

TYNDALE



# CORNERSTONE

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

## 1 Corinthians

William Baker

## 2 Corinthians

Ralph Martin &  
Carl N. Toney

GENERAL EDITOR

Philip W. Comfort



New Living  
Translation

CORNERSTONE  
B I B L I C A L  
COMMENTARY

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*with* Carl N. Toney

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*featuring the text of the*  
NEW LIVING TRANSLATION



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1 CORINTHIANS

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## GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* is based on the second edition of the New Living Translation (2007). Nearly 100 scholars from various church backgrounds and from several countries (United States, Canada, England, and Australia) participated in the creation of the NLT. Many of these same scholars are contributors to this commentary series. All the commentators, whether participants in the NLT or not, believe that the Bible is God's inspired word and have a desire to make God's word clear and accessible to his people.

This Bible commentary is the natural extension of our vision for the New Living Translation, which we believe is both exegetically accurate and idiomatically powerful. The NLT attempts to communicate God's inspired word in a lucid English translation of the original languages so that English readers can understand and appreciate the thought of the original writers. In the same way, the *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* aims at helping teachers, pastors, students, and laypeople understand every thought contained in the Bible. As such, the commentary focuses first on the words of Scripture, then on the theological truths of Scripture—inasmuch as the words express the truths.

The commentary itself has been structured in such a way as to help readers get at the meaning of Scripture, passage by passage, through the entire Bible. Each Bible book is prefaced by a substantial book introduction that gives general historical background important for understanding. Then the reader is taken through the Bible text, passage by passage, starting with the New Living Translation text printed in full. This is followed by a section called "Notes," wherein the commentator helps the reader understand the Hebrew or Greek behind the English of the NLT, interacts with other scholars on important interpretive issues, and points the reader to significant textual and contextual matters. The "Notes" are followed by the "Commentary," wherein each scholar presents a lucid interpretation of the passage, giving special attention to context and major theological themes.

The commentators represent a wide spectrum of theological positions within the evangelical community. We believe this is good because it reflects the rich variety in Christ's church. All the commentators uphold the authority of God's word and believe it is essential to heed the old adage: "Wholly apply yourself to the Scriptures and apply them wholly to you." May this commentary help you know the truths of Scripture, and may this knowledge help you "grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord" (2 Pet 1:2, NLT).

PHILIP W. COMFORT  
GENERAL EDITOR





# ABBREVIATIONS

## GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

b.	Babylonian Gemara	Heb.	Hebrew	NT	New Testament
bar.	baraita	ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same place	OL	Old Latin
c.	<i>circa</i> , around, approximately	i.e.	<i>id est</i> , the same	OS	Old Syriac
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare	in loc.	<i>in loco</i> , in the place cited	OT	Old Testament
ch, chs	chapter, chapters	lit.	literally	p., pp.	page, pages
contra	in contrast to	LXX	Septuagint	pl.	plural
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls	M	Majority Text	Q	Quelle (“Sayings” as Gospel source)
ed.	edition, editor	m.	Mishnah	rev.	revision
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example	masc.	masculine	sg.	singular
et al.	<i>et alli</i> , and others	mg	margin	t.	Tosefta
fem.	feminine	ms	manuscript	TR	Textus Receptus
ff	following (verses, pages)	mss	manuscripts	v., vv.	verse, verses
fl.	flourished	MT	Masoretic Text	vid.	<i>videtur</i> , it seems
Gr.	Greek	n.d.	no date	viz.	<i>videlicet</i> , namely
		neut.	neuter	vol.	volume
		no.	number	γ.	Jerusalem Gemara

## ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

ASV	American Standard Version	NCV	New Century Version	NKJV	New King James Version
CEV	Contemporary English Version	NEB	New English Bible	NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
ESV	English Standard Version	NET	The NET Bible	NLT	New Living Translation
GW	God’s Word	NIV	New International Version	REB	Revised English Bible
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible	NIRV	New International Reader’s Version	RSV	Revised Standard Version
JB	Jerusalem Bible	NJB	New Jerusalem Bible	TEV	Today’s English Version
KJV	King James Version	NJPS	The New Jewish Publication Society Translation	TLB	The Living Bible
NAB	New American Bible				
NASB	New American Standard Bible				

