was the equivalent of the Roman Venus.

The glamour and glory of ancient Corinth came to a grinding halt in 146 BC, when the Roman armies overran it. The invaders razed the entire city and took most of its treasures back to Rome. The inhabitants were either killed or sold into slavery. The once beautiful city lay in ruins for almost 100 years. In 44 BC, Julius Caesar ordered it rebuilt, and slaves who had gained their freedom were sent to occupy it.

At the time of Paul, Corinth was no longer a Greek city, but a Roman colony quite cosmopolitan in make-up. Its strategic location on two major trade routes enticed businessmen from a variety of nations. It became a center for the worship of many of the Greco-Roman gods and goddesses. Corinth also had attracted many nationalities and a variety of religions.

We know that among these was a settlement of Jews. Later, a discovery of a stone bearing the inscription “Synagogue of Hebrews” confirmed the Jewish settlement. Its shape and size suggests that it may have served as the lintel over the entrance to the Jewish synagogue where, according to Acts 18:4, Paul preached his first sermon after arriving in Corinth. At the time of Paul, the city of Corinth could very well have deserved the label “sin city.” In many ways, the Corinthians lived in a moral and spiritual “smog” strikingly similar to that in which we find ourselves today.

In 1858, the rebuilt city was destroyed by a major earthquake. The original site was abandoned and the modern city of Corinth was built a little over three miles to the northeast.

PAUL’S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH IN CORINTH

The relationship of Paul with the congregation of Christians in Corinth is more fully known than are his dealings with any of the other churches that he founded. According to the book of Acts, Paul’s first visit to Corinth was made in the last phase of his second missionary journey when he left Athens and went to Corinth. Here he met with a Jewish couple, Priscilla and Aquila, who along with all the Jews in Rome had been ordered to leave the imperial city under an edict of Emperor Claudius in AD 49. Like Paul, they were newcomers to Corinth, and also like Paul, they made their living with the craft of tent-making (or leather-working). He worked with them during the week and on the Sabbath proclaimed the Gospel in the local synagogue (Acts 18:1–4).

After a fairly short period of time, some of the leaders of the synagogue showed resentment against Paul. They made it so uncomfortable for him that he discontinued his visits to the

synagogue and focused his ministry on the Gentiles. His witnessing was blessed. Along with some Jews who had responded favorably to Paul’s message, many non-Jews came to faith and became the nucleus of a Christian congregation in Corinth. While the exact length of time is difficult to calculate, his stay in Corinth must have been around two years, making it the longest stay at any church he founded (Acts 18:9–11).

In its formative stage, this congregation in Corinth had the benefit of the ministry of Paul, assisted by Priscilla and Aquila. Acts 18:24ff tells us that this congregation was also blessed with the services of the highly educated, converted Jew from Alexandria named Apollos. According to Acts 18:28, this man spoke with eloquence and fervor, “proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.”

Paul had a high opinion of how this group of Christians had grown in the faith. In his first letter, he referred to them as having been “enriched in every way — in all your speaking and in all your knowledge...you do not lack any spiritual gift” (1 Cor. 1:5–7). Quite a “positive stroke” for these Christians, especially since it came from their highly respected pastor!

PURPOSE OF THE LETTER

Paul had gotten word from Titus about a troubling situation that was brewing in the congregation at Corinth. It was probably inevitable, with all of the various “isms” being promoted in their community, that some of the weaker members would be misled into one form or another of paganism. But more insidious, was the internal problem of influential false teachers who had wormed their way into positions of leadership and credibility in the congregation. At first some members were “hoodwinked” by these “schmoozers.” The

members, who had come under their influence, inevitably came to realize that a lot of their ideas did not “square” with what Paul had taught them. When they brought this up in their discussions, the false teachers’ response was to disparage the credentials and credibility of Paul. They began a vicious “smear” campaign against him, pulling no punches!

Paul’s primary purpose was to do what he could to undo the damage done to his reputation and somehow bring about a restored relationship with these people who were so dear to him. Second Corinthians offers a marvelous illustration of how the apostle Paul went about his effort to solve this serious problem. For one thing, Paul refrained from scolding the people for being so gullible, or for being disloyal to him. He simply used the Gospel and had faith that this alone could bring about the right outcome. This was a good move on his part. With the blessing of God upon his efforts, his relationship with the people at Corinth was restored and the people so dear to him were brought back to the only living way to God and eternal salvation. Paul’s experience with the people of Corinth vividly demonstrates the power and sufficiency of God’s awesome Grace.

DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING

Putting together a precise and accurate timetable of Paul’s activities presents quite a challenge. However, most Bible scholars agree that 2 Corinthians was written around AD 55 while Paul was in Macedonia. He had arrived in Corinth for his first visit early in AD 50. When he left Corinth after his extended ministry there, he first went to Antioch. After spending “some time” there, he made his way through Galatia and then on to Ephesus, which became his base of operations for his ministry in Asia Minor. It was in the Spring of AD 55, around the Feast of Pentecost, that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. Shortly after, Paul left Ephesus heading for Macedonia, where he met up with Titus and was told about the problems that had flared up in the church at Corinth. It was from Macedonia, shortly before winter, that he wrote what we refer to as 2 Corinthians.

