

2 Corinthians Class 1 Transcript

Greetings, and welcome back to FI Online. We're glad you can join us as we begin this new series of classes on the book of **2 Corinthians**.

As this is the first class, we don't have any questions to answer this evening, but as always, we do want God's blessing upon our classes. So, if you would join me, please bow your heads, and we'll ask God's blessing.

[Prayer]

[1:21]

Last year when we finished up a series on **1 Corinthians**, as always, the media [department] and administration get together and talk about what should we do for this next year's class. And it seemed rather obvious that where we should begin is where we left off last year, moving from **1 Corinthians** into **2 Corinthians**.

The period of time between the two epistles is relatively short, although there are some significant issues that have arisen in that period of time, and it's very important to understand this. So, as always as we begin, let's begin with understanding a bit of the background of this particular book.

It would be easy for us to just launch into it, but if we do, we're going to miss a great deal about what Paul is actually addressing in this book. It is unique in its approach. So, to get that background let's at least briefly refresh our minds on Paul's contact with the Church in Corinth in the first place. You may remember Paul's first journey. He and Barnabas left Syrian Antioch, went to Cyprus, from there up into what we would call the central portion of Turkey today, and visited Churches—established Churches actually—in Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Derbe and Iconium, then came back to the coastal area of Turkey and sailed back to Syrian Antioch.

They were there for a period of time, and it is during that period of time, as we go through the book of **Acts**, that Paul—that the issue of Gentiles in the Church and what God expects of them reached a very important decision-making point. **Acts 15** tells us of the important conference in Jerusalem to decide exactly what God expected of Gentiles. Was circumcision necessary? What was their relationship to the whole legal system that had existed under Judaism? All of those decisions had to be made, and the Church had to be unified. So, **Acts 15** tells us about that conference and the decision that was made.

Very shortly after that conference, we're told that Paul and Barnabas agreed that they needed to go back and visit those Churches that had been raised up in the first journey. And of course, that's one of the lessons that we derive from that, that God doesn't expect us simply to preach the message and go our way, but He expects us to care for those that He calls to be a part of His Church. Now unfortunately, there was a dispute between Paul and Barnabas about taking John Mark with them, and it ended up with Paul taking Silas—or Silvanus, as he is sometimes known—and going overland back to those Churches, while Barnabas went another direction.

[4:14]

Now, they resolved their differences as time went by. But Paul's second journey led him back to those Churches where he had originally been with, again, with Antioch, Lystra, Derbe, Iconium. And then he had hoped to go north to the area along the Black Sea, the area called Bithynia. But, the way was blocked. God did not allow that to take place.

So, Paul looked to the west, and to the west was the very prosperous and growing province of Asia, which

included its capital city, Ephesus, and all of those that we sometimes think of as the seven Churches of Revelation. But again, the door was blocked, and Paul was not able to go there. So he ended up in the coastal city of Troas.

And, when he is in Troas—hadn't been there very long—and there is a vision of a man from Macedonia, saying: "Please come over and help us." And we are told in the book of **Acts** that Paul and Silas, and those who were with him at that point—Timothy is also with him, and there is some indication that Luke is also with him at this point—they sailed quickly across to the port city of Neapolis and then from there to the city of Philippi in Macedonia.

Paul and Silas are there for a relatively short period of time, and we read the story there of how there was a great uproar. Paul and Silas are beaten unjustly, illegally, because Paul, at least—and perhaps Silas—is a Roman citizen. They're thrown in jail. We have the famous story of the Philippian jailer.

Then Paul and Silas go on down the very important trade route called the Via Egnatia to the city of Thessalonica. Again, they are there for a short period of time until there is another uproar, and Paul and Silas leave there and go to Berea, which is off the Egnatian Way and therefore perhaps a little bit calmer area.

We're told in the book of **Acts** that the Bereans were "more noble" than the others, and they truly searched the Scriptures daily to find out if what Paul was teaching was true. It was a very positive response among the Berean people. But again, some of those who had been stirring up trouble before came along, and before long it was deemed it was wisest to send Paul away so that he didn't continue to create a problem for the people there—not that he was creating the problem, but their animosity toward him was.

[6:51]

So Paul goes to Athens, and of course we have the famous story in the book of **Acts** about Paul in Athens before the Areopagus. No real fruit is produced in Athens, and Paul goes on to Corinth. So, in this second journey, this is his first contact with the people of Corinth. Corinth, as we explained last time, was a very profligate city, and Paul, frankly, did not expect there to be a great response. But again, Jesus Christ appeared to him in a vision and said: "Stay here. I have many people here." And apparently Paul spent about 18 months, and a very encouraging and growing congregation in Corinth began to develop.

From there Paul took with him Priscilla and Aquila, who had been in Corinth when he arrived, and sailed very shortly across the Aegean to Ephesus. But he didn't have time to stay in Ephesus at this point; he was headed back to Jerusalem and then back to Antioch. And his second journey ended.

