



THE
FOOLISHNESS
OF THE CROSS
1&2 CORINTHIANS

#NT18
LEADERS GUIDE

NT LEADER'S GUIDE

2 CORINTHIANS

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GOSPEL TRAINING CENTER
AT LAKEWOOD

 **Lakewood**
BAPTIST CHURCH

NT Leader's Guide: 2 Corinthians

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2 CORINTHIANS

Authorship & Audience

According to 1:1, Paul wrote this letter to the church at Corinth. Likely, he wrote this epistle around AD 55, about a year after he wrote 1 Corinthians. While we know this book as 2 Corinthians, and it is one of two letters we have preserved in Scripture to the church at Corinth, it seems there were at least four letters Paul wrote to this church. The first letter we know of is one mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9. The second is 1 Corinthians itself. The third is the painful letter he references in 2 Corinthians 2:3-4, and the fourth is 2 Corinthians. Knowing about these different letters helps us make sense of Paul's references to previous letters in this work, and it also reminds us of the close relationship Paul has with this church. Even his severe words in this letter come from a deep-seated love and affection for this church.

The audience of this letter is the church at Corinth. As noted in the introduction to 1 Corinthians, the people of Corinth valued honor, progress, power, and wealth. These cultural values have seeped into the church, and it seems that things have gotten worse since Paul wrote 1 Corinthians.

Purpose

Paul writes to defend his apostolic ministry. The charge against him seems to be that he has suffered too much to be truly set apart by God. Paul turns this criticism on its head, and he argues that his suffering is actually the proof that he is a true apostle. For, in his suffering, Paul embodies the cross. Indeed, we could say that Paul takes the theme of 1 Corinthians - the foolishness of the cross - and now applies it to his ministry. His work as a minister of the gospel will appear foolish to the world. His work will look more like the cross than like success in this world.

Contemporary Application

We can pull two major strands of contemporary application from this letter. First, the letter helps us in evaluating Christian leaders and

churches. Second, on a more personal level, this letter helps us understand how suffering plays into the Christian life.

As far as evaluating ministers and ministries, Paul makes clear that gospel work being carried on in the name of Jesus will look nothing like earthly success. In fact, a successful ministry may look like failure to the world. The fundamental criterion for evaluating ministers and ministries is whether or not they proclaim “Jesus Christ as Lord” (4:5). Christian leadership has more in common with slavery than being a CEO.

Second, Paul’s lessons on suffering do not apply merely to Christian leaders but to all believers. The way of the Christian life is the way of the cross. These sufferings can be considered light and momentary (4:16) because of the reality of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15) and the future hope of believers in God’s presence. This is not a call merely to wait out suffering until the world to come, but to use suffering as a means to advance the gospel (1:3-11). Suffering for Christ is a sign that we are following Christ. His people will embody the cross as they take this message of reconciliation to the world (5:11-21).

Discussion Questions

2 Corinthians 1:3-11 | In these verses, what does Paul highlight as the purpose of God’s comforting us in our own suffering? How have you been able to use challenges from your life to comfort others with the hope of Christ?

2 Corinthians 2:14-17 | The image of a triumphal procession is from a Roman victory parade following a great battle. Paul pictures himself as having been conquered by Christ but now happily following Christ. How does this image of being conquered and being a servant undermine the Corinthian expectations (and even our own expectations) of what Christian leadership looks like? Why is Paul pleasing to those being saved but the fragrance of death to those who are perishing? Is the same true for faithful Christian leaders today?

2 Corinthians 3:12-18 | How do we refer to what Paul calls the ‘old covenant’ and the writings of Moses? What does Paul mean that a ‘veil’ is over their faces when they read the Old Testament (vv. 14-15)? According to v. 16, when is this veil removed? What do we

see, according to v. 18, when that veil is removed and we read the Old Testament? What happens to us by God's Spirit as we read his Word? Keeping in mind the books (the OT) Paul is referencing here, what does that say about the value of the Old Testament for believers today?

2 Corinthians 4:1-6 | According to Paul in these verses, how should we evaluate a Christian church or ministry? What is the one criterion for success? Why do 'disgraceful, underhanded ways' seem appealing for a church? Where do you need to work to proclaim and promote, not yourself, but Jesus Christ as Lord?

2 Corinthians 4:7-15 | Note particularly v. 7. Why is weakness a mark of Paul's true apostleship? How does the fact that Paul's ministers from weakness give you hope that you can faithfully serve the Lord where you are now?

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 | What kind of 'light' troubles has Paul experienced in his life? How was he able to view these as 'light and momentary'? What do we need in order to share this same perspective?

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 | How did God in Christ reconcile us to himself? What is Paul's ministry of reconciliation? How can we today be ambassadors for this reconciliation?

2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1 | How are the people of the church 'the temple of the living God'? What does it mean for us to be the temple? How does Paul call on us to live in light of this reality?

2 Corinthians 7:8-13 | Paul's last letter brought them much grief. Why was this actually a good thing? What is 'godly grief'? How does this differ from other kinds of grief? Do Christians still need to repent?

2 Corinthians 8:1-15 | What does Paul call upon the Corinthian church to do in these verses? How would you summarize his counsel to someone who was asking you about giving away your finances? Look at v. 9, how is the grace of Christ the foundation for our giving?

2 Corinthians 9:1-15 | In v. 5, what kind of giving does Paul commend? In v. 7, how does Paul describe this type of giving? How does such generosity ‘enrich one in every way’ (v. 11)?

2 Corinthians 10:12 | In chapter 10, Paul returns to the theme of defending his ministry. There are those in Corinth who are unimpressed by Paul’s presence. He is not as successful or as influential as the Corinthians would like him to be. Paul is speaking here of comparing himself with other ministers, but how could we apply these verses to the church as a whole? In other words, why is it harmful to begin comparing our church to another? The Corinthians looked for eloquence and prestige: what are we tempted to wrongly prioritize as the signs of a good church? Look again at 2 Cor. 4:5-6. According to these verses, what is actually the true sign of a successful, God-honoring church?

2 Corinthians 11:21-33 | In these verses, what does Paul list as the signs of his true apostleship? What does that tell us about the nature of the Christian life?

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 | How was Paul’s weakness actually God’s grace to him? What hardship in your own life is helping you to see the truth of v. 9?

2 Corinthians 13:11-14 | How should these instructions mark our life together as a church?



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