UNITY OF THE LETTER

Many scholars today take the view that one or more sections of 2 Corinthians, as we now have it in our Bibles, simply cannot have belonged to the original document. The footnote in the Concordia Self-Study Bible (NIV) gives a concise summary of some of their reasons for taking this view. Conservative scholars view these theories to be without the support of a single shred of external evidence. Not a single writer from the early years of the Christian Church, not a single original manuscript, and absolutely no thread of tradition have expressed so much as a hint that 2 Corinthians ever existed in any form other than in which we now have it. This is the perspective from which this Bible Study was developed.

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This letter's pervading theme of the complete sufficiency and power of God's grace in the face of trials and afflictions of every kind is one that seems in a unique way quite appropriate for the Christian church in the 21st century.

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VALUE OF THE LETTER

One commentary begins with the sweeping statement: "Saint Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians may without exaggeration be described as one of the richest of all the writings of the New Testament...its rediscovery today could hardly fail to be an ennobling and fortifying experience for the Church of Christ." This letter's pervading theme of the complete sufficiency and power of God's grace in the face of trials and afflictions of every kind is one that seems in a unique way quite appropriate for the Christian church in the 21st century.

In his book, *The Word of the Lord Grows*, Dr. Franzmann writes:

"The second letter to the Corinthians is certainly one of the most difficult of Paul's letters, which is not to say that it was difficult or obscure for its first readers. They lived in the situation which we must laboriously reconstruct...it is an angel to be

wrestled with, if we would receive a blessing. But the blessing is a rich one and worth the wrestling."

In this letter, Dr. Franzmann also points out that we see Paul the "man" and Paul the "apostle." We see him in battle for his very existence as an apostle. We learn that the battle must be and why it must be. We learn that battle is necessary in the life of the Church and that it can even be beneficial for it. And above all, we learn that the battling in the church doesn't have to forsake the principle of love. Great insights to explore in depth!

God bless our study of 2 Corinthians so that we, who are also being bombarded with false religious ideas and pagan philosophies of life, will be faithful to God's Word and put the power of God's Grace in Christ to work in all we think and do and say. Are you ready? "Let's Roll!"

PERSONAL APPLICATION*2 CORINTHIANS 1:1–11*

God of all Grace, I thank You from the bottom of my heart that, through Your Holy Word and the working of the Spirit, You have opened Your heart to me and showed me all that You have done for me through Your Son Jesus. Help me to grow in my appreciation of the on-going power of Your Grace, as I work through this Bible Study today. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Review

1. What was Paul's primary purpose in writing this letter to the members of the congregation in Corinth, which he had formerly served as pastor?

On which of Paul's three missionary journeys did he first visit the city of Corinth (Acts 15:36–41, 18:1)?

What experience led Paul to travel to mainland Europe in the first place (Acts 16:9–11)?

2 Corinthians 1:1–2

2. Paul identifies himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (v. 1). How does Luke's account of Paul's encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road support this statement (Acts 9:1–5)?

Paul elaborates on this in Galatians 1:15. According to Paul, who took the initiative in his miraculous conversion and subsequent call to apostleship?

To what quality of God does Paul here, and in I Corinthians 15:9–10, attribute all of this?

3. Where did Paul and Timothy first meet (Acts 16:1–3)?

How had Timothy been brought to the Christian faith (2 Timothy 1:5)?

As you think about your religious experience, do you see any similarities to that of Paul or Timothy's? Explain.

4. Tell what you have learned about what was going on in the church at Corinth. Do you think Paul had something special in mind when he described the Church as “belonging to God”?

5. Give the name Paul calls the believers in Corinth and in the province of Achaia?

Did this term originate with Paul? (Psalms 30:4, 31:23, 34:9, 116:15) Explain.

What is the theological basis that allows such a title to be given to imperfect people? (Romans 3:23–24).

6. What do you think Paul was wishing for the recipients of this letter with the words “grace” and “peace”?

Write the Hebrew word for “peace.”

2 Corinthians 1:3–7

7. What two qualities of God does Paul highlight as especially worthy of high praise, as he moves into the body of the letter?

With all of the great qualities of God, what do you suppose moved Paul to feature these two in this letter (vv. 4–7 give some hints)?

Paul doesn’t mention specific troubles for which they would need special compassion and comfort. Can you think of some problems that might come their way as they tried to live their faith in a pagan community?

We know that Christians who live in countries which are governed by Muslims (e.g., Sudan, Malaysia, Pakistan) experience all kinds of hardships. Do you sense any problems that come your way because you are a believer?

2 Corinthians 1:8–11

8. What were some afflictions Paul experienced in his quest to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles? (See also 2 Cor. 4:7–12, 11:23–29)

How bad were they? (vv. 8–10)

9. What does Paul request of these Christians (v. 11)? State the two ways good will come as a result.