Then Paul began his third journey. And, in this case, again he went back overland through the central part of what we would call Turkey and goes directly to Ephesus. Now Paul ends up spending about three years in Ephesus. This was apparently the longest period of time he spent anywhere.

It is during that period of time that messages come from Corinth. First of all, there's a message from those of Chloe's household that says: There are problems in Corinth. There are divisions that are taking place in the Church. People are choosing up their heroes, some saying: I am of Paul. I am of Apollos. I'm of Cephas, or Peter. We saw that as we looked at the beginning of **1 Corinthians**.

So, Paul has to address that, and he sends a letter to them. The letter was somewhat corrective. There are parts of **1 Corinthians** we saw that were really very corrective in many ways. So he sends that letter across to the people of Corinth, and as we've said, that probably took place around the Days of Unleavened Bread in 55 A.D. I personally think it was just before that period of time because of the material covered in **1 Corinthians**. He addresses the Passover and things that needed to be done **there**.

And then he says at the end of **1 Corinthians 11**: The other things *I will set in order when I come*. That probably indicates that he planned to come to Corinth fairly soon. So, this creates at least a timestamp for us to kind of begin figuring out when **2 Corinthians** comes along.

[9:32]

Now we're told in the book of **Acts** that toward the end of Paul's three-year period in Ephesus, there is a great uproar. And we have the famous story of Paul—well, he's on the outside—but the uproar that takes place with thousands of people gathering in the theater in Ephesus in defense of their goddess Diana, or Artemis of the Ephesians. We don't know exactly what may have taken place and all the details there, but it appears that it's relatively shortly after that that Paul leaves Ephesus and heads—because he intends to go in to visit, first of all, Macedonia, and then to come to Corinth. But there are a number of issues that are involved along the way.

If we look at the end of **1 Corinthians chapter 16**, we will see in **verse 8**, Paul says that he intends to remain *in Ephesus until Pentecost*. So, if he sent **1 Corinthians** just before the Days of Unleavened Bread and Passover, probably—and again, that's when **1 Corinthians 16** is written, obviously—so he is saying at that time: “I intend to stay here until Pentecost. And then I'm going to make my way toward you.” And he tells them: “I want to spend some time with you, not just a brief drop-in visit. I want to spend a little time, and then I have to go back to Jerusalem because there's something special going on.”

During this period of time, there's been a bit of a difficult time, some kind of a famine of some sort that's taking place in the area of Judea. And Paul has been—over a period of a few years now—has been encouraging the brethren through Asia and Macedonia and the southern part of Greece, called Achaia, he's been encouraging them to put together a contribution that can be sent to those who are in need in Judea. So, he is telling them he needs to wrap up some of that and that he wants to take that—after he visits in Corinth for a while, he wants to take that and take it to those who are in need.

And then he tells them that after that time: “I know I need to go on to Spain and to go through Rome on the way.” So, he's going to—he's telling them ahead of time: “Here's my travel plan. I do plan to come see you again.” That's going to be important as we go a little further.

So, sometime around Pentecost, he leaves Ephesus; he goes north to Troas. He is very concerned though, because while the letter of **1 Corinthians** produced some very positive response for some, the word has come back to him that there are those who are resistant. There may be some specific issues that are involved. We'll talk about that in just a moment. But not everyone responded well.

[12:28]

It's likely that Paul sent **1 Corinthians** with Timothy. Timothy was a very kind person, very understanding, very patient, and the kind of person that, if a person's in a good attitude, they're going to respond to Timothy quite well. But not everyone was in a good attitude, and therefore, Paul's found the need to send someone who's a little stronger. And he sent Titus. We're not sure exactly all the details that take place here. One of the things we have to realize is that the book of **Acts** gives us an outline of certain events in Paul's life. It's not really a history of Paul. There are several very important things that are left out that we would really like to know about, but it's not there in the book of **Acts**. The book of **Acts** has a different direction, different purpose to it. So, we don't have all the details.

Paul talks about, in **2 Corinthians**, a very strong letter that he sent to the Church in Corinth. We have sometimes assumed that that was **1 Corinthians** itself because, of course, there are certainly some corrective things there. But, the tone of it indicates that maybe there's another letter that was sent, and we don't have that particular letter. It's sometimes called “the severe letter.” And, it is likely that if such a letter

did exist, it was probably sent with Titus.

Titus was sent then to Corinth. Titus has not returned when Paul leaves Ephesus. In fact, they had agreed that after he visited Corinth and tried to deal with the issues there, that he would meet Paul in Troas. So—Troas is a port city—Paul goes north from Ephesus to Troas. And, he says that when he gets there, there is a door open to him. But he says: “I can’t stay. Titus isn’t here, and I need to know what’s going on. I’m very concerned about Corinth.” So, he sails from Troas, goes across again to Philippi. And in Philippi, Titus joins him. Titus is going overland to come back that way. So, Titus joins him there, and he gets a mixed message.