## ABBREVIATIONS FOR DICTIONARIES, LEXICONS, COLLECTIONS OF TEXTS, ORIGINAL LANGUAGE EDITIONS

ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (6 vols., Freedman) [1992]	BAGD	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 2nd ed. (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker) [1979]	BDB	<i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Brown, Driver, Briggs) [1907]
ANEP	<i>The Ancient Near East in Pictures</i> (Pritchard) [1965]	BDAG	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd ed. (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich) [2000]	BDF	<i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Blass, Debrunner, Funk) [1961]
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (Pritchard) [1969]				

- BHS *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Elliger and Rudolph) [1983]
- CAD *Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* [1956]
- COS *The Context of Scripture* (3 vols., Hallo and Younger) [1997–2002]
- DBI *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman) [1998]
- DBT *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (2nd ed., Leon-Dufour) [1972]
- DCH *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (5 vols., D. Clines) [2000]
- DLNTD *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development* (R. Martin, P. Davids) [1997]
- DJD *Discoveries in the Judean Desert* [1955–]
- DJG *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Green, McKnight, Marshall) [1992]
- DOTP *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (T. Alexander, D.W. Baker) [2003]
- DPL *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Hawthorne, Martin, Reid) [1993]
- DTIB *Dictionary of Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Vanhoozer) [2005]
- EDNT *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (3 vols., H. Balz, G. Schneider. ET) [1990–1993]
- GKC *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Gesenius, Kautzsch, trans. Cowley) [1910]
- HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, J. Stamm; trans. M. Richardson) [1994–1999]
- IBD *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (3 vols., Douglas, Wiseman) [1980]
- IDB *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (4 vols., Buttrick) [1962]
- ISBE *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (4 vols., Bromiley) [1979–1988]
- KBL *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros* (Koehler, Baumgartner) [1958]
- LCL Loeb Classical Library
- L&N *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (Louw and Nida) [1989]
- LSJ *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th ed., Liddell, Scott, Jones) [1996]
- MM *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Moulton and Milligan) [1930; 1997]
- NA<sup>26</sup> *Novum Testamentum Graece* (26th ed., Nestle-Aland) [1979]
- NA<sup>27</sup> *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th ed., Nestle-Aland) [1993]
- NBD *New Bible Dictionary* (2nd ed., Douglas, Hillyer) [1982]
- NIDB *New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Douglas, Tenney) [1987]
- NIDBA *New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* (Blaiklock and Harrison) [1983]
- NIDNTT *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (4 vols., C. Brown) [1975–1985]
- NIDOTTE *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (5 vols., W. A. VanGemeren) [1997]
- PGM *Papyri graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*. (Preisendanz) [1928]
- PG *Patrologia Graecae* (J. P. Migne) [1857–1886]
- TBD *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Elwell, Comfort) [2001]
- TDNT *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (10 vols., Kittel, Friedrich; trans. Bromiley) [1964–1976]
- TDOT *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (8 vols., Botterweck, Ringgren; trans. Willis, Bromiley, Green) [1974–]
- TLNT *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (3 vols., C. Spicq) [1994]
- TLOT *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (3 vols., E. Jenni) [1997]
- TWOT *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (2 vols., Harris, Archer) [1980]
- UBS<sup>3</sup> *United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (3rd ed., Metzger et al.) [1975]
- UBS<sup>4</sup> *United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (4th corrected ed., Metzger et al.) [1993]
- WH *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (Westcott and Hort) [1882]

## ABBREVIATIONS FOR BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

### Old Testament

Gen	Genesis	Deut	Deuteronomy	1 Sam	1 Samuel
Exod	Exodus	Josh	Joshua	2 Sam	2 Samuel
Lev	Leviticus	Judg	Judges	1 Kgs	1 Kings
Num	Numbers	Ruth	Ruth	2 Kgs	2 Kings

1 Chr	1 Chronicles	Song	Song of Songs	Obad	Obadiah
2 Chr	2 Chronicles	Isa	Isaiah	Jonah	Jonah
Ezra	Ezra	Jer	Jeremiah	Mic	Micah
Neh	Nehemiah	Lam	Lamentations	Nah	Nahum
Esth	Esther	Ezek	Ezekiel	Hab	Habakkuk
Job	Job	Dan	Daniel	Zeph	Zephaniah
Ps, Pss	Psalms, Psalms	Hos	Hosea	Hag	Haggai
Prov	Proverbs	Joel	Joel	Zech	Zechariah
Eccl	Ecclesiastes	Amos	Amos	Mal	Malachi

