

# Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians

## Introduction

### Historical Evidence

The evidence from the early Christian authors is much the same as that for the first letter. Writers who knew of it and quoted from it include :- Irenaeus ( c. 120-200), Athenagoras ( 2<sup>nd</sup> century), Clement of Alexandria ( died c. 215) and Tertullian ( c 160 – 220+) it is also listed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Muratorian Canon. Clement of Rome in the last quarter of the first century made references to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> letters by quoting the same OT verses as Paul, - in chapter 13, 'An Exhortation to Humility', we find, “ *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, neither let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in the Lord, in diligently seeking Him, and doing judgment and righteousness*”, which takes origin from Jeremiah 9:23,24 and appears in 1Cor. 1:31 and 2 Cor. 10:17.

### Reason for Writing

Paul appears to have had three reasons to write this second letter :-

1. To mitigate the consequences of the first letter. The harshness of this 1<sup>st</sup> letter may have been too severe and been counter productive and generated hostility to him and to Christianity. So he had to placate the Corinthians (although Titus may have already excused his attitude).
2. To urge more generous giving to the fund for poor Church in Jerusalem. He compared the rich and miserly Corinthians unfavourably with the poor but generous Macedonians. As one who has experience of health education I have known that it is **never** wise or profitable to either, compare parties unfavourably, nor to deliberately generate feelings of guiltiness. In making these adverse comparisons Paul would have simply caused resentment among the proud Corinthians and given them cause to doubt his credentials.
3. To defend his right to be called an 'Apostle', and his right to authority and respect. Paul had spoken to the members of the Corinthian Church in a manner in which they were not accustomed. They considered themselves superior and somewhat special, so why should they accept the castigations of this upstart? After all he had never been among the disciples during Jesus' ministry, he had brought no letters of introduction from the apostles in Jerusalem<sup>1</sup>, when in Corinth he had not claimed the right of free maintenance – the right of a true apostle, but had accepted that right from the Macedonians – the Corinthians wanted to show just how well they could wine, dine and entertain a genuine apostle! He appeared to them as being hypocritical, devious and he was cowardly, since he had failed to come to visit them and sort out the problems face to face. While he was capable of writing nasty letters he was afraid to come in person, because, at least in part, he was a poor debater. They may well have been suspicious of his exhortations to provide alms for Jerusalem and not accept their entertainment. Was this an attempt to obtain a gratuity without giving the Corinthians the pleasure of boasting about their generous banqueting? For the money minded Corinthians anyone who did something for nothing had an ulterior motive – in someway he was working for himself!

Paul was never successful in establishing a stable church in Corinth, his own abrasive personality and the Corinthian attitude were never to be compatible. A quarter of a century later Clement of Rome was to write to the Corinthian church, “ *Every kind of honour and happiness was bestowed upon you, and then was fulfilled that which is written, "My beloved did eat and drink, and was enlarged and became fat, and kicked." Hence flowed emulation and envy, strife and sedition, persecution and disorder, war and captivity. So the worthless rose up against the honoured, those of no reputation against such as were renowned, the foolish against the wise, the young against*

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<sup>1</sup> Paul had felt the need for letters of authorization from the Jerusalem Jewish hierarchy before embarking on his Damascus expedition!

*those advanced in years. For this reason righteousness and peace are now far departed from you, inasmuch as every one abandons the fear of God, and is become blind in His faith, neither walks in the ordinances of His appointment, nor acts a part becoming a Christian, but walks after his own wicked lusts, resuming the practice of an unrighteous and ungodly envy, by which death itself entered into the world.” - Chapter 3. And in chapter 38 “Let our whole body, then, be preserved in, Christ Jesus; and let every one be subject to his neighbour, according to the special gift bestowed upon him. Let the strong not despise the weak, and let the weak show respect unto the strong. Let the rich man provide for the wants of the poor; and let the poor man bless God, because He hath given him one by whom his need may be supplied. Let the wise man display his wisdom, not by [mere] words, but through good deeds. Let the humble not bear testimony to himself, but leave witness to be borne to him by another. Let him that is pure in the flesh not grow proud of it, and boast, knowing that it was another who bestowed on him the gift of continence. Let us consider, then, brethren, of what matter we were made,—who and what manner of beings we came into the world, as it were out of a sepulchre, and from utter darkness. He who made us and fashioned us, having prepared His bountiful gifts for us before we were born, introduced us into His world. Since, therefore, we receive all these things from Him, we ought for everything to give Him thanks; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”*

It appears, therefore, that the members of the Church in Corinth had in no way been altered by Paul's letters.

### **Where and When Written**

The letter was written in Macedonia in around 55.