First of all, Titus says the people have responded very, very well. Most of them, even those who were a bit resistant in the first place, have responded well to this visit. We’ll talk about the visit in a moment, as well. But they’ve responded well, and they’re listening to what you’re saying, and they’re trying to straighten out. And there’s been a great deal of repentance, and they have a great deal of love and concern for you. They’re thankful that you’ve taken the time to try to help them through this situation.

[15:16]

The mixed part of the message is: it appears there are some other people who have shown up in Corinth. Maybe [they] weren’t a part of the original problem. But these individuals have come on the scene, and now they are trying to undermine Paul and the message that he brought. We will see as we go further, it’s clear that these individuals were Jewish. We don’t know all the details there. But it’s clear from the things that are said that they come from that kind of a background.

Now one of the things that we learn—and we’ve seen it historically, and we certainly will see it over and over again in modern history as well as down through time—but one of the strategies that is used by individuals who want to gain a following is that, first of all, in order to get people to follow **you**, you’ve got to get them to question what they’re already following and believing. And, one of the most effective ways to undermine something that they have come to believe is to undermine the teacher who taught it to them in the first place. So that’s what we’re going to see. We’re going to see that these individuals have come to Corinth, and they are attacking Paul. They are putting themselves forward, and they’re saying that Paul should not be the one you listen to. We’ll see some interesting traits about them as we go a little further.

But Paul knows that he has to go there and confront that situation directly, but, he needs to give them time to consider what he’s saying. So it appears that probably from this area of Philippi, Paul wrote **2 Corinthians** and sent it to them. Again, we’re not sure exactly how he sent it. Perhaps again he sent Titus back, but it was sent to them. And, in it he tells them why he hasn’t been there up to this point, and he also tells them that he is coming and that he will be addressing those situations. So, he’s encouraging them to try to understand a little bit more and to make the right kind of decisions.

All of that is a part of Paul’s third journey as he is going there. And again, he’s going to ultimately leave from Corinth, take all of the things that have been gathered for those who were in need in Judea. He’s going to take that with him, sail to Judea, take it up to Jerusalem. And, though we don’t want to go through the rest of the story at this point, it is while he is in Jerusalem that he is arrested, put in confinement for two years in Caesarea under King Herod, and then after that, sails to Rome and is in confinement for a couple of years there. That’s where the book of **Acts** ends.

[18:00]

So, we get a little bit of the background. Paul probably, when he did visit Corinth this second time after sending the—well, maybe the third time; we’ll again talk about that—but after sending **2 Corinthians** to them, he probably spent the winter there. It appears that that’s what he intended to do. So, leaving

Ephesus after Pentecost, making his journey up to Philippi for a period of time, probably briefly through Thessalonica and Berea and then down to Corinth, probably sometime in the early summer or mid-summer, and then spending the winter with them. And then, in the spring when it became safe to travel in the Mediterranean again, sailing back to Judea. So, it gives us a little bit of a time span there. It seems that it was a minimum of probably three months, at least, that he spent with them.

Now, you may notice on our map that we've shown the area of Greece. You note that the northern area is called Macedonia, and the southern area, Achaia. Those are not the names that are used exactly the same way today. There is a country called Macedonia, but the Greeks make a very big issue with the fact that it's not really ancient Macedonia; it's just a name they took. So, when we read about this area—Paul says: "I'm going to visit Macedonia" —he's talking about Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea. Those congregations we're aware of. But he's coming to Achaia, which would be Corinth, primarily, as the congregation.

Now historically when we think of Achaia, probably that's the main area of Greece we think of, because we think of, in the history, the cities that were important: Athens, Corinth, Sparta, Olympus. All of those are in the area that would be called Achaia. And that was the most influential part of Greece. The northern part was much more mountainous and not many cities in the same way in that area.

[20:01]

Alright, let's move a little bit further on here. Now I want to mention to you as well—I hope it will be helpful to you—but, one of the things that we will make available to you in watching this series is a one-page study guide for the book of **2 Corinthians**. Now it doesn't have all the questions and answers that you need to be able to understand the book, but we hope it will be helpful for you. That as we go through it, the study guide will give you certain words and phrases to focus on, and we want to make sure that we understand what these mean, what are they? Such as: the "day of salvation," or the "ministry of reconciliation," or the "ministry of death," or the "ministry of the Spirit." What are we talking about? We want to focus on those.

And then we also give you several questions—I think I have eight of them here—for you to think about as we go through the book. It's not a test. It's not a quiz. It's just a study guide. And it's a one-page guide that you can download, and we hope that you will find it helpful as we go forward.

Now we've talked a good bit about the historical background of this particular book, and we need to go forward with that to understand just a little bit more. As we said, Paul was very concerned about the words that he heard, the message that he heard from Corinth saying: "The conditions there—there are some serious situations." And, especially these people that are coming in and are beginning to attack Paul. Now we're going to see something important about that, and I want to emphasize that a little bit more. But also, let's consider this: There are a couple of things that are missing as we look at this, and we really wish we had more information about it, but we don't.

