

NT SURVEY: PAULINE EPISTLES

Week 4 : 2 Corinthians & Romans

2 CORINTHIANS

Author and Date¹

- That the Apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, this highly personal, biographical epistle, is uncontested.
- Several considerations establish a feasible date for the writing of this letter.
 - Paul ministered in Ephesus for about 2 1/2 years (Acts 19:8–10).
 - Paul wrote 1 Corinthians toward the close of that period (1 Cor 16:8), most likely in A.D. 55.
 - Paul planned to stay in Ephesus until the following spring (1 Cor. 16:8), and 2 Corinthians was written after he left Ephesus, making the date of writing likely late A.D. 55 or early A.D. 56.

Background and Setting²

- Planning to remain at Ephesus longer, Paul sent Timothy to Corinth (4:17; 16:10, 11).
 - News reached Paul of further difficulties at Corinth, including the arrival of false apostles, who were assaulting Paul’s character.
- Temporarily abandoning the work at Ephesus, Paul went immediately to Corinth.
 - This “painful visit” (2:1), was not a successful one from Paul’s perspective; someone in the Corinthian church (possibly one of the false apostles) even openly insulted him (2:5–8, 10; 7:12).
 - Saddened by the Corinthians’ lack of loyalty to defend him, seeking to spare them further reproof (1:23), and perhaps hoping time would bring them to their senses, Paul returned to Ephesus.
 - From Ephesus, Paul wrote a more “severe letter” (2:4) and sent it with Titus to Corinth (7:5–16).
- Leaving Ephesus after a riot sparked by Demetrius (Acts 19:23–20:1), Paul went to Troas to meet Titus.
- But Paul was so anxious for news of how the Corinthians had responded to the “severe letter” that he could not minister there though the Lord had opened the door (2:12, 7:5).
 - So, he left for Macedonia to look for Titus (2:13). To Paul’s immense relief and joy, Titus met him with the news that the majority of the Corinthians had repented of their rebellion against Paul (7:7).
- Knowing that some rebellious attitudes still smoldered under the surface, and could erupt again, Paul wrote the Corinthians the letter known as 2 Corinthians.

¹ <https://www.gty.org/library/bible-introductions/MSB47/second-corinthians>

² Ibid

- In this letter, though the apostle expressed his relief and joy at their repentance (7:8–16), his main concern was to:
 - Defend his apostleship (1–7)
 - Exhort them to resume preparations for the collection for the poor at Jerusalem (8–9)
 - Confront the false apostles head on (10–13)

Historical and Theological Themes³

- Second Corinthians contains important biographical data on Paul throughout.
- Although an intensely personal letter, written by the apostle in the heat of battle against those attacking his credibility, 2 Corinthians contains several important theological themes.
 - It portrays God the Father as a merciful comforter (1:3; 7:6), the Creator (4:6), the One who raised Jesus from the dead (4:14; 13:4), and who will raise believers as well (1:9).
 - Jesus Christ is the One who suffered (1:5), who fulfilled God’s promises (1:20), who was the proclaimed Lord (4:5), who manifested God’s glory (4:6), and the One who in His incarnation became poor for believers (8:9).
 - It portrays the Holy Spirit as God (3:17, 18) and the guarantee of believers’ salvation (1:22; 5:5).
 - Satan is identified as the “god of this age” (4:4), a deceiver (11:14), and the leader of human and angelic deceivers (11:15).
 - The end times include both the believer’s glorification (4:16–5:8) and judgment (5:10).
 - The glorious truth of God’s sovereignty in salvation (5:14–21), and man’s response to God’s offer of salvation: genuine repentance (7:9, 10).
 - It presents the most concise summary of the substitutionary atonement of Christ found in Scripture (5:21) and defines the mission of the church to proclaim reconciliation (5:18–20).
- Another major theme in 2 Corinthians is suffering.
 - Paul’s suffering:
 - Two hardship lists attest to Paul’s sufferings as an apostle (2 Cor 6:4–10; 11:23–29).
 - Paul speaks of a recent affliction that left him without hope of survival (2 Cor 1:3–11).
 - Paul speaks of a “thorn in the flesh” that was tormenting him (2 Cor 12:7).
 - Paul identifies the difficulties he endures “on behalf of” Christ (2 Cor 4:5; 5:20; 12:10).
 - The Lord’s Provision:
 - Even in affliction, Paul blesses the Lord, who comforts him in his affliction (2 Cor 1:3–4).
 - But the apostle also recognizes the temporary and relative nature of suffering when compared with eternal glory (2 Cor 4:17).
 - Paul boasts in his weakness, knowing that the Lord’s grace is sufficient (2 Cor 12:9–10).