### New Testament

Matt	Matthew	Eph	Ephesians	Heb	Hebrews
Mark	Mark	Phil	Philippians	Jas	James
Luke	Luke	Col	Colossians	1 Pet	1 Peter
John	John	1 Thess	1 Thessalonians	2 Pet	2 Peter
Acts	Acts	2 Thess	2 Thessalonians	1 John	1 John
Rom	Romans	1 Tim	1 Timothy	2 John	2 John
1 Cor	1 Corinthians	2 Tim	2 Timothy	3 John	3 John
2 Cor	2 Corinthians	Titus	Titus	Jude	Jude
Gal	Galatians	Phlm	Philemon	Rev	Revelation

### Deuterocanonical

Bar	Baruch	1–2 Esdr	1–2 Esdras	Ps 151	Psalms 151
Add Dan	Additions to Daniel	Add Esth	Additions to Esther	Sir	Sirach
Pr Azar	Prayer of Azariah	Ep Jer	Epistle of Jeremiah	Tob	Tobit
Bel	Bel and the Dragon	Jdt	Judith	Wis	Wisdom of Solomon
Sg Three	Song of the Three Children	1–2 Macc	1–2 Maccabees		
		3–4 Macc	3–4 Maccabees		
Sus	Susanna	Pr Man	Prayer of Manasseh		

## MANUSCRIPTS AND LITERATURE FROM QUMRAN

Initial numerals followed by “Q” indicate particular caves at Qumran. For example, the notation 4Q267 indicates text 267 from cave 4 at Qumran. Further, 1QS 4:9-10 indicates column 4, lines 9-10 of the *Rule of the Community*; and 4Q166 1 ii 2 indicates fragment 1, column ii, line 2 of text 166 from cave 4. More examples of common abbreviations are listed below.

CD	Cairo Geniza copy of the <i>Damascus Document</i>	1QIsa <sup>b</sup>	Isaiah copy <sup>b</sup>	4QLam <sup>a</sup>	Lamentations
		1QM	<i>War Scroll</i>	11QPs <sup>a</sup>	Psalms
		1QpHab	<i>Peshar Habakkuk</i>	11QTemple <sup>ab</sup>	<i>Temple Scroll</i>
1QH	<i>Thanksgiving Hymns</i>	1QS	<i>Rule of the Community</i>	11QTgJob	<i>Targum of Job</i>
1QIsa <sup>a</sup>	Isaiah copy <sup>a</sup>				

## IMPORTANT NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

(all dates given are AD; ordinal numbers refer to centuries)

### Significant Papyri (P = Papyrus)

P1 Matt 1; early 3rd	same codex)	1 Cor 7–8,	P30 1 Thess 4–5; 2 Thess 1;
P4+P64+P67 Matt 3, 5, 26;	Phil 3–4; late 3rd		early 3rd
Luke 1–6; late 2nd	P20 Jas 2–3; 3rd		P32 Titus 1–2; late 2nd
P5 John 1, 16, 20; early 3rd	P22 John 15–16; mid 3rd		P37 Matt 26; late 3rd
P13 Heb 2–5, 10–12; early 3rd	P23 Jas 1; c. 200		P39 John 8; first half of 3rd
P15+P16 (probably part of	P27 Rom 8–9; 3rd		P40 Rom 1–4, 6, 9; 3rd

- P45 Gospels and Acts;  
 early 3rd  
 P46 Paul's Major Epistles (less  
 Pastorals); late 2nd  
 P47 Rev 9–17; 3rd  
 P49+P65 Eph 4–5; 1 Thess  
 1–2; 3rd  
 P52 John 18; c. 125  
 P53 Matt 26, Acts 9–10;  
 middle 3rd  
 P66 John; late 2nd  
 P70 Matt 2–3, 11–12, 24; 3rd  
 P72 1–2 Peter, Jude; c. 300  
 P74 Acts, General Epistles; 7th  
 P75 Luke and John; c. 200  
 P77+P103 (probably part of  
 same codex) Matt 13–14,  
 23; late 2nd  
 P87 Philemon; late 2nd  
 P90 John 18–19; late 2nd  
 P91 Acts 2–3; 3rd  
 P92 Eph 1, 2 Thess 1; c. 300  
 P98 Rev 1:13–20; late 2nd  
 P100 Jas 3–5; c. 300  
 P101 Matt 3–4; 3rd  
 P104 Matt 21; 2nd  
 P106 John 1; 3rd  
 P115 Rev 2–3, 5–6, 8–15; 3rd

