

Notes on the Greek New Testament Day 238 – August 26th – 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

Circumstances of Paul's writing '2 Corinthians'

When Paul sent off the letter we know as 1 Corinthians, he expected to follow it with a personal visit and to be able to remain a while at Corinth (1 Cor 16:5-8). In the meantime he sent Timothy (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10). Shortly after Timothy's departure, Paul seems to have changed his plans. He now proposed to visit the Corinthians twice, once on his way to Macedonia and a second time on his return, before sailing on to Judea (2 Cor 1:15,16), along with delegates from the churches taking gifts to the Christians at Jerusalem.

However, when Timothy arrived in Corinth he found that a particular ringleader had launched a personal attack on Paul (2 Cor 2:5-11; 7:8-13). Timothy was unable to resolve the problem and returned to Ephesus to inform Paul of the situation. In response, Paul made a brief and 'painful' visit to Corinth (2 Cor 2:1). The opposition to Paul seems to have centred upon one or two leaders whom the Corinthians tacitly supported or at least refused to disown. "Moreover, the church had been infiltrated by Judaisers from Judea, men who were adamantly opposed to the gospel Paul preached and who ridiculed his apostleship (2 Cor 2:5-8; 7-12)" (Carson). The work of the gospel was in jeopardy at Corinth.

Paul left, and rather than making the previously planned double visit to Corinth he returned to Ephesus from where he wrote a severe yet tearful letter. This further change of plan left him open to the charge of being fickle (2 Cor 1:16-2:4). The 'severe letter' was sent to Corinth in the hands of Titus (2 Cor 2:4; 7:8). This letter has been lost (though some think that it is (partially) preserved in 2 Corinthians 10-13). In this letter, Paul demanded the punishment of the ringleader(s) who had opposed him (2 Cor 2:3-9; 7:8-12).

Titus seems also to have been charged with the task of organising the collection for the Christians in Jerusalem (2 Cor 8:6). The longstanding plan for the collection had been postponed partly, perhaps, because of the Corinthian's antipathy towards Paul but perhaps also (suggests Carson) because "the interlopers from Judea were demanding financial support (11:7,12-20;12:14) and were siphoning off funds that should have gone to Jerusalem." The fact that Paul instructed Titus to commence the collection suggests that he was optimistic that his letter would receive a positive response.

Shortly afterwards, Paul faced severe problems at Ephesus which compelled him to leave the city (see Acts 19 and 2 Cor 1:8,9). Paul had hoped to meet Titus at Troas but, being unable to find him, continued on to Macedonia (perhaps Philippi) to intercept him (2 Cor 2:12f.). There Titus informed Paul that the worst was over, the rebellion has been quelled (2 Cor 7:6-16). In response, and in the midst of organising the collection from the Macedonian churches, Paul wrote (in part or in whole) the letter we know as 2 Corinthians. This letter he sent back to Corinth with Titus.

In 2 Corinthians 1-9 Paul expresses his joy concerning the news brought by Titus. For a while he had regretted having written the 'severe letter', fearing it might have done more harm than good. Now he sees that it has produced genuine repentance and he is glad. Now he encourages the Corinthians to complete the collection.

With chapter 10 the tone seems to shift from joy to anger and polemic. For this reason, some suggest that chapters 10-13 are the misplaced 'severe letter.' Martin suggests rather that Titus was initially sent to Corinth with the letter we have preserved in 2 Corinthians 1-9. Shortly afterwards Paul learnt of further trouble at Corinth, prompting an addendum which is now chapters 10-13. Carson, however, suggests that Paul wrote (or dictated) the first nine chapters shortly after meeting up with Titus but at this stage the letter remained unfinished (and unsent). The business of organising the collection among the Macedonian churches meant that completion of the letter was delayed and it was during this time that Paul heard of further problems at Corinth. This fresh news prompted completion of the letter with chapters 10-13.

The chapters are different in tone because they are Paul's response to very different news, but all of the chapters form a single letter.

Paul eventually arrived in person at Corinth (Acts 20:2), where, after about a year he wrote the letter to the Romans.

