



PART 2

PAUL IN CORINTH: LEADERSHIP UNDER FIRE

Chapter Five

However, the division in the church reflected a serious leadership *vacuum* that had arisen in Corinth. After Paul's departure, Apollos had capably led that church for a season ([Acts 18:27–28](#); [Acts 19:1](#)). But Apollos had also moved on to other mission fields, and sometime after that is when the factions arose.

[Acts 18:27-28 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁷“And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace,
²⁸for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.”

[Acts 19:1 \(NASB\)](#)

¹“It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples.”

It is obvious from Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians that their internal strife and other troubles all stemmed from a lack of wise and godly leadership in the wake of Paul's and Apollos's departure. The Corinthian believers were tolerating immorality in their midst ([1 Corinthians 5:1](#)).

[1 Corinthians 5:1 \(NASB\)](#)

¹“It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.”

Believers were suing fellow Christians in secular courts ([1 Corinthians 6:1](#)).

[1 Corinthians 6:1 \(NASB\)](#)

¹“Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?”

People in the church were flirting with idolatry ([1 Corinthians 10:14](#)), disrupting the Lord's Table ([1 Corinthians 11:17–22](#)), and abusing their spiritual gifts.



1 Corinthians 10:14 (NASB)

¹⁴“Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.”

1 Corinthians 11:17-22 (NASB)

¹⁷“But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse.

¹⁸For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it.

¹⁹For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you.

²⁰Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper,

²¹for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk.

²²What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.”

On top of that, someone in their midst was beginning to raise questions about Paul's apostolic authority ([1 Corinthians 9:1-8](#)).

1 Corinthians 9:1-8 (NASB)

¹“Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?

²If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

³My defense to those who examine me is this:

⁴Do we not have a right to eat and drink?

⁵Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?

⁶Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?

⁷Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?

⁸I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things?”

That powerful first epistle seems to have resolved most of the urgent practical issues in the Corinthian church, but by the time Paul wrote [2 Corinthians](#), a new and even more troubling attack on the peace of the church at Corinth had arisen, suggesting that a lack of strong leadership continued to be a major problem there. False teachers, claiming a higher authority than that of the apostle Paul, had come to town and were systematically undermining the church's loyalty to their founder and Christ's apostle.

They raised new questions about Paul's apostolic credentials and began to attack Paul's teaching and his reputation for their own selfish agenda ([2 Corinthians 11:13](#)). They were clearly taking advantage of the leadership vacuum in that church.



2 Corinthians 11:13 (NASB)

¹³“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.”

Piecing together the clues in [2 Corinthians](#), here is what apparently happened next: Paul seems to have heard about the threat of false teachers in Corinth, so he left Ephesus (where he was then ministering) and traveled to Corinth to try to help resolve the issues there.

He had promised them in the earlier epistle that he would visit ([1 Corinthians 4:19](#); [1 Corinthians 11:34](#); [1 Corinthians 16:5](#)), so he seized this opportunity to go.

1 Corinthians 4:19 (NASB)

¹⁹“But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power.”

1 Corinthians 11:34 (NASB)

³⁴“If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you will not come together for judgment. The remaining matters I will arrange when I come.”

1 Corinthians 16:5 (NASB)

⁵“But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia.”

But the visit, under the circumstances, turned out to be a deeply sorrowful experience for Paul ([2 Corinthians 2:1](#)).

2 Corinthians 2:1 (NASB)

¹“But I determined this for my own sake, that I would not come to you in sorrow again.”

Apparently, someone in the church, influenced by the false teaching, sinned against Paul in a public and humiliating way—probably by defying him or insulting him. Paul seemed to refer to this individual in [2 Corinthians 2:5–8](#) (“But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent” [[v. 5](#)]).

2 Corinthians 2:5-8 (NASB)

⁵“But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree—in order not to say too much—to all of you.

⁶Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which *was inflicted* by the majority,

⁷so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort *him*, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

⁸Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm *your* love for him.”

In [2 Corinthians 2:4](#), and [2 Corinthians 7:9–12](#), Paul indicated that the episode prompted him to write a strongly worded rebuke in a letter (another non-canonical epistle), which he sent by way of Titus ([2 Corinthians 8:6, 16](#); [2 Corinthians 12:18–21](#)).



2 Corinthians 2:4 (NASB)

⁴“For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.”

2 Corinthians 7:9-12 (NASB)

⁹“I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of* repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of* God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us.

¹⁰For the sorrow that is according to *the will of* God produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.

¹¹For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.

¹²So although I wrote to you, *it was* not for the sake of the offender nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God.”