### Significant Uncials

- Ⲙ (Sinaiticus) most of NT; 4th  
 A (Alexandrinus) most of NT;  
 5th  
 B (Vaticanus) most of NT; 4th  
 C (Ephraemi Rescriptus) most  
 of NT with many lacunae;  
 5th  
 D (Bezae) Gospels, Acts; 5th  
 D (Claramontanus), Paul's  
 Epistles; 6th (different MS  
 than Bezae)  
 E (Laudianus 35) Acts; 6th  
 F (Augensis) Paul's  
 Epistles; 9th  
 G (Boernerianus) Paul's  
 Epistles; 9th  
 H (Coislinianus) Paul's  
 Epistles; 6th  
 I (Freerianus or Washington)  
 Paul's Epistles; 5th  
 L (Regius) Gospels; 8th  
 P (Porphyrrianus) Acts—  
 Revelation; 9th  
 Q (Guelferbytanus B) Luke,  
 John; 5th  
 T (Borgianus) Luke, John; 5th  
 W (Washingtonianus or the  
 Freer Gospels) Gospels; 5th  
 Z (Dublinensis) Matthew; 6th  
 037 (Δ; Sangallensis) Gospels;  
 9th  
 038 (Θ; Koridethi) Gospels;  
 9th  
 040 (Ξ; Zacynthius) Luke; 6th  
 043 (Φ; Beratinus) Matthew,  
 Mark; 6th  
 044 (Ψ; Athous Laurae)  
 Gospels, Acts, Paul's  
 Epistles; 9th  
 048 Acts, Paul's Epistles,  
 General Epistles; 5th  
 0171 Matt 10, Luke 22;  
 c. 300  
 0189 Acts 5; c. 200

### Significant Minuscules

- 1 Gospels, Acts, Paul's Epistles;  
 12th  
 33 All NT except Rev; 9th  
 81 Acts, Paul's Epistles,  
 General Epistles; 1044  
 565 Gospels; 9th  
 700 Gospels; 11th  
 1424 (or Family 1424—a  
 group of 29 manuscripts  
 sharing nearly the same  
 text) most of NT; 9th–10th  
 1739 Acts, Paul's Epistles; 10th  
 2053 Rev; 13th  
 2344 Rev; 11th  
 f<sup>1</sup> (a family of manuscripts  
 including 1, 118, 131, 209)  
 Gospels; 12th–14th  
 f<sup>13</sup> (a family of manuscripts  
 including 13, 69, 124, 174,  
 230, 346, 543, 788, 826,  
 828, 983, 1689, 1709—  
 known as the Ferrar group)  
 Gospels; 11th–15th

### Significant Ancient Versions

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <p>           SYRIAC (SYR)<br/>           syr<sup>c</sup> (Syriac Curetonian)<br/>           Gospels; 5th<br/>           syr<sup>s</sup> (Syriac Sinaiticus)<br/>           Gospels; 4th<br/>           syr<sup>h</sup> (Syriac Harklensis) Entire<br/>           NT; 616         </p> | <p>           OLD LATIN (IT)<br/>           it<sup>a</sup> (Vercellensis) Gospels; 4th<br/>           it<sup>b</sup> (Veronensis) Gospels; 5th<br/>           it<sup>d</sup> (Cantabrigiensis—the Latin<br/>           text of Bezae) Gospels, Acts,<br/>           3 John; 5th<br/>           it<sup>e</sup> (Palantinus) Gospels; 5th<br/>           it<sup>k</sup> (Bobiensis) Matthew, Mark;<br/>           c. 400         </p> | <p>           COPTIC (COP)<br/>           cop<sup>bo</sup> (Boharic—north Egypt)<br/>           cop<sup>fas</sup> (Fayyumic—central Egypt)<br/>           cop<sup>sa</sup> (Sahidic—southern Egypt)         </p> <p>           OTHER VERSIONS<br/>           arm (Armenian)<br/>           eth (Ethiopic)<br/>           geo (Georgian)         </p> |
|--|---|--|

# TRANSLITERATION AND NUMBERING SYSTEM

*Note:* For words and roots from nonbiblical languages (e.g., Arabic, Ugaritic), only approximate transliterations are given.