When we go through **2 Corinthians**, Paul will talk about his impending visit there as his third visit to Corinth. Well, we know the first visit that took place when he established the congregation there. And we know that this one is coming up, but we have no listing of another visit to the city of Corinth. So, does that mean it didn't occur? Well, again as we said, there are several things in the book of **Acts** that are missing, and we don't know. It would certainly make sense that Paul would've had another visit there. After all, consider that, as we read in **1 Corinthians 6 [11]**, toward the end of that chapter, he's talked about straightening out things so that the Passover is observed correctly. But then he says: *And the rest I will set in order when I come.*

Now that, in probably most people's minds, would indicate that he's going to be coming before long. If

there is no second trip to Corinth, then it's going to be at least a year and a half before he comes there. That doesn't seem to fit with what he said. But then again, we can't prove there was a journey to Corinth, either. Some have assumed, therefore, that when he talks about this third visit or third trip to Corinth, that he is looking at **1 Corinthians** as being kind of like a metaphoric visit with them, or a trip—that he sent it to them, and that was it, and that that's what's referred to as the "severe letter." Again, it's possible, and that has been our traditional understanding of it, but it's certainly not possible to prove that. And there are many aspects of **1 Corinthians** that don't seem to fit with that.

What's more, we would also say that as we examine **2 Corinthians**, there are a number of issues that were brought up in **1 Corinthians** that are not even mentioned. Apparently, those issues were resolved; they're taken care of, and we don't find them anymore. So, he's addressing a **whole new** set of situations when we come to **2 Corinthians**. So, it's a little hard to get exactly the chronology, but we get at least a sense of that.

[23:59]

Now, when Paul is still in Ephesus, before he leaves and heads up into Macedonia, he receives news—probably from Timothy, who has visited there and come back—that there are more difficulties there. There are these individuals who've come in—and we'll see that Paul refers to them as self-styled false apostles, individuals who present themselves as if they are apostles—they are sent with authority to this area to teach and to instruct and even to correct the Corinthian congregation. These individuals come along and present themselves in that way. And in order for them to be able to present what **they** want people to do, the very first thing they need to do is undermine Paul. And so they begin by pointing out some of the deficiencies that they think Paul has, and we'll see this as we go a little bit further.

Paul knew that some of the rebellious attitudes that had been in Corinth were still continuing there, but he also becomes aware of these individuals who are unnamed. We have no names for them. There's no particular individual. Perhaps Paul didn't even know the names of the individuals involved. But it wasn't the individuals he was concerned about. It was their message that was undermining the work that Jesus Christ had done through Paul when he was there with those people.

Paul traveled up to Macedonia, as we said, looking for Titus. He wasn't there, but when he met—oh excuse me—he was in Macedonia when he got there. He went to Troas looking for him, he wasn't there. But when he met Paul in Macedonia again, Titus had good news that many had responded, but, there were also a few more who were in a very wrong attitude. And, of course, when correction comes along, basically that's what happens—people get kind of sorted into two groups: those who heed the correction and respond, and those who refuse to and just set their will, and they become hardened and determined they're going to have their own way, and they're not going to be corrected by this individual who sent this to them.

So we recognize that Paul is aware of this, and he knows, as a shepherd, as a pastor, he can't just ignore that; he has to go and address it. But, he wisely recognizes sometimes it's best to give people a little bit of time. Their initial reaction may have been rebellion and anger, but given a little bit of time, maybe they can stop and consider the situation. So he wants to give them at least a little bit of time to work through that.

When he writes to them, he doesn't specifically say he's in Philippi, but it appears that that's where he is. And some of the early manuscripts apparently even included the word—the words—that said he was writing from Philippi. He is in Macedonia when he tells them in **2 Corinthians 9** and **verse 2**—let's just look there for a second here in **2 Corinthians 9** and **verse 2**.

Paul says: **2** *for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was*

ready a year ago (He's talking about this contribution.); *and your zeal has stirred up the majority.*

Now, what I'm—we will see that in more detail as we get there. But, what he is saying there is written in the present tense. So he's telling them: "This is where I am, and I'm telling the people here about you and how you're responding in a very positive way." So obviously he intends to come to Corinth in a very short time.

[27:51]

Now we have a possible chronology here, so let's just share this and talk about it for a moment.

