

2.4 Paul's Churches: II Corinthians

David Moseley, Ph.D.

In contrast to the many forms of dysfunction on display in the Corinthian church that Paul addresses in his first letter, II Corinthians really only focuses on one central issue – Paul's authority in the Corinthian church as an Apostle. He rails against so-called "Super Apostles" that have challenged and undermined his leadership and pastoral supervision, which resulted in a painful public humiliation for Paul when he visited Corinth to try to address this matter. He then responds passionately with a robust defense of his Apostleship, employing various rhetorical and polemical forms to win over his audience through a rigorous analysis of his public and private personae. However, this issue is addressed in very different ways depending on which part of the letter you are reading...because most scholars regard II Corinthians as a composite of two (or more) different letters written at different times and in contrasting circumstances, which have been fused together, but unfortunately reversed in terms of the chronology – the *earlier* letter making up chapters 10-13, very harsh and sarcastic in tone; and the *later* letter, more friendly, conciliatory and pastoral, is found in chapters 1-9. [Please consult the Corinthians Timeline handout.] It has been said that II Corinthians shows the distinctive individuality of Paul more than any other, fully illustrating what Paul wrote when he said in I Corinthians 9:22: "*I have become all things to all people, so that I might by any means save some.*"

Assignment #7 for Class on Saturday 9th March 2019

Reading

Please read through Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. I suggest reading the Introduction to the Letter in your Oxford Annotated NRSV Bible beforehand; and then reading through the Letter in two self-contained sections that correspond to what are considered to be the two separate letters combined in II Corinthians: (1) First read II Corinthians 10-13 [which may be the earlier "Letter of Tears" (II Cor 2:3–4 and 7:8)]; and then (2) II Corinthians 1-9, which is written subsequent to the last four chapters of the book. Go back and re-read the Letter again at a subsequent time, using the annotations in your NRSV to help with clarification and interpretation.

Thinking & Responding

For this week's Response Paper, I would like you to consider the criteria Paul discusses (directly and indirectly) in II Corinthians with regards to his understanding of what makes a true Minister of the Gospel. Think about how he compares and contrasts genuine, authentic Apostleship with what he considers to be the phony characteristics of his opponents. Is Paul's abrasiveness alienating? Does he manage to balance out Judgment and Grace? Please write a Response of approximately 400-500 words on this subject (12-point font, double-spaced, one-inch margin, with your name at the top of the paper). Type up and print your Reflections, and be ready to share and discuss your Insights. I will collect them in to review and grade at the end of the class.