

New Testament Literature - 2 Corinthians and Galatians

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Session 18

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. Dave Mathewson explores the historical contexts, pastoral motivations, and theological themes of 2 Corinthians and Galatians. In 2 Corinthians, Paul addresses lingering opposition to his apostolic authority, arguing that authentic authority is demonstrated through suffering and divine strength perfected in weakness. Moving to Galatians, Dr. Mathewson examines debates surrounding its destination and date, particularly how Paul's visits to Jerusalem align with the book of Acts. Ultimately, the lecture highlights Paul's impassioned defense of justification by faith alone apart from the Mosaic Law, emphasizing that Christian obedience is generated through the new covenant Holy Spirit.

Outline

I. Introduction to 2 Corinthians: Background and Pastoral Context

- A. Overview of Paul's Correspondence with Corinth
 - 1. Paul's visits and at least four total letters written to Corinth (Acts 18)
 - 2. Survival of 1 and 2 Corinthians in the New Testament canon
- B. Events Preceding 2 Corinthians
 - 1. Positive response by most Corinthians to 1 Corinthians
 - 2. Challenge to Paul's apostolic authority by troublemakers
 - 3. The "Painful" or "Tearful" letter (2 Corinthians 2:4)
 - 4. Mixed reception: repentance by many, persistent opposition by others
- C. Occasion and Purpose of 2 Corinthians
 - 1. Praise for those who repented and responded positively
 - 2. Admonition and warning for those still opposing Paul ("super-apostles")
 - 3. Re-establishment of Paul's legitimate apostolic authority

II. Key Issues and Theological Themes in 2 Corinthians

- A. Literary Unity and Tone Shift
 - 1. Abrupt shift in tone between Chapters 1–9 (positive) and Chapters 10–13 (harsh/negative)
 - 2. Critical theories regarding compilation of separate letters
 - 3. Alternative explanations: writing over multiple sessions or addressing different subgroups

B. The Jerusalem Collection (Chapters 8–9)

1. Pragmatic and theological purpose: solidifying Jew-Gentile unity in the early church
2. Principles of Christian giving: generosity and gratitude rather than Old Testament tithing

C. Central Theological Theme: Power and Glory Through Weakness

1. Suffering and weakness as the authentic credentials of Paul's apostleship
2. Paul's "thorn in the flesh" and divine revelations (2 Corinthians 12)
3. Divine principle: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness"

III. Introduction to Galatians: Geographical Destination and Historical Context

A. The Recipient: "To the Churches of Galatia" (Galatians 1:1–2)

1. Difference between Galatia as a region/province vs. specific city

B. Geographical Debates

1. North Galatian Theory: address to ethnic Galatians in central/northern Asia Minor
2. South Galatian Theory: address to churches in southern Roman province (Lystra, Derbe, Iconium)
3. Scholarly consensus supporting the South Galatian destination

C. Chronological and Historical Debates

1. Alignment of Galatians 1–2 with Paul's Jerusalem visits in Acts (Acts 9, 11, 15)
2. Comparison between Galatians 2 and Acts 11 (famine relief) vs. Acts 15 (Jerusalem Council)
3. Implications for dating: early date (first written letter) vs. later date post-Jerusalem Council

IV. The Crisis in Galatia and Paul's Defense of the Gospel

A. The Opponents: The "Judaizers"

1. Christian Jews requiring Gentile converts to adopt Mosaic Law (circumcision)
2. Equation challenged: Faith in Christ + Mosaic Law = Justification

B. Paul's Theological Counter-Argument

1. Justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ apart from works of the Law
2. True obedience generated by the new covenant Holy Spirit rather than external law

C. Rhetorical Tone and Unique Features of Galatians

1. Absence of traditional thanksgiving section at the opening
2. Immediate expression of shock and distress (Galatians 1:6)
3. Personal handwriting in large letters as emotional emphasis and urgency (Galatians 6:11)