- **1 Corinthians**, probably written sometime around the spring of A.D. 55. As we've said, probably right before the Days of Unleavened Bread.
- Then he describes what is called a "painful visit." In other words, there were individuals who were having a problem. Remember in some of those issues that he addressed in **1 Corinthians**, there was an individual who had been openly involved in a flagrant sexual misconduct, a sin. And Paul had said: "This individual needs to be put out. You need to get together, and you need to stand firm in this." And people had not been doing that. So, there are going to be different reactions to that. There are going to be some individuals in the Church who are saying: "Oh, I'm so grateful that someone finally stepped up and did something. We shouldn't be allowing this to be in the Church." There were undoubtedly others who said: "Well, that's just being too harsh. We need to be more loving and patient with this person." Well, that wasn't the right solution, but undoubtedly there were people who felt that way. So, there are certain divisions that are taking place in the Church. And again, we talked about that through **1 Corinthians**. Paul, or at least someone, apparently made a visit there. If there was a visit by Paul—and again, and I certainly believe it's possible—that probably would've been in the summer or fall of 55 A.D.
- This is followed by, in the spring of 56 A.D., what is referred to as the "severe letter," a very corrective letter. And again, we'll talk more about that in just a moment. Paul leaves Ephesus in the spring of 56, right after Pentecost. He is in Macedonia in the summer of 56 A.D. Titus travels from—excuse me—Titus arrives in Macedonia during that time Paul is there, in 56 A.D., and he [Paul] writes **2 Corinthians**, probably late summer, early fall, just before he goes to be with them in Corinth over the winter.

POSSIBLE TIMELINE FOR 2 CORINTHIANS

- 1 Corinthians—spring A.D. 55
- Painful visit—summer or fall A.D. 55
- Severe letter—spring A.D. 56
- Paul leaves Ephesus—spring A.D. 56
- Paul in Macedonia—summer A.D. 56
- Titus arrives in Macedonia—summer A.D. 56
- 2 Corinthians—fall A.D. 56

Now the painful visit, the "severe letter" that we talk about, are feasible, but they are not easily proven. Again, the book of **Acts** doesn't tell us.

There has been a common assumption that **1 Corinthians** was this "painful letter" and that Paul referred to that letter as "a visit." There are a number of difficulties with that explanation. As we mentioned, we talked about him saying: "I'll set the rest of this in order when I get there."

Some have also concluded that the situation involving the man who was involved in the sexual immorality was dividing the congregation and that some were reluctant to follow what Paul said to do. Others, probably when the man was put away—now we'll see as we get into **2 Corinthians**, there is every indication that the man repented of his sin. And, there was a problem. There were people in Corinth who wouldn't forgive him. There were people in Corinth who were being too harsh in dealing with him **after** his repentance. So, we've got to deal with that in the congregation as well. And that may have opened the door for some of those who were attacking Paul, who were attacking Paul's character itself.

Now if there was another letter, why don't we have a copy of it? Well, we've said early on that Paul probably wrote scores of epistles, and we only have 13 or 14 of those epistles available to us today. Some of them were very specific about specific situations.

Now consider this: If Paul had had to write a very corrective letter to the Corinthian congregation **and** most of the people in the congregation had responded to that correction, had repented—as again **2 Corinthians** will show us—and were trying to do things in the right way, why would you want to preserve for all time a letter that told all of us about the mistakes that they were making? It would be kind of a stain on the Corinthian congregation from that point forward. So, it's certainly understandable that we might not have a letter that Paul wrote that was rather corrective, but the problem was addressed.

[32:14]

Okay, let's back up and say: Now why did Paul write this particular letter? Obviously, he's very concerned about what's taking place in Corinth. Titus had been sent to address some of those concerns. He had returned with a report that most of the Church members were responding very well. But, there was still a core of opposition from some who had apparently come to Corinth since Paul had been there.

Apparently, these individuals are coming on the scene. And again, Paul describes them as false apostles. He describes himself as an apostle. We'll see that at the very beginning of **2 Corinthians**. He describes himself in those terms. These individuals apparently described themselves in that term as well, that: "We are apostles as much as Paul. We are just as good as Paul." And of course, whenever anybody says: "I'm just as good as...", that means: "I'm better than..." It's just a kind of a phrase. It doesn't sound nice to say: "I'm better than...", so we say, "I'm as good as..." That's what they were saying about Paul. They were as good as...; they were apostles as much as he was.

But there were certain things that they were doing, as well, that the apostle Paul wasn't doing. For example, it appears that they were receiving income—financial income and support—from the tithes and offerings given there by the brethren in Corinth. Now Paul didn't do that. It appears, at least from the book of **Acts**, from what we can tell and from other passages as well, that Paul, when he went to a certain area, he did not receive tithes and offerings from the people in that area while he was there. In other words, it seems that he was concerned that if he received his financial support from the people he was working with at the time, well, it could give the impression that he was just there to get the money from them. So Paul says: "I'm not going to give anybody that opportunity. I will go..." And when he initially went to Corinth, he worked with Priscilla and Aquila. It says they were tentmakers or leather workers; the term is a broad term. But he worked with them to support himself and even those who were with him.

But we also read, as we go through the story, that the brethren in Philippi, at least twice while he's there, send funds to support him, and that when they do, he stops doing the tentmaking, and so on, and devotes himself full-time to teaching the gospel and taking care of those who are involved. So it wasn't that Paul wouldn't receive tithes and offerings, but he wouldn't receive it from those he was working with at the time. At least that appears to be the principle. These individuals are coming on the scene, and they not only are willing to receive it, they're **expecting** to receive the tithes and offerings. Now that's going to be an interesting result.