Outline of 2 Corinthians

The letter may be divided into the following sections:

Introduction 1:1-11

I Paul justifies his conduct towards the Corinthians 1:12-7:16

A The question of Paul's journeys to Corinth 1:12-2:13

B First defence of the apostolic ministry 2:14-7:4

C Again, Paul's journeys 7:5-16

II The collection for the church at Jerusalem 8:1-9:15

A Recommendations for the collection and delegates ch. 8

B A second recommendation ch. 9

III Polemical arguments and defence 10:1-13:10

A Paul defends himself and his work against accusation ch. 10

B Paul's self-eulogy 11:1-12:18

C Final notices 12:19-13:10

Conclusion 13:11-13

The Collection

The collection seems to have been a central element of Paul's missionary strategy embracing both Jew and Gentile. Martin expresses it as follows, "It is generally admitted that the collection for the saints was more than a simple expression of charity. As we look at the texts in 2 Corinthians and Romans it appears that Paul viewed this exercise as a powerful way of demonstrating the unity of the two wings of the church, both Jewish and Gentile. His appeal as 'apostle to the non-Jews' was calculated to awaken in his converts a sense of gratitude for all the benefits they had received through Israel's hope in the messianic faith. Conversely, Paul fervently believed that such a sign of the Gentile generosity (which was freely expressed and so gave evidence of both Gentile independence from and fellowship with Israel... would be interpreted as a way to cement relations – often strained – between the two cultural groups and win over the Jewish Christians to the full acceptance of the validity of his own mission (see Gal 2:7-10...). There is an undertone of missionary strategy here as Paul adds in the thought that the way Gentile Christians act as proof of their new life in Israel's messiah will goad the Jews into envy and encourage them to seek salvation (Rom 11:14)..."

"His pilgrimage to Jerusalem, bearing gifts from the nations, reflects the prophetic picture of the last days (Isa 2:2-5; 60:5-22; Mic 4), as the rabbis believed. Then, it was hoped, the obedience of the Gentiles would lead to the renewal of Israel and the onset of the new age of eschatological joy and blessedness. Paul's own work as an apostle would be validated by this climactic result, as he headed the large retinue of Gentile delegates to the Holy City (Acts 20:4). His thinking seems to oscillate between the expectation of Israel's conversion (Rom 11:26) and his continuing desire to evangelise in Rome and Spain (Rom 15:24), but clearly the two are interrelated. Thus Paul views the offering of the collection as both a 'salvation-historical' validation of his own ministry against his detractors and a means of 'eschatological provocation' leading to national Israel's jealousy and turning to God. Alas, here again Paul's best hopes were doomed and crushed on the anvil of Israel's continued 'hardness' and 'blindness' and his own increasing disfavour among his compatriots."

From Acts 20:2-5 it appears that there were no Corinthians among the delegates to Jerusalem. Perhaps in the end Paul's efforts to complete the collection among the Corinthians failed.

Paul's Opponents

The problems Paul addresses in 2 Corinthians seem to have arisen primarily through agitation by outsiders (10:13-15; 11:4; 12:11). It would appear that a party of Jewish 'Christians' had arrived claiming that they had the support of the genuine apostles, namely the Twelve (cf. Acts 15:24 which refers to a similar claim). They:

- Called into question Paul's authority and suggested that he was not truly an apostle;
- Accused Paul of lacking any proper letters of introduction (10:13-14, cf. 3:1);
- Asserted that he had no right to allegiance from the Corinthians – perhaps claiming that Corinth was in Peter's bailiwick and that they were his representatives (10:15);
- Suggested that Paul was a poor speaker and that his ministry lacked spiritual impact. He was unimpressive and could only command respect at a distance through his letters (10:1-2, 9-11; 11:6; 13:3-4, 9);
- Argued that his refusal to take money from the Corinthians demonstrated that he could not be a genuine teacher (11:5, 7-11; 12:11-15; 13:3a, 6).

It would seem that these opponents, though Jewish (10:22), adopted the Hellenistic standards of rhetoric exemplified by the sophists and also adopted their practice of insisting on payment for their services. Of such, Carson writes, "Sophists delighted to parade their accomplishments and display their oratory. They aimed to collect a growing number of disciples who hung on their words and paid large sums for the privilege of learning at their feet. The more accomplished the sophist, the more he could boast, and the greater the charge he could levy. Sophisticated haughtiness became a virtue, self-admiration a strength." The Corinthians were prone to be attracted and enticed away by such an approach, as we learn from 1 Corinthians (e.g. 1 Cor 2:1-4).

Paul's response is that these self-promoted leaders were actually preaching another Jesus, were animated by another spirit and were proclaiming a different gospel (11:4).

Forced to defend himself and his ministry, Paul asserts that he has been called by Christ and commissioned by him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. The hallmark which demonstrates the authenticity of his ministry is not some display of human power but the grace of God demonstrated in the context of human weakness. In this he bears the stamp of Jesus, his Lord and Master.

