Long Story Short: 2 Corinthians

Key Historical Background to the Letter:

◆ After the writing of 1Corinthians, a number of people in the church rejected Paul's leadership and led an open rebellion against Paul's authority as an apostle. Paul visited Corinth to address this (referenced in 2:1) and the whole church humiliated and rejected him. In response Paul left and wrote what he calls a 'tearful and severe' letter (2:3-4).

◆ To Paul's joy, the majority of the Corinthian Christians responded positively to Paul's letter. They were sorry for how they mistreated Paul (7:8-12). There was, however, still a minority group there who opposed Paul and rejected him (11:12-21).

◆ Paul's opponents claimed that he lacked any skill in public speaking (11:6), that he had no leadership or courage (10:10-11), and that his suffering, poverty and persecutions were signs that God did not approve of his ministry (1:8-11; 11:24-29).

◆ 2 Corinthians is Paul's response to this faithful majority, and another rebuttal against the rebellious minority. The letter aims at (1) encouraging the majority that is still faithful to Paul and the Gospel (chs. 1-7), (2) to encourage them to give to the collection for poor Christians in Jerusalem (chs. 8-9), and (3) to offer the rebellious minority another chance to humble themselves before Paul returns again to confront them (chs. 10-13).

Flow of Thought in 2 Corinthians

1:1-11: Greeting and Introduction to the letter
1:12-7:16: Paul defends his legitimacy as an Apostle and teacher of the Gospel
  1:12-2:4: Paul explains his delay to come to Corinth as a gracious act to spare them, not a lack of integrity on his part.
  2:5-11: Paul has forgiven those who rebelled against him and so should the Corinthians
  2:12-17: So Paul plans to come to Corinth again soon
  3:1-6: Paul's credibility comes from the results of the Gospel in their midst to change lives by the Spirit
  3:7-18: Paul's Gospel brings the Old Covenant to completion, and can fundamentally transform human beings. This is all the authentication Paul needs.
  4:1-6:13: Paul's life and ministry are characterized by hardship and suffering
    4:1-18: Paul's suffering in furthering the Gospel don't discredit his ministry, rather they follow the pattern of the cross: God shows his power by bringing life and healing out of pain and suffering
    5:1-10: Suffering for the Gospel reminds us that our present bodies and this present world is not the new creation, we await the renewal of all things
    5:11-6:2: The Gospel is about reconciliation, and so Paul wants more than anything to be reconciled to the Corinthians who opposed him
    6:3-13: Paul's suffering shows how genuine his faith and commitment are. They should be a legitimation of his message instead of shameful
  6:14-7:1: Paul calls the Corinthians to separate from those who rejected him and his Gospel
  7:2-16: Paul rejoices over the Corinthians who humbled themselves and asked for forgiveness
8:1-9:15: Paul appeals to the faithful Corinthians to give to the Jerusalem poor
  8:1-15: Giving to the poor is an act of grace that imitates God's grace in sending Jesus
  8:16-9:5: Paul recommends Titus as a faithful co-worker who will come to collect the offering
  9:6-15: Generosity is rooted in joy and thankfulness, and is a way of spreading God's grace
10:1-13:10: Paul's appeal to the rebellious minority among the Corinthians
  10:1-11: Paul's lowly appearance and demeanor are meant to highlight God's power and grace
  10:12-18: In reality, Paul could pull rank on all the Corinthian opposition, but he won't use his authority in that way
  11:1-21: Paul defends his lowly appearance and demeanor: he didn't want the Corinthians to follow Christ out of the wrong motivation
  11:22-33: Paul boasts about his sufferings: they are his badge of honor
  12:1-13: Paul's weakness and how it actually draws attention to God's grace and not himself
  12:14-13:10: Paul's final defense and appeal to the rebellious Corinthians
13:11-14: Final greetings