[35:07]

It also appears that because of that, because these individuals were taking the tithes and offerings for themselves, that the contribution that was being put together for those who were in need in Jerusalem was suffering. People were saying: "Well, we're already giving all of this to these individuals. We don't have that much extra that we can send." So Paul is very concerned about that aspect of it as well.

We also should understand that Paul is responding here, but he is being personally attacked. Now, there are many times when Paul was personally attacked, and he just simply chose to ignore the attacks because most of the time, that's probably the best thing to do. When people attack you personally, most of the time, what are you going to say? They accuse you of having a certain attitude. How do you prove that isn't my attitude? You can look at my actions, and they should show you that. But if somebody wants to say: "No, no, his real motives are..." Well, what can I do? You'll have to be the judge of that.

So Paul, in essence, many times does not defend himself when he is attacked by others. But in this case he does. Why does he do that? Because, in this case, the attack is intended to undermine him, so that his teaching is also undermined. There are many examples through history of individuals who've come along, who have perhaps taught something that was true, but their own flaws destroyed the validity of what they said. People could no longer trust them and rely upon them, and so many people turned away because the servant himself was flawed. And that's probably a mistake in many cases, but it's common. So their attempt was to attack Paul, to undermine the message that he brought so that they could teach something that was different. So therefore he felt a need to step up and defend himself. The gospel message, which he received directly from Jesus Christ, was being undermined. So, he wasn't so concerned about defending himself, but he had to remove **any doubt** about the message.

Those seeking to pull away people from one group to become followers of themselves typically follow a three-step pattern. Now, it's the same pattern that is used in those individuals who are involved in cults today. But I think it's a fascinating pattern as we look at it.

1. The very first step is to give people special attention, especially those who are vulnerable—people who may feel like: "Well, I'm not being recognized for what I'm doing. I am kind of being overlooked. Those in charge always have their friends, and they do things with them, and I'm just here, and I'm a nobody." And so someone comes along and begins to give them special attention, begins to tell them: "You know what? You're really important. You know, you're the real core of this group. You're the ones who are really faithful and loyal." You give them special attention, make them feel good.
2. The second step, then, is they gradually encourage them to distrust and pull away from their previous relationships, even isolating them from family and friends. Now cults today very commonly do that. They find young people who may be vulnerable at this particular point in life, and they begin to befriend them so that we have these new relationships that are so rewarding and supportive, and: "Those people that I used to be around, even family, well, they don't understand." That's a good way to put it. "They don't understand what you understand now. Your mind is being opened to something new and wonderful, and they don't understand. Well, you can be with us, and we'll help you. And, you know, you're probably not going to be able to be around those people that much." And they begin to pull away.
3. And then the third step is to encourage them to quit looking to the ones that they had trusted before and look to the new teachers for everything that they need.

PROCESS FOR GAINING FOLLOWERS

Three-step process for gaining followers (used by cults)

1. Give people special attention, especially the vulnerable.
2. Gradually encourage them to distrust and pull away from previous relationships; isolate them from family and friends.
3. Encourage them to look only to their new teachers.

It's a three-step process that, again, has been used throughout the centuries. This was taking place in Corinth. These individuals had come along, and of course, for the many people who had repented, who respected Paul, who trusted him, who had responded very positively, they weren't interested in what these individuals were saying. But for those who maybe were a little more vulnerable, here came these individuals on the scene, and, wow, they really seem to be impressive. They were perhaps far more

eloquent than Paul. Paul tells us he wasn't a particularly eloquent person. These individuals may have been very eloquent, just really convincing, persuasive, and there were those who would be vulnerable to that. And because it was persuasive, they may begin to doubt and question their own trusting in Paul and wondering about those other people who did. So, over that period of time, they began to be influenced, and you begin to pull a group apart. Paul could begin to see this taking place.

[40:31]

So, as we begin **2 Corinthians**, he begins by addressing the majority, those who had responded positively to his correction and instruction. And he wanted to assure them of his love and his confidence in them. You know, sometimes when you have to correct someone, they may feel that from that point forward, they're always suspect in your eyes. But that's not the way it should be. And I think for most of us, no, we wouldn't feel that way at all. If someone—we address a problem that someone has, and they respond, and they change; that's wonderful! We don't continually look at them and think about them as having failed at some point in the past. That's not a very healthy way to view people. And Paul wanted to assure them that: "No, I'm not thinking of you in that way. Okay, you stumbled, but you didn't fall. You didn't stay there. You got up, and you started going in the right direction. That's great! I have **confidence** in you that that's what you're going to continue to do." He wanted them to know that. If there was any lingering reticence or concern on their part, Paul wanted to kind of figuratively wrap his arms around them and assure them that any of the sins that had been there were forgiven and put aside.

