

## INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF

# 2 Corinthians

- is the eighth book of the New Testament, preceding Galatians
- like Galatians, is agitated, bold, confrontational, difficult, emotional
- with 13 chapters, ranks third longest of Paul's 13 epistles
- presents the oft-turbulent relation between apostle and church
- resolves big problems addressed in earlier epistle (2:1-11; 7:8-12)

### Classic passages

- 1:3-7 - comfort to and through us
- 3:1-18 - covenants old and new
- 4:1-18 - Paul's valedictory
- 5:17-21 - gospel of reconciliation
- 6:14-18 - demand for separation
- 9:6-11 - the spirit of giving
- 10:3-5 - spiritual warfare
- 11:18-33 - Paul's many troubles
- 12:1-10 - vision of paradise

### Repeating theme

Paul's difficult relations with the Corinthians weave their way through this letter. Other leaders critical of Paul had staked their own claims over this church. The tension between the great apostle and his critics lurks just below the surface (chs. 1-9) until it is fanned into open flame (chs. 10-13).

- Knowing some will think him foolish for writing this way (11:1, 16, 19, 21), Paul repeatedly defends his apostleship, choosing words like *boast*, *boldness*, *commend*, etc. (1:12-14; 3:1ff; 5:12ff; 6:3-13; 7:4, 14, 16; 8:24; 9:2-4; 10:1-18; 11:1-33; 12:1-21; 13:1-4).
- Referring to his detractors in harsh terms like "false apostles," Paul threatens to "be bold" and "not spare" should he visit Corinth again (2:17; 10:2, 12; 11:4, 12-15; 12:20, 21; 13:2).

### Memorable statements

- "One died for all" (5:14).
- "God loves a cheerful giver" (9:7).
- "Now is the day of salvation" (6:2).
- "My grace is sufficient for you" (12:9).
- "We walk by faith, not by sight" (5:7).
- "The love of Christ constrains us" (5:14).
- "We are ambassadors for Christ" (5:20).
- "You are the temple of the living God" (6:16).
- "When I am weak, then I am strong" (12:10).
- "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (3:6).
- "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord" (10:17).
- "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (5:17).
- "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" (9:15).
- "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (6:16).
- "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (6:14).

- "We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth" (13:8).
- "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (5:10).
- "Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light" (11:14).
- "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you" (13:14).

### Key words, ideas

1. Sorrow, suffering, tribulation, death (1:8, 9; 2:1-7; 4:8-12; 5:1-4; 7:5-10; 11:24-28; 12:7)

2. Comfort, consolation, confidence (1:3-7; 4:1; 5:6, 8; 7:6, 7, 13, 16; 8:22; 12:9)

- These opposites — tribulation and consolation — are joined in three wonderful passages, showing that God always sends the second after the first (1:3-7; 4:13-18; 12:7-10).

3. Paul's gospel (9 times) is associated with grace (13 times), with reconciliation (5 times in 5:18-20), and with Christ. Several interesting phrases are followed by either *in Christ* or *of Christ*: established (1:21); presence (2:10); triumph (2:14); fragrance (2:15); epistle (3:3); glory (4:4); God was . . . (5:19); gentleness (10:1); obedience (10:5); simplicity (11:3); truth (11:10); power (12:9); grace (13:14).

4. Fellowship and finances; grace and gift; ministering and sharing: Chapters 8 and 9 (with 1 Cor. 9) form the apex of the apostle's teaching on financial stewardship. This section on money sits in a context rich with God's grace and the believers' fellowship. (For fellowship, see 1:24; 6:11-14; 7:3; 8:4, 23; 12:15; 13:14.)

**2 Corinthians in a sentence:** Using a defensive tone sprinkled by generous grace, Paul follows a corrective letter to this church with an energetic mixture of support for his apostleship, encouragement for hope in the gospel of Christ, and exhortation to complete the necessary service.