³ <https://www.gty.org/library/bible-introductions/MSB47/second-corinthians>

Challenging Verses

- **2 Corinthians 1–9 & 2 Corinthians 10–13**

- As Paul's tone in 1 Corinthians 10 seems to change, some have wondered if chapters 10–13 were not originally part of the same letter as chapters 1–9.
 - Some say chapters 10–13 were originally part of the sever letter (2:4) that Paul sent prior to writing 2 Corinthians.
 - Some say that these chapters were part of a letter that came after 2 Corinthians, in response to further news that Paul received about the false teachers in Corinth.
 - Some say that they are part of the same letter, but that there was a pause in Paul's writing between chapters 9 and 10, where he received further news from Corinth.
- Some evidence against this claim:
 - There is no historical evidence (early translations, early church fathers) that this portion of the letter was ever circulated separately
 - All Greek manuscripts have them following chapters 1–9
- So, while Paul was writing to those in Corinth who had repented, he understood that there were still those swayed by the false teachers that needed to be addressed.

- **2 Corinthians 5:10 – For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive compensation for his deeds done through the body, in accordance with what he has done, whether good or bad.**

- What is the judgment that Paul is speaking of?
 - The Greek word used here for the judgment seat is “bēmatos”
 - This was traditionally where Olympic athletes would go to receive their prizes
- This is not a judgment of sinners, as Christ has paid the penalty of sin for all those who believe
- Rather, Paul is talking of the bema judgment where believers will receive rewards for their obedience in life (i.e., deeds of the body...whether good or bad)
 - **1 Corinthians 3:12–15** – gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw

- **2 Corinthians 12:7 – Because of the extraordinary greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!**

- What is the identity of Paul's “thorn in the flesh”? It can be narrowed to three categories:
 - Physical issues that Paul suffered – migraines, malarial fever, epilepsy, or an issue with Paul's eyesight (Gal 4:13–15)
 - In Galatians 4:13–15, Paul describes a bodily illness that was a trial to the Galatians as they received him. Some have considered if it was an issue with his eyesight.

- Oppositional issues in the form of persecution from false teachers or demons throughout his ministry
 - A term used in apposition (grammatically parallel, referring to the same thing) to ‘thorn in the flesh’ is ‘messenger of Satan’.
 - The word for messenger, *angelos*, often refers to angels. An angel of Satan would, then, be referring to a demon.
 - Also, given the context of the letter, it could be persecution that Paul faced.
- Psychological issues either from sinful temptations or spiritual trials (Ro 7:22–24)
 - Roman Catholic writers often adopt this view, as the Latin Vulgate translates ‘thorn in the flesh’ as *stimulus carnis*, pointing to a besetting sin that Paul struggled with.
 - Martin Luther, however, viewed the thorn as spiritual trials that Paul was facing.
 - This could fit the context, given the distress from the Corinthian church.
- Regardless of the identity of the thorn, we see the purpose of Paul including this in the letter.
 - As Paul was defending his ministry, he was not boasting in his own strength, but the Lord’s.
 - Paul was able to boast in his weakness, understanding that the Lord’s grace is sufficient to sustain him (2 Cor 12:9–10).

KEY VERSES

- **2 Corinthians 4:16–18** – Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer person is decaying, yet our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.
- **2 Corinthians 5:17** – Therefore if anyone is in Christ, this person is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.
- **2 Corinthians 6:14** – Do not be mismatched with unbelievers; for what do righteousness and lawlessness share together, or what does light have in common with darkness?
- **2 Corinthians 9:7** – Each one must do just as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.
- **2 Corinthians 10:5** – We are destroying arguments and all arrogance raised against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ
- **2 Corinthians 12:9–10** – And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in distresses, in persecutions, in difficulties, on behalf of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

ROMANS

- “This Epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel and is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.”⁴
- Romans is the most systematic and logical doctrinal book of the Apostle Paul. It was affected by circumstances in Rome; therefore, it is an "occasional" document. Something occurred that caused Paul to write the letter. However, it is the most neutral of Paul's writings, in that Paul's way of dealing with the problem (possibly the jealousy between believing Jewish and Gentile leadership, cf. 14:1-15:13) was a clear presentation of the gospel and its implications for daily life.⁵

Author and Date

- The ancient writers regularly included Romans in their list of authentic documents, and a steady stream of patristic writers beginning with Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus all assume its Pauline authorship without defense.⁶
- It was probably during Paul’s three-month stay in Corinth (Acts 20:2–3) that he wrote Romans.
 - This receives some support from his reference in Romans 16:1–2 to Cenchreae (a city near Corinth).
- Paul states in 15:26-28 that he has just completed the raising of funds for the poor believers in Jerusalem after visiting the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.
 - This corresponds to Acts 20:1-2, identifying the time of composition as the year after Paul left Ephesus on his third missionary journey.⁷ Therefore, the date of Romans would be AD 56–57.