As an aspect of renewing that relationship with them, he also encourages them to renew their collection for those who were in need in Judea. In doing that, he shows them that he's putting the past mistakes behind, and he is expecting them—since they've changed—to step up and to renew their dedication that they had previously been showing in this particular area. And in doing that, he's showing them that they are fully brethren. He trusts them. He relies upon them the same way he does for the brethren in Philippi or Thessalonica or Berea or back in Ephesus. He's relying on them. He considers them "brethren." So, he is encouraging them to take part, to make that commitment to doing the work that needs to be done at this point.

Now it's obvious that Paul is planning to come to see them soon, and he knows when he gets there, there's going to be a showdown between him and those false apostles who were attacking him and his apostleship. One of their accusations against him was because several times Paul had expressed that he wanted to come back and visit the brethren in Corinth, and yet he had been unable to do that. We find the same thing in the book of **1 Thessalonians**, where Paul tells them: "Well, I wanted to come, and yet the door has continually been blocked to me." So, Paul wants to assure them that he really intends to be there with them. He has a great desire to come and see them, but he hadn't been able to be there up to this point.

So, he explains to them, as we go through the first part of the book, some of the reasons why he didn't come immediately. In other words, he recognized there were some issues there, and he wanted to give them time to process and respond to the corrective letter that he had sent them, instead of him just showing up the next day and wanting to see the response. You want to give them time. So he shows them that.

[43:54]

Now, as we go through the letter, we will find a great deal of what we would call this "ministry of reconciliation," this reconciling people, in the first part. But when we come to **chapter 10**, we will see there is a **marked** change. He directly begins to address those who are causing division and attacking him. Not only does he address them, but he addresses the rest of the Church too, in a very important way.

These individuals have been judging Paul, and Paul advises them: “Okay, if you’re going to judge for yourselves,”—which is not a bad thing to do; we are told to judge with righteous judgment. Jesus Christ said to do that. —“if you’re going to judge with righteous judgment, let’s hold everyone up to the same standard. These individuals are coming in and saying I am not a true apostle. I don’t have this to back me up, or that, and they do. Okay, let’s hold everyone to the same standard, and then **you judge** who is the true apostle of Jesus Christ, and who isn’t.” It’s very important.

We’ll see as we get to **chapter 11**, he specifically talks about false ministers who come along and present themselves as—remember the term—“angels of light,” just like Satan presents himself as an angel of light. These individuals present themselves as those who bring spiritual light and truth. He says: “Okay, let’s look at them. Don’t just take their word for it. Don’t just look on the surface of something that looks religious and sounds righteous. Let’s look a little deeper. Let’s see what it is. Don’t be deceived by somebody coming along and sounding righteous or sounding so wonderful and so enthusiastic about their ‘new knowledge.’ No, you need to be more careful than that.” And **chapter 11** will take us there.

Who were these false apostles? Well, they were apparently not the same ones who had divided the congregation into parties in **1 Corinthians**, because none of the problems that were addressed in **1 Corinthians** are addressed in **2 Corinthians**, in that way. It appears that these individuals were advocating some kind of Jewish law-keeping system for salvation. But it’s interesting that we read nothing really about circumcision as we go through here, as we might have seen in **Galatians**.

In **2 Corinthians 11** in **verse 22**, Paul makes it clear that these individuals were Jewish, probably from Judea. They had come to the Church from outside. In other words, this was not a group of individuals who had developed within the Corinthian congregation. These were individuals who had come from outside and were trying to influence that congregation and begin to pull people away.

2 Corinthians 3 and **verse 1** seems to indicate that these individuals brought with them documents that attested to their authority to teach within the Church. Their primary efforts, as they were dealing with the Corinthian brethren, seem to have been aimed at undermining Paul and turning the people to them. There are several different things which they claimed, and Paul is going to address these as he goes through the remainder of the book.

[47:23]

First of all, they said Paul was inconsistent and capricious. In other words, he is one way one day and another way another day, and you never really know how Paul’s going to be. Okay. They also accuse Paul of “lording it” over other people. That he was the apostle, and he just expected everybody to bow and scrape to him. Okay. Was that really true? Is that the way it was? Paul, as an apostle, had a responsibility to make certain decisions, to bring correction where needed, but was that overstepping or lording it over the people, or was that a shepherd’s genuine care for those who were involved? It’s easy to, if your attitude is a little bit skewed, it’s easy to begin seeing wrong things in what was right. An old phrase comes back to mind when I read this about Paul lording himself over people. It’s an old phrase that came up, oh, 20, 25 years ago, about individuals who are “sheriffs instead of shepherds.” Many times the accusation was totally false. But nonetheless, it’s a common phrase, and when people feel like they don’t really like to respond to someone in authority, it’s very easy to say: “Well, they’re just abusing their authority.”

They accuse Paul of actually limiting their spiritual growth, saying: “Well, Paul isn’t telling you the things that we know. We can give you more, and you can grow more.” They accuse Paul because he had no letters of recommendation saying that he was an authorized representative. The only way that Paul brought forward his message was on his own authority, and, of course, Paul told them that: “I was taught by Jesus Christ Himself. So, I’m sent as an apostle of Jesus Christ.” These others are saying: “Well, no,

we have backing from others who are in authority.” Now who they were, we don’t really know.