Conclusion

2 Corinthians is the most human of Paul's epistles, "opening a window into the inner life of the apostle... Perhaps the central element in this letter is the close link uniting Paul's person and ministry with the kerygma he is charged to make known. Apostle and Gospel go together in indissoluble unity, just as Christ Jesus and his apostle Paul are closely associated as 'Lord' and 'servant' (4:5). They remain two distinct persons, however inextricably joined (4:10; 13:3...); yet given the contingent situation at Corinth and the reality of the conflict and isolation in Paul's missionary career, he writes in such a way that at times the two merge by their intimate association with the Gospel, which is both Christ's and Paul's." (Martin)

Works frequently referenced in these notes on 2 Corinthians

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| Carson, Donald A | <i>From Triumphalism to Maturity: A new exposition of 2 Corinthians 10-13</i> , Leicester, IVP, 1986 |
| Kruse, Colin | <i>2 Corinthians</i> (Tyndale Commentary), London, IVP, 1987 |
| Martin, Ralph P | <i>2 Corinthians</i> (Word Biblical Commentary), Waco Texas, Word Books, 1986 |

Tasker, RVG

2 Corinthians (Tyndale Commentary), London, Tyndale Press, 1958

Verse 1

Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφὸς τῆ ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ τῆ οὔση ἐν Κορίνθῳ, σὺν τοῖς ἀγίοις πᾶσιν τοῖς οὔσιν ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Ἀχαΐᾳ·

Paul stresses his apostolic authority which is from God. He is not self-appointed. By way of contrast, see his accusations concerning 'false apostles' in 11:3.

θελημα, ατος n will, wish, desire

Timothy had experienced great difficulties as Paul's emissary at Corinth. The mention of him here could be "Paul's attempt to rehabilitate his colleague, who had been insulted and rejected as an emissary." Martin

οὔση verb, present part, f dat s εἰμι

"The verbal form in the phrase τῆ ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ τῆ οὔση should be observed in the light of K L Schmidt's contention (TDNT 3:506) that what is in view is the 'one great church' with its local manifestation or outcropping at Corinth. He argues that it is a mistake to render 'the Corinthian church'; rather it is the one church of God that appears on the scene at Corinth." Martin

ὅλος, η, ον whole, all, entire

The letters of 1 & 2 Corinthians were clearly intended to be read in churches other than that at Corinth

Verse 2

χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

χαρις, ιτος f grace, unmerited

A christianised adaption of the customary wish expressed in Greco-Roman culture, χαρειν 'greeting.' "In Paul's hands the term χαρειν becomes charged with the force of a powerful, performative wish-prayer which conveys the idea of God's favour (χαρις) to those who do not deserve it... and his strength to match human weakness (see 12:9 for this meaning of χαρις, 'grace')." Martin

εἰρηνη, ης f peace

Verse 3

Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ πατὴρ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν καὶ θεὸς πάσης παρακλήσεως,

εὐλογητος, η, ον blessed, praised

"God is now revealed and known ... not as God only, but as God revealed in relation to His only begotten Son." Selwyn

οἰκτιρμος, ου m compassion, mercy

'Father of mercies' is a Hebrew expression meaning 'merciful father'.

παρακλησις, εως f encouragement, help, comfort, counsel

A key theme in these verses. God is the source of all comfort/encouragement to his people.

Verse 4

ὁ παρακαλῶν ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ θλίψει ἡμῶν, εἰς τὸ δύνασθαι ἡμᾶς παρακαλεῖν τοὺς ἐν πάσῃ θλίψει διὰ τῆς παρακλήσεως ἧς παρακαλούμεθα αὐτοὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ.

παρακαλεω exhort, encourage, urge

θλιψις, εως f trouble, suffering

εἰς το + infinitive expressing result

"Paul can testify that on every occasion when he had been in tribulation he had been able not merely to endure it but to derive blessing from it. Not the least of these blessings is the ability that such experiences have given him to extend to others in their hour of trouble a sympathy born of the divine sympathy he himself has been privileged to receive." Tasker

"Paul is glad that, in spite of the many troubles that have weighed upon him, he has known the special strength given by God (v.4). Suffering for Christ's sake was ever his destiny as the apostle to the Gentiles (1 Thess 2:2; cf. Col 1:24; Eph 3:13). In Luke's narrative this vocation was made known to him at the commencement of his Christian life (cf. Acts 9:15, 16). Out of that continuing experience came Paul's sense of kinship with his churches which often had to endure trial in a pagan world. And he joins together his vocation with that of his people who in passing through troubled times learn with him to receive divine encouragement and to minister that encouragement to others." Martin

Verse 5

ὅτι καθὼς περισσεύει τὰ παθήματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ἡμᾶς, οὕτως διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ περισσεύει καὶ ἡ παράκλησις ἡμῶν.