## HEBREW/ARAMAIC

### Consonants

א	aleph	= '	מ, ם	mem	= m
ב, ן	beth	= b	נ, ן	nun	= n
ג, ן	gimel	= g	ס	samekh	= s
ד, ן	daleth	= d	ע	ayin	= '
ה	he	= h	פ, ן, ף	pe	= p
ו	waw	= w	צ, ן	tsadhe	= ts
ז	zayin	= z	ק	qoph	= q
ח	heth	= kh	ר	resh	= r
ט	teth	= t	ש	shin	= sh
י	yodh	= y	שׁ	sin	= s
כ, ן, ף	kaph	= k	ת, ן	taw	= t, th (spirant)
ל	lamedh	= l			

### Vowels

ֿ	patakh	= a	ֿ	qamets khatuf	= o
ֿ	furtive patakh	= a	ֿ	holem	= o
ֿ	qamets	= a	ֿ	full holem	= o
ֿ	final qamets he	= ah	ֿ	short qibbutz	= u
ֿ	segol	= e	ֿ	long qibbutz	= u
ֿ	tsere	= e	ֿ	shureq	= u
ֿ	tsere yod	= e	ֿ	khatuf patakh	= a
ֿ	short hireq	= i	ֿ	khatuf qamets	= o
ֿ	long hireq	= i	ֿ	vocalic shewa	= e
ֿ	hireq yod	= i	ֿ	patakh yodh	= a

## GREEK

α	alpha	= a	ι	iota	= i
β	beta	= b	κ	kappa	= k
γ	gamma	= g, n (before γ, κ, ξ, χ)	λ	lamda	= l
			μ	mu	= m
δ	delta	= d	ν	nu	= n
ε	epsilon	= e	ξ	ksi	= x
ζ	zeta	= z	ο	omicron	= o
η	eta	= ē	π	pi	= p
θ	theta	= th	ρ	rho	= r (ῥ = rh)

σ, ς	<i>sigma</i>	= s	Ψ	<i>psi</i>	= ps
τ	<i>tau</i>	= t	Ω	<i>omega</i>	= ō
υ	<i>upsilon</i>	= u	·	<i>rough</i>	= h (with
φ	<i>phi</i>	= ph		<i>breathing</i>	vowel or
χ	<i>chi</i>	= ch		<i>mark</i>	diphthong)

## THE TYNDALE-STRONG'S NUMBERING SYSTEM

The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series uses a word-study numbering system to give both newer and more advanced Bible students alike quicker, more convenient access to helpful original-language tools (e.g., concordances, lexicons, and theological dictionaries). Those who are unfamiliar with the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek alphabets can quickly find information on a given word by looking up the appropriate index number. Advanced students will find the system helpful because it allows them to quickly find the lexical form of obscure conjugations and inflections.

There are two main numbering systems used for biblical words today. The one familiar to most people is the Strong's numbering system (made popular by the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance to the Bible*). Although the original Strong's system is still quite useful, the most up-to-date research has shed new light on the biblical languages and allows for more precision than is found in the original Strong's system. The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series, therefore, features a newly revised version of the Strong's system, the Tyndale-Strong's numbering system. The Tyndale-Strong's system brings together the familiarity of the Strong's system and the best of modern scholarship. In most cases, the original Strong's numbers are preserved. In places where new research dictates, new or related numbers have been added.<sup>1</sup>

The second major numbering system today is the Goodrick-Kohlenberger system used in a number of study tools published by Zondervan. In order to give students broad access to a number of helpful tools, the Commentary provides index numbers for the Zondervan system as well.

The different index systems are designated as follows:

TG	Tyndale-Strong's Greek number	ZH	Zondervan Hebrew number
ZG	Zondervan Greek number	TA/ZA	Tyndale/Zondervan Aramaic number
TH	Tyndale-Strong's Hebrew number	S	Strong's Aramaic number

So in the example, "love" *agapē* [<sup>TG</sup>26, <sup>ZG</sup>27], the first number is the one to use with Greek tools keyed to the Tyndale-Strong's system, and the second applies to tools that use the Zondervan system.

The indexing of Aramaic terms differs slightly from that of Greek and Hebrew. Strong's original system mixed the Aramaic terms in with the Hebrew, but the Tyndale-Strong's system indexes Aramaic with a new set of numbers starting at 10,000. Since Tyndale's system for Aramaic diverges completely from original Strong's, the original Strong's number is listed separately so that those using tools keyed to Strong's can locate the information. This number is designated with an S, as in the example, "son" *bar* [<sup>TA/ZA</sup>10120, <sup>S</sup>1247].