They also said that Paul was impressive at a distance, but, when you’re around him, he’s really rather weak and contemptible. Paul doesn’t really dispute that. He doesn’t come along and say: “No, no. I’m dynamic!” No, he doesn’t do that, and this is just a rather cheap shot. You know, it’s somebody who perhaps was not big and strong, and so on, but maybe kind of short and unimpressive and thin. We don’t know what Paul looked like. Scripture doesn’t tell us, but he tells us he was not physically impressive. And there were people who seemed to make a point of that, that somehow this indicated some spiritual weakness.

Paul refused to receive tithes and offerings, they said, because he knew he was a fraud. He knew that God would not want him to take the tithes and offerings because he wasn’t really entitled to them, so he didn’t do that. Well, again, we’ll see what takes place there.

[50:17]

And finally, they said that this collection that was for the saints in Judea, that that was all a scam. That Paul was really just gathering all these things together, he would leave, and you’ll never see him again. So, all of those accusations are apparently made against Paul.

On the other hand, they also made some claims for themselves. They claimed that they were eloquent and had higher knowledge and that, of course, that’s what a true apostle should have. They claim this proved their apostleship—because of their eloquence. Well, again, we would certainly hope that most of us as Christians would look at this and say: “Okay, eloquence is not really what matters.” It’s nice if a speaker is eloquent. It’s nice if they can present things in a really fascinating way. But history, even the modern history of the Church, has shown us: eloquence doesn’t equate with conversion. We need to be more aware of what the truth is.

These individuals said they had visions from God. So Paul is going to say: “Alright, you want to talk about visions? Let’s do that.” They claimed that they had performed healing miracles. They carry letters of commendation from recognized authorities—whoever that might be; we don’t really know. They came from Judea, the home of Judaism, the place where Jesus Christ carried out His ministry. They didn’t come from some Gentile city like Paul, who came from Tarsus. I mean, you’ve got to be suspicious of someone like that! Well, at least that’s the message that they’re sending.

They claim to hold Moses and Abraham in high regard, and of course, they claimed that Paul just ignored them, put them down as if they didn’t matter.

And finally, they claimed they were preaching the **full** gospel message, not a partial one, like Paul. Well, Paul recognizes that it can be difficult to perceive who is the true minister and who is the fraud. So he addresses the issues, and he invites the members to judge for themselves. Reminds you of an old phrase that probably many of you heard a long time ago: “Don’t believe me; believe your Bible.” That’s what Paul is, in essence, saying to these people: “Don’t believe the words that you hear. Don’t believe my words, just because I say them. Do some judging, the proper way—judging with righteous judgment—and see what the truth is.”

The followers of Jesus Christ, Christians, are not required to be mindless automatons who march in lockstep behind what everyone tells them to do. You have minds. You’re intended to use those minds. In fact, that’s part of the reason for God’s calling, so that those minds can be changed.

[53:15]

Remember what He told us in **Isaiah [55:8]**? God said: “*My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways*

My ways. My ways and My thoughts are higher than yours.” Now what does that tell you? I know what it tells me. It tells me: if God’s ways and thoughts are higher than mine, and mine are not the same as His, it isn’t God who needs to change His thinking; it’s me. I need to learn to think in a different way. And I’m sure you feel the same way.

So, Paul is inviting them to think. Not to just be robots who do whatever they’re told. But to think. But to do so on the right basis. Not on the basis of emotions swinging you one way or another. Not on the basis of half-truths. Look at the whole truth.

On the positive side, it’s also been said that **1** and **2 Corinthians** together are wonderful examples of practical, pastoral ministry—how pastors are to care for the brethren. They contain some very powerful examples of the heart of a shepherd in the care of his spiritual flock, as well as the approach a father takes in jealously protecting his children from danger and helping them learn how to protect themselves from danger.

In addition, there is a great deal here about the appropriate conduct of a New Covenant minister. Paul doesn’t tell them what they have to think. He empowers them to understand and make choices on their own.

Finally, we’ll just simply say that as far as this epistle of **2 Corinthians** is concerned, it was accepted from some of the very earliest days as being genuinely written by Paul and genuinely as a part of Scripture. It is quoted as early as 105 A.D. by Polycarp, and 185 by one named Irenaeus. These are some of the early writers that we recognize. Polycarp, of course, we have a great deal of interest in because it appears that Polycarp was in fact an elder of the Church of God who lived in Ephesus—a **faithful** minister. And so, for him to quote this as early as 105 A.D. indicates that he believed it was in fact the truth of God as recorded by Paul. So, we have that record for us.

So, with that we finish the background of the book of **2 Corinthians**, and in our next class we will start in **verse 1** of **chapter 1**.

In the meantime, we hope that you will download the study guide that we are making available for you. And remember that with any of these classes, you have one hour after the class is broadcast to send in any questions you might have, and we’ll try to answer those questions as we begin the next class.

Thank you for joining us.

[56:13]