

2 Corinthians
Treasure in Jars of Clay:
Humble Service in the Age of Celebrity

Paul planted the church in Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18). Later while ministering in Ephesus, he learned of trouble in the church. This news prompted him to write 1 Corinthians. It seems that in between the writing of 1 Corinthians and the composition of this letter, the Corinthians entertained false teachers who attempted to undermine Paul’s authority by questioning his qualifications as an apostle. This provoked a quick, unexpected visit from Paul that he called “painful” (2 Corinthians 2:1). While still reeling from the conflict in that encounter, Paul delayed a planned visit to receive the collection being taken among Gentile churches for famine relief for Jewish believers in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-4). His opponents used his delay as evidence of instability and lack of trustworthiness. Therefore, Paul wrote another letter that was not preserved. Just like his visit, this letter was painful, too (2 Corinthians 2:3-4; 7:8-9). In a state of near desperation, Paul sent Titus to Corinth to determine what effect, if any, his letter had on the situation. Titus eventually returned to Paul with good news that served as God’s source of comfort to him.

Second Corinthians paints a detailed portrait of God’s servants that stands in stark contrast with the world’s superficial snapshot of leadership. In this letter, Paul teaches us that:

God works through humble servants, the weak and the frail, to display the glories of his power and sufficiency of his grace.

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2.	Praise him because suffering and comfort teach us to trust.....	1:8-11
II.	Paul defends the integrity of his ministry	1:12-7:16
A.	Paul responds to his critics in Corinth	1:12-2:13
1.	He declares the integrity of his actions	1:12-14
2.	He denies the charge of insincerity.....	1:15-22
3.	He explains why he had changed travel plans	1:23-2:4; 12-13
4.	He appeals for love shown through forgiveness	2:5-11
B.	“The Great Digression:” Glorious ministry through weakness	2:14-7:4
1.	The nature of true ministry: It is glorious!.....	2:14-4:6

	True ministry is glorious . . .	
	a. because of the Triumph of Christ.....	2:14-17
	b. because of the sufficiency from God	3:1-6
	c. because of the superiority of the New Covenant	3:7-11
	d. because of the transforming power of the Spirit.....	3:12-18
	e. because of the illuminating effect of the gospel	4:1-6
2.	The path of true ministry leads through suffering	4:7-5:10
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	b. The suffering messenger serves by faith.....	4:13-5:10
	1) By faith he hopes in the resurrection	4:13-15
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	2. Committed obedience deepens affection within the church	7:13b-16
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A.	Generous giving for the sake of Gospel ministry	8:1-8:15
	1. An example of generosity: the Macedonian churches	8:1-6
	2. A challenge to generosity as evidence of Christian love	8:7-15

¹ At first glance, this section seems out of place, sandwiched between two aspects of Paul's defense. However, this marks a return to the issue used as a point of criticism leveled against Paul: his delayed visit to receive the collection for Jerusalem. But since there was now movement toward reconciliation, Paul announced his plan to return to Corinth. In so doing, he implied that the fault for his delay in coming rested with the Corinthians, not with him.

B.	Generous giving received through careful planning	8:16-9:5
1.	Care was taken to establish honorable testimony	8:16-24
2.	Care was taken to encourage timely action.....	9:1-5
C.	Generous giving and its divine reward	9:6-15
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A.	Paul describes the exercise of his authority	10:1-11:15
1.	He exercised powerful authority	10:1-6
2.	He exercised authority through weakness.....	10:7-11
3.	He exercised authority in his assigned sphere of activity	10:12-18
B.	Paul distinguishes his authority from that of false apostles.....	11:1-12:10
1.	He “boasts” of superiority in knowledge and love	11:1-15
2.	He “boasts” of service through sufferings	11:16-33
3.	He “boasts” of God’s power made perfect in his weakness	12:1-10
C.	Paul threatens to exercise his authority during a third visit.....	12:11-13:10
	He would exercise “severe” use of authority . . .	
1.	If they failed to reject the false teachers	12:11-21
2.	If they refused to repent of immorality	13:1-10
V.	Final words of encouragement.....	13:11-14