1. Generally, one may simply use the original four-digit Strong's number to identify words in tools using Strong's system. If a Tyndale-Strong's number is followed by a capital letter (e.g., TG1692A), it generally indicates an added subdivision of meaning for the given term. Whenever a Tyndale-Strong's number has a number following a decimal point (e.g., TG2013.1), it reflects an instance where new research has yielded a separate, new classification of use for a biblical word. Forthcoming tools from Tyndale House Publishers will include these entries, which were not part of the original Strong's system.



# *1 Corinthians*

WILLIAM BAKER





## INTRODUCTION TO

# *1 Corinthians*

THE CORINTH OF PAUL'S DAY was a vibrant collection of socially and racially diverse people drawn to the city by the prospect of creating better lives for themselves and their families. Unique in its day, the continual influx of ambitious immigrants energized the Corinthian marketplace with an unparalleled, self-sustaining vitality that continued to lure others. Corinth was a perpetual boomtown, growing from 3,000 colonists to 100,000 inhabitants in less than 100 years. Picture New York or Chicago in the early nineteenth century or Los Angeles in the twentieth century, maybe Phoenix today. Those who live in urban America would have felt very much at home in Corinth—a potpourri of faces, foods, dress, goods, entertainment, get-rich-quick schemes, gods, ideas. It even had an open-air shopping mall.

At the time Paul wrote, the Corinthian church was no more than five years old and still only a collection of new believers meeting in a few scattered homes. We should think of it as similar to a modern church plant begun with only new, adult believers with no previous experience of Christianity, drawn from a cross section of this very diverse, driven population. With this in mind, we can begin to relate to the kinds of issues Paul addressed when he wrote to these people in 1 Corinthians. Their social and economic diversity created many problems when they met and did things together. Their individual ambition created rivalries about who was right and who was the best. They were not clear on what the key Christian principles are, and they certainly were not clear on how to implement these in their culture. They wondered who best represented Christian thought and practice—despite the fact that Paul first brought the gospel to them—and were confused about the role the Holy Spirit was supposed to play in their community.

The Corinthian community was young, confused, adrift in the sea of its own culture, embattled by its own immature members, with much to learn from its spiritual father. It is like us in many, many ways, so much so that the messages of Paul to these Christians—enclosed in 1 Corinthians—speak to us, too. These messages for the most part are not theological; this is not Romans or Galatians. They are eminently pragmatic, befitting its readers and us. Yet in solving these practical problems, Paul reveals crucial, universal Christian principles that equip us to deal with our own pragmatic situations born out of cultural diversity, personal ambition, and immature confusion. This is a good letter for us to read and understand.

### **AUTHOR**

The opening words of 1:1 name Paul as author of 1 Corinthians, and his authorship has never been seriously questioned. In the annals of critical inquiry, 1 Corinthians

joins Romans, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, and 1–2 Thessalonians as one of the major epistles that form the core of Paul's writings, and by which the vocabulary, style, and theology of the rest are measured with regard to authenticity. First Corinthians joins Galatians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon in having a note of authentication near or at the end of the composition (16:21; Gal 6:11; Col 4:18; 2 Thess 3:17; Phlm 1:19). The statement "HERE IS MY GREETING IN MY OWN HANDWRITING—PAUL" indicates that it is like a signature. All the references except Galatians include his name, "Paul." Although many Hellenistic letters did not end with such a "signature," since the author's name is always stated at the outset (as it is in 1 Corinthians; Collins 1999:2), other writers in Hellenistic times chose to sign off with their own personal signature (a good example is P. Fayum 110; for a photograph, see Comfort 2005:145; see also P. London II, 308, P. Oxyrhynchus 246, 286, and 3057, the last of which is perhaps the earliest Christian letter). Although it is not displayed in all his writings, Paul appears to have had some concern about inauthentic letters circulating to churches under his apostolic care.

This "signature" is evidence that Paul did not pen 1 Corinthians personally but used an amanuensis. The use of a writing secretary like this was normal in the first century, and we can assume that Paul had help in this way for all his letters, even when the individual is not named. Paul does name Tertius as his amanuensis for Romans (Rom 16:22), as 1 Peter names Silvanus (or Silas) to be its amanuensis (1 Pet 5:12). But these are the only two mentioned by name in the New Testament. Thus, the fact that the amanuensis for 1 Corinthians is not named is not unusual.