Background and Setting⁸

- Some of those converted on the Day of Pentecost probably founded the church at Rome (cf. Acts 2:10).
 - Paul had long sought to visit the Roman church but had been prevented from doing so (1:13).
- Paul’s primary purpose in writing Romans was to teach the great truths of the gospel of grace to believers who had never received apostolic instruction.
- The letter also introduced him to a church where he was personally unknown but hoped to visit soon for several important reasons: to edify the believers (1:11); to preach the gospel (1:15); and to get to know the

⁴ Martin Luther, “Preface to the Epistle to the Romans” (1522), in Works of Martin Luther (1932), Vol. VI, p. 447.

⁵ <https://bible.org/seriespage/introduction-romans-1>

⁶ <https://bible.org/seriespage/6-romans-introduction-argument-and-outline>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ <https://www.gty.org/library/bible-introductions/MSB45/romans>

Roman Christians, so they could encourage him (1:12; 15:32), better pray for him (15:30), and help him with his planned ministry in Spain (15:28).

- Unlike some of Paul's other epistles (e.g., 1, 2 Cor, Gal), his purpose for writing was not to correct aberrant theology or rebuke ungodly living.
 - The Roman church was doctrinally sound, but, like all churches, it needed the rich doctrinal and practical instruction this letter provides.

Historical and Theological Themes⁹

- Since Romans is primarily a work of doctrine, it contains little historical material.
- Paul does use such familiar OT figures as Abraham (chap. 4), David (4:6–8), Adam (5:12–21), Sarah (9:9), Rebekah (9:10), Jacob and Esau (9:10–13), and Pharaoh (9:17) as illustrations. He also recounts some of Israel's history (chaps. 9–11). Chapter 16 provides insightful glimpses into the nature and character of the first-century church and its members.
 - Romans 1:7, 15 identify this letter as being sent to the Christians at Rome. They were predominantly Gentile believers as is evidenced by Paul's statements to that effect in 1:5, 12–14 and 11:13. But there was probably a strong Jewish element as well because (1) the heavy use of the OT suggests this and (2) since Paul did not plant this church, most likely the Jewish element would be stronger than in one of his congregations.¹⁰
- The overarching theme of Romans is the righteousness that comes from God: the glorious truth that God justifies guilty, condemned sinners by grace alone through faith in Christ alone.
 - Chapters 1–11 present the theological truths of that doctrine
 - Principles of spiritual leadership (1:8–15); God's wrath against sinful mankind (1:18–32); principles of divine judgment (2:1–16); the universality of sin (3:9–20); an exposition and defense of justification by faith alone (3:21–4:25); the security of salvation (5:1–11); the transference of Adam's sin (5:12–21); sanctification (chaps. 6–8); sovereign election (chap. 9); God's plan for Israel (chap. 11);
 - Chapters 12–16 detail its practical outworking in the lives of individual believers and the life of the whole church.
 - Spiritual gifts and practical godliness (chap. 12); the believer's responsibility to human government (chap. 13); and principles of Christian liberty (14:1–15:12).

⁹ <https://www.gty.org/library/bible-introductions/MSB45/romans>

¹⁰ <https://bible.org/seriespage/6-romans-introduction-argument-and-outline>

CHALLENGING VERSES

Romans 5:12–21 – Universal Salvation and Original Sin

• Universal Salvation

- It is often argued from Romans 5:12-21 that salvation is universal, meaning that no matter what you believe in or theology you hold to, you will ultimately be saved.
 - V. 18 – So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to **all men**, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to **all men**.
- Though justification is offered universally (Rom. 8:32), it is not applied universally.
 - Anyone can be saved who repents of their sins and puts their faith in Christ (Rom. 10:9-10), but not all men will (Rom. 1:18).
 - It is important to make the distinction that **though salvation is offered to the world, it is only effectual in those whom God foreknew** (Rom. 8:29-30).
- Paul's point in Romans 5:18 is not that everyone will be saved, he is talking about Christ being offered to all men, not just the Jews or Gentiles.
 - V. 15 – For if by the transgression of the one **the many** died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to **the many**.

• Original Sin

- Paul does not deny in this text that the sin of individuals leads to death.
- Individuals come into the world condemned and spiritually dead because of Adam's sin.
 - Adam's descendants inherited a sin nature, from the point of conception (Ps 51:5).
 - Mankind aren't sinners because they sin, they sin because they are sinners.
- I am convinced that the major reason why the liberal scholars want to regard the opening chapters of Genesis as mythology is that they do not want to face the reality of the fall of the race in Adam or the guilt that flows from it.¹¹ (Rom 1:18, 2 Tim 4:3–4)

Election and the Sovereignty of God in Romans 8:28–30

- **Romans 8:28–30 - And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.**

¹¹ James M. Boice, *Romans, vol. 2. The Reign of Grace* (Romans 5–8) (MI: Baker, 1992), 583.

