

NT Reading Plan 2020

Living Hope Fellowship
2 Corinthians 1-7

Comfort

After the initial opening greeting, Paul writes a wonderful passage on comfort. The words "comfort," "comforts," or "comforted" come up 9 times in this opening body of the letter. Go read the last paragraph of the letter in chapter 13 for a thematic connection.

1. Besides the God of all Comfort, the Father is the Father of _____, _____ (there are 2 correct answers) in 1:3?
2. What is comfort the antidote for in chapter 1? In other words, because we experience _____, God responds with comfort.
3. How does God prepare us to minister to people in their afflictions?

Personal

2 Corinthians is immensely personal. You get a real sense for who Paul is as a person and pastor. It gushes from the heart with personal example, passionate persuasion, genuine concern. He is much less linear and systematic here like he was in Romans. In a sense, he is more off the cuff, from the heart, in the moment. As such, the cadence of the book is quite rapid and feels disjointed at times upon the first (or 5th!) pass. You will often find yourself wondering what a paragraph has to do with the ones before and after, for example. Paul seems to shift gears without clear cues sometimes. How are these paragraphs related? The following section will help you know why and give you a better grasp on interpreting this "diary of an apostle."

Personal Defense

Understand that there is quite a backstory to 2 Corinthians. A good Bible introduction or study Bible introduction will help you here greatly. Suffice it to say, Paul has had a lengthy history with the Corinthian church, first in planting the church during his 2nd missionary journey (see Acts 18), then his subsequent 18 month pastorate there.

Paul then went on to Ephesus where he ministered for close to 3 years, writing 1 Corinthians from there in response to multiple reports of trouble within the church (see notes on 1 Cor.). After leaving Ephesus, Paul got subsequent reports of continued issues in this church. 1 Corinthians had not resolved all the issues and new problems were surfacing.

Paul hoped the Christians would take his advice and resolve things on their own without his intervention. They didn't. Paul then personally left profitable ministry to come to Corinth in order to help set things right. He described that as a "painful visit." Things weren't going well. The Corinthian church seemed more fractured than ever, exacerbated by a group of religious leaders who arose in direct defiance of Paul, even calling his credibility as an apostle into question. Their false teaching was a cover up for their own immorality. And to make the sting worse, the church was listening to them instead of him!

Can you imagine a pastor's heart being ripped out his chest when this is the condition of the flock he had labored for despite the threat of death at every turn (1:8)? He didn't even get paid by the Corinthians for his ministry. Other churches supported him so he could give out

the word of God for free in Corinth. His life was known to them. His doctrine was biblically sound, substantiated in the OT and further revealed to him in Christ by God himself. Paul faced every obstacle and adversity in bringing the gospel there, but none of them so painful as sheep defecting to follow false shepherds whom Paul will sarcastically call super-apostles (11:5; 12:11).

This book will be much harder to understand for anyone who has not labored in gospel ministry and had their hearts ripped to shreds in the process. I've just begun in pastoral ministry and I've just begun to understand the depth of personal pain and yet enduring hope in Christ that Paul so intimately shares here. Ministry has never been for the faint of heart. It's always been for those with a contrite and broken heart.

I have told my wife many times, if I die, please have the preacher select something from 2 Corinthians 4 or 5...or just read the whole thing! Those chapters reverberate in my very core like lightning in my veins.

Please don't just think you are going to church. Please don't just consume church. Please don't follow any wind of doctrine and any charismatic life. And even more, please don't just ghost the church and never speak to your pastor again. Any decent pastor bleeds for the sheep. What we are doing here in the family of faith is intensely personal, very emotional, keenly relational, extremely satisfying, yet incalculably costly. For Christ and his kingdom, out of all the arenas of the universe, are specifically opposed by Satan, maliciously slandered, incredulously forsaken even by those close to your heart in the church! And this is why Paul carried around "the daily pressure on [him] of [his] anxiety for all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:28). Ministry will always test our resolution that Christ is worthy of all, but remember, "we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too" (1:5).

To help understand the flow of 2 Corinthians, you must know that Paul is making a **personal defense** of his ministry in light of the false apostles (aka super-apostles) who are discrediting him. Therefore, be on the lookout for the following key words (in the ESV at least): "commend," "commending," "commended," "boast," "boasting." Also, if something doesn't make sense, ask yourself if Paul is being sarcastic or using hyperbole (exaggeration) to make his point.

4. What are some credentials that Paul drums up to support his viability as a minister of the New Covenant? In other words, what can he cite to "commend" himself to them?

5. Therefore, in light of his commendations, where is his "boast"?

Reconciliation through Substitution

Paul reminds of what the central theme of our New Covenant ministry is and the only path to reconciliation: through the substitutionary death of Christ. Please memorize this succinct verse which captures the heart of the gospel!

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (5:21).

6. In this verse, what does Christ get from you? What do you get from him?