περισευω intrans. increase, abound

παθημα, τος n suffering, passion, desire

The suffering of the Christian in the cause of the kingdom are the suffering of Christ, for they are the sufferings of his body (see Acts 9:4,5).

Barrett suggests that two ideas are combined in the phrase τὰ παθήματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ:

- i) The sufferings experienced by Christ, which are "extended so as to reach and be shared by others."
 ii) The sufferings not endured by the Messiah but which are associated with him in the messianic age and form a prelude to the coming of the age of bliss.
 "As union with Christ was the source of the afflictions which Paul endured, so it was the source of the abundant consolation which he enjoyed." Hodge

Verse 6

εἴτε δὲ θλιβόμεθα, ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑμῶν παρακλήσεως καὶ σωτηρίας· εἴτε παρακαλούμεθα, ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑμῶν παρακλήσεως τῆς ἐνεργουμένης ἐν ὑπομονῇ τῶν αὐτῶν παθημάτων ὧν καὶ ἡμεῖς πάσχομεν,

The difficulty of the construction leads to a number of textual variants in vv. 6&7. The text reproduced here is 'strongly supported.'

εἴτε if, whether
 θλιβῶ press hard, crush; pass experience
 difficulty/trouble
 σωτηρία, ας f salvation
 ἐνεργουμένης Verb, pres midd ptc, f gen s
 ἐνεργεῶ work, be at work (in)

'If we are encouraged, it is for your encouragement which (God) produces as you remain steadfast under the same sufferings that we suffer.' Martin. Barrett prefers to give an active sense to ἐνεργουμένης 'which is made effectual by your steadfastness.' Martin concludes, "Either way, the meaning is tolerably clear, however. When Paul undergoes apostolic sufferings, it is to benefit the churches (4:12). When God encourages him in his trials, the effect is seen in the strength also given – but not magically nor mystically... – to afflicted believers."

ὑπομονη, ης f patience, endurance
 παθημα see v.5
 πασχω suffer, experience

Harks back to verse 4.

Verse 7

καὶ ἡ ἐλπίς ἡμῶν βεβαία ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν· εἰδότες ὅτι ὡς κοινωνοὶ ἐστε τῶν παθημάτων, οὕτως καὶ τῆς παρακλήσεως.

ἐλπίς, ιδος f hope, ground of hope
 βεβαιός, α, ον reliable, firm, well founded

'secure' "Paul knows that God can be called on both to sustain the church in trouble and to bring it through as in 1 Cor 15:58." Martin

εἰδότες Verb, perf act ptc, m nom pl οἶδα
 (verb perf in form but with present meaning) know, understand

κοινωνός, ου m partner, sharer

Paul speaks of 'the sufferings' common to himself and the Corinthians. He is thus referring to the 'sufferings of Christ' (v.5) which are shared by his people.
 "We should, however, observe with O'Brian, *Introductory Thanksgivings*, 247, 248, that while the Corinthians share in the messianic woes, they do not endure precisely the same trial (θλιψίς) that the apostle met (v 6). In fact, we do not know the precise nature of the church's sufferings, yet they are linked with 'Christ's afflictions.'" Martin

Verse 8

Οὐ γὰρ θέλομεν ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, ὑπὲρ τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν τῆς γενομένης ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, ὅτι καθ' ὑπερβολὴν ὑπὲρ δύνάμιν ἐβαρήθημεν, ὥστε ἐξαπορηθῆναι ἡμᾶς καὶ τοῦ ζῆν·

ἀγνοεῶ not know, be ignorant, fail to understand

Cf. 8:1; 1 Cor 10:1; 12:1.

θλιψίς see v.4
 ὑπερβολή, ης f surpassing, beyond
 measure, to an extreme

καθ' ὑπερβολὴν 'excessively,' a favourite Pauline expression, cf. Rom 7:13; 1 Cor 12:31; 2 Cor 4:17; Gal 1:13.

For ὑπὲρ δύνάμιν 'beyond our power' cf. 8:3 and 1 Cor 10:13.