The role of a first-century amanuensis could vary from simply taking dictation to composing the letter on behalf of the author. Given the consistency of style and vocabulary in Paul's letters, few doubt that Paul took a personal, active role in providing oral dictation to his writing secretaries. Letters were normally composed on papyrus sheets (about 8 inches by 10 inches) or scrolls (20 sheets pasted together). It is possible that one full scroll dictates the optimum length of the longest of Paul's letters, like 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, and Romans. However, some suggest that Paul used the codex form (i.e., leaves bound together as a book), which would not limit the length of the writing.

Paul's letters were probably not edited after composition, either by him or by the amanuensis. If Paul did any amending, it was through the course of dictation. The prime example of this is in 1:14–16, where Paul begins in 1:14 by stating unconditionally that he personally baptized none in Corinth except the households of Crispus and Gaius. Yet he meekly admits in 1:16 that he also baptized Stephanas's household (as if someone, perhaps the amanuensis or Stephanas himself just reminded him), then finally acknowledges that he may have baptized others whom he no longer remembers. Given the confusion that undermines Paul's point, and the fact that he was only a few sentences into the letter, why not just crumple this one up and start over again as we might do? As far as we know, he just didn't. Perhaps it was due to the use of permanent ink and the cost of scrolls. It might just be the convention of the times. Regardless, we have to keep this in mind as we try to understand Paul in his letters. Sometimes he overstated his case and then amended his point on the fly in the comments that follow.

Paul intended his letters to be read aloud to the entire Christian community gathered together, or at least to the meetings of the various small groups that met in individual homes (Col 4:7; Horsley 1998:21). Thus, Paul wrote as if he were speaking to them. Indeed, he was speaking aloud on his end of the communicative process, just as the recipients would hear his words read aloud (and probably explained) by Paul's delegate at their end of the process. We could think of a letter from Paul as a sort of singing telegram. The letter is the medium to bring him into their presence when he cannot be there himself. Paul's letter carriers and readers are not always named, but Romans names Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2), and Ephesians and Colossians name Tychicus (Eph 6:21; Col 4:7). First Corinthians implies that Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, who brought him a letter from the Corinthians (7:1), would return to Corinth with his letter (16:17). Stephanas, named as the head of the first household to become Christians in Corinth (16:15), baptized by Paul (1:16), and listed first among the three messengers, most likely functioned as the reader of the letter (Collins 1999:4).

#### DATE AND OCCASION OF WRITING

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus during AD 54 or 55, no more than five years after first entering Corinth alone. This entrance happened shortly after Paul fled for his life from Thessalonica and Berea and made his famous speech to the Areopagus in Athens. He remained in Corinth for 18 months (spring AD 50 to fall AD 51), by far his longest period of residence during his second evangelistic journey among the Gentiles. After this visit, he returned to Antioch of Syria, his home base. He quickly reorganized and set out on a third trip, which took him through his previously established churches in Asia Minor before arriving in Ephesus, on the western coast, where he remained for three years.

During his three-year period with the Ephesian church, approximately 250 miles straight across the Aegean Sea from Corinth, Paul carried on a very active pastoral relationship with the Corinthians via letters, messengers, and a personal trip. Eventually, he would leave Ephesus and make the 600-mile overland trip to Corinth, where he would remain for three months before heading back up the coast to Troas to sail to Jerusalem with the money collection he had gathered from the Greek and Asian churches.

First Corinthians is actually the second of four letters we know Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth. The first letter, normally designated the "previous letter," is referred to in 5:9-10 and contained a warning against associating with fellow believers whose lifestyles remain immoral and worldly. This previous letter may have been prompted by information Paul received from Apollos, who went to Corinth (Acts 18:27-19:1) but had by then probably returned to Ephesus (Murphy-O'Connor 1996:103-108; Thiselton 2000:31). Certainly, Apollos was back in Ephesus with Paul at the time he wrote 1 Corinthians (16:12).

Paul's third correspondence to the Corinthians occurred before he wrote the letter we know as 2 Corinthians. The backdrop of both this third letter and 2 Corinthians (described in 2 Cor 2:4-11 and 7:5-13) was an impromptu personal visit Paul made to Corinth by ship. What he thought would be a happy reunion

was instead a disaster. Some individual, who seemed to represent the views of a lot of people, publicly insulted Paul, questioning his personal integrity, his apostolic authority, and the legitimacy of the collection of the funds in which he was urging the Corinthian believers to participate. Stunned and hurt by this incident, particularly because no one in the Corinthian church came to his defense, Paul skulked out of Corinth without a response. After arriving back at Ephesus, he sent a stinging letter of rebuke to all concerned, delivered personally to them by Titus. The backbone of 2 Corinthians narrates Paul's intense, personal worry about how this "severe letter" was received. Traveling up the Asia Minor coast to the prearranged rendezvous point in Troas, Paul expected to meet up with Titus to hear his report. Titus never showed up. So Paul went on into Macedonia, finding him there, probably in Philippi. Awash with relief from Titus's report that all was well, Paul sent 2 Corinthians, his fourth letter and a fifth contact with the Corinthian believers in the three and a half years since leaving them.

Acts 18 describes the key events of Paul's initial 18-month ministry in Corinth. Right away he met Aquila and Priscilla (probably in the marketplace), fellow tent-makers and also seasoned believers who had been expelled from Rome along with other Jews. These two became Paul's most trusted colleagues. They participated in evangelizing Corinth and then accompanied Paul to Syrian Antioch and on the third missionary journey through Ephesus. Eventually they made their way back to Rome before Paul wrote Romans. Paul preached in the Jewish synagogue every Sabbath and in the marketplace as he plied his trade (Hjort 1979:443). After Timothy and Silas arrived from Macedonia (Thessalonica and Philippi), he even more actively pursued Jewish Corinthians with the gospel. Eventually, the number of believers grew so significantly that they were expelled from the synagogue only to set up a rival "Christian" synagogue next door to the Jewish synagogue. From there, sparks flew to the point that those from the Jewish synagogue made an official protest to the Roman governor. Gallio, most likely only recently appointed, saw no just cause for convicting Christians as breakers of any Roman law; he dismissed the charge.

Historically, the overlap of Gallio and Paul in Corinth marks one of the most important intersections of New Testament and secular dating, providing a foothold for dating the rest of Paul's movements before and after his period in Corinth. Fragments of a stone inscription were discovered in the 1930s at Delphi, not far from Corinth. This inscription mentions the Roman Emperor Claudius, the proconsul of Achaia (the region surrounding Corinth), Gallio, date information, and words clarifying a boundary dispute (Murphy-O'Connor 2002:161-165). Since proconsuls were appointed for one-year terms (July-June), it allows us to date Gallio's term as most likely AD 51-52 (Conzelmann 1975:13; Horsley 1998:29; Murphy-O'Connor 2002:165; Thiselton 2000:29). The beginning of Gallio's term overlapped, then, with the end of Paul's time in Corinth.

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians midway between the period of Jewish hostility to the planting of the church and the period of internal hostility among some in the church toward Paul. The careful order that characterizes 1 Corinthians should not convey the false notion that Paul was writing to these believers during a tranquil lull in their brief history. These believers were still coping with division and hos-

tility from their fellow Jews (which Acts 20:3 indicates never subsided) and were nurturing the seeds of division from one another and from Paul that would sprout during the painful visit only months ahead. We should not interpret 1 Corinthians in isolation from these well-established realities when we try to understand the events that gave rise to its composition.

At least two particular events prompted Paul to write 1 Corinthians. The first was the arrival in Ephesus of an official delegation (consisting of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus) from Corinth with a letter asking Paul to answer specific questions. The second event was an unofficial visit from "Chloe's people," probably employees or slaves of hers who came to Ephesus principally for business purposes and who also shared some of Chloe's concerns about the situation in Corinth with Paul. A third possible event was the return of Apollos from his period of ministry with the Corinthian believers. Apollos shared his perspective with Paul on how the Corinthian believers were doing, which was probably not well, because Apollos expressed his reluctance to return to Corinth (16:12).

Paul began by responding to the information reported to him by Chloe's workers; he addressed the critical need for unity among those who serve Christ (1:10-4:17). He responded to the questions from the official letter beginning in 7:1, addressing in turn questions about marriage and celibacy (ch 7), eating and serving meat sacrificed to idols (chs 8-10), use of gifts from the Spirit (chs 12-14), and probably details about the relief collection for Jerusalem believers (16:1-4). Each of these four topics begins with the same expression ("