- Questions arise in these verses regarding election and the extent of God’s sovereignty in salvation
 - Objections to this view of salvation come from the words *foreknew* and *predestined*.
- Regarding foreknew: “One of the errors Calvinists make is assuming God’s foreknowledge equals His foreordination. They do not just believe God is omniscient (knows all things that can be known), but that His foreknowledge is due to His foreordination. God knows ahead of time what will happen, not just because He is eternal and sees our future as His eternal now. He knows what the future holds because He has decreed all things the future holds. For the Calvinist, God does not just foreknow things because He is eternal and omniscient; He foreknows them BECAUSE He has foreordained them.”¹²
 - Foreknew or foreordained?
 - **Ephesians 1:4-5** – He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will
- Regarding predestined: “Predestination does not render an event certain to happen, but rather that it is a declaration of God's recognition or foresight that the event is certain to take place.”
 - **Isaiah 46:9–11** – Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.

Romans 7:14-25 – Was Paul a Believer?

- There are actually three views on this passage:
 - Some describe this as Paul’s life prior to Christ
 - V. 14 – sold into bondage to sin
 - V. 18 – nothing good dwells in me
 - V. 24 – the body of this death
 - Compare to 6:6 – our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin
 - Some describe Paul as a “carnal Christian”
 - Thinking it is possible for people to come to faith in Christ, live the rest of their lives in a completely carnal (fleshly) manner, with no evidence of being born again.
 - **2 Cor 5:17** - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (cf. Eph 2:10, Gal 5:22-26)
 - Paul is actually describing life for all believers
 - V. 15 – not practicing what I would like to do... doing the very thing I hate
 - This is not the attitude of unbelievers (1:18-21, 32)

¹² <https://calvaryoxnard.org/blog/2017/10/25/are-you-ready-for-this-part-2>

Romans 11 – God’s Plan for Israel

- In Romans 9–11, Paul offers an extended explanation of the relationship between the gospel and Israel, especially the promises God made to Israel.
- However, those who hold to Replacement Theology claim that the church has replaced Israel.
 - The prophecies in Scripture concerning the blessing and restoration of Israel to the Promised Land are spiritualized or allegorized into promises of God’s blessing for the church.¹³
- Romans 9–10 tells of Israel’s rejection of the Messiah and the gospel coming to the Gentiles
 - Romans 10:19–21 – But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? First Moses says, “I will make you jealous with those who are not a nation, With a foolish nation I will anger you.” And Isaiah is very bold and says, “I was found by those who did not seek Me, I revealed Myself to those who did not ask for Me.” But as for Israel, He says, “I have spread out My hands all day long to a disobedient and obstinate people.”
- Romans 11 gives one of the clearest answers to the question of whether God’s setting aside of Israel, due to their rejection of Christ, is permanent.
 - Romans 11:1 – I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be!
- Wild olive branches & natural branches (Rom 11:17–24)
 - Gentiles (wild olive branches) have been grafted in (v. 17)
 - Israel (natural branches) will be grafted back in (v. 23–24)
- A partial hardening has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in (v. 25)
 - V. 26 – All Israel will be saved
 - V. 25 points to a particular time when this hardening will end, that being the second coming of Christ at the end of the tribulation, where Israel will repent, seeing the Messiah they rejected and weeping (Zech. 12:10)
- Why does this matter?
 - It calls into question the very nature of God’s faithfulness to His promises.
 - God made unconditional, unilateral covenants to the nation of Israel. Paul reminds the Romans that God’s gifts and calling are irrevocable (Rom 11:29).
 - Jeremiah 33:14–26 – The covenants of God to Israel will be upheld

¹³ <https://www.gotquestions.org/replacement-theology.html>

KEY VERSES

- **Romans 1:16** - “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”
- **Romans 3:9-11** - “What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.’”
- **Romans 3:21** - “But now a righteousness from God apart from the law, has been made known, to which the Law and Prophets testify.”
- **Romans 3:23** - “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
- **Romans 5:8** - “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
- **Romans 6:23** - “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
- **Romans 8:1-2** – “Therefore there is now no condemnation at all for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.
- **Romans 8:9** - “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature, but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.”
- **Romans 8:28-30** – “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.”
- **Romans 8:37-39** - “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
- **Romans 10:9-10** - “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”
- **Romans 12:1-2** - “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.
- **Romans 12:19** - “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.”
- **Romans 16:17** - “I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.”