ἐβαρήθημεν Verb, aor pass indic, 1 pl βαρεῶ
 burden, weigh down, overcome

ἐξαποροεῖμαι despair

ζῆν Verb, pres act infin ζῶ live, be alive

The exact nature of this life-threatening trial is uncertain. The uproar at Ephesus recorded in Acts 19:23-41 does not seem to have placed his life in danger. Neither is it likely that Paul would use words such as this of the anguish of spirit he experienced concerning the Corinthians. R.A.Knox thought it some physical illness.

"In the absence of any precise information a form of persecution due to mob-violence, somewhere in Asia but not necessarily at Ephesus is probably the best conjecture we can make." Tasker. Cf. 1 Cor 15:32.

Verse 9

ἀλλὰ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς τὸ ἀπόκριμα τοῦ θανάτου ἐσχίκαμεν, ἵνα μὴ πεποιθότες ὦμεν ἐφ' ἑαυτοῖς ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ τῷ ἐγειρόντι τοὺς νεκρούς·

ἑαυτός, ἑαυτή, ἑαυτόν reflexive pronoun,
 himself, herself, itself

ἀποκριμα, τος n sentence (of death)
 θάνατος, ου m death

ἐσχήκαμεν Verb, perf act indic, 1 pl ἔχω

"Paul's reference to having received the sentence 'in himself' suggests that a subjective experience was involved. It was not so much a verdict pronounced by some external authority, but rather a perception in the heart and mind of the apostle himself." Kruse

πειθω persuade; perf trust, rely on, have confidence, be confident

ῶμεν Verb, pres subj, 1 pl εἶμι

ἐγειρω raise

νεκρος, α, ον dead

Cf. Rom 4:17.

Verse 10

ὃς ἐκ τηλικούτου θανάτου ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς καὶ ῥύσεται, εἰς ὃν ἠλπικαμεν ὅτι καὶ ἔτι ῥύσεται,

τηλικουτος, αυτη, ουτο so great, so large

Here the translation needs to be something like 'so menacing a death.'

θανατος, ου m death

p⁴⁶ and a few other MSS read the plural τηλικουτων θανατων. G Zuntz *The Text of the New Testament* argued that the plural is original and that the singular is a correction by scribes who considered that you cannot risk more than one death. Martin argues that the singular reflects the fact that Paul is speaking here of a specific circumstance where his life was threatened. Metzger suggests that the plural may have crept in as an attempt to heighten the intensity of the account.

ἐρρύσατο Verb, aor midd/pass dep indic, 3 s ῥυομαι save, rescue

καὶ ῥύσεται a number of later MSS read the present tense ῥυεται, presumably to 'improve' the flow of the text with a transition from past, through present, to future.

ἠλπικαμεν Verb, perf act indic, 1 pl ἐλπίζω hope

The evidence for inclusion/omission of ὅτι is finely balanced. On the whole it seems best to include it, judging omission to be an attempt to ease the awkwardness of multiple particles.

ἔτι still, yet, moreover

Verse 11

συνυπουργούντων καὶ ὑμῶν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τῇ δεήσει, ἵνα ἐκ πολλῶν προσώπων τὸ εἰς ἡμᾶς χάρισμα διὰ πολλῶν εὐχαριστηθῇ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν.

συνυπουργεω join in and help, help

δεησις, εως f prayer, plea

πολυς, πολλη, πολυ gen πολλου, ης, ου i)

much, many

προσωπον, ου n face, presence

χαρισμα, τος n gift (from God)

I.e. God's gift to them of deliverance in answer to the prayers of many (δια πολλων). "The many' (οἱ πολλοι) suggests the majority of the Corinthian church who had recently declared their allegiance to the apostolic ministry in a time of testing and had dissociated themselves from the recalcitrant person(s) who had fomented a rebellion against Paul (2:6; 7:12)." Martin

εὐχαριστηθῇ Verb, aor pass subj, 3 s εὐχαριστεω thank, give thanks

The sense seems to be that if many persons have prayed for the gift bestowed on the apostles by God, thanks will be given by many on their behalf. Martin suggests that 'the many' in both instances is the same – one group not two. W.G.Rutherford translates the latter part of the verse "that there may be a sea of upturned faces as a widespread thanksgiving goes up to God on our behalf for the gracious act which he has done for us."

"In retelling this account – even with some tantalising obscurities – of his ordeal in Asia, Paul makes it plain that he was saved from the jaws of death by God's signal mercy and favour in answer to his prayer. Yet God worked through the prayers of his people (v.11), and Paul does not forget this side of the story as well. Those who prayed for him ... are invited to share his gladness. There is no finer stimulus to our prayers than when we hear from some friend at home or abroad that he or she is rejoicing in an answer to our praying on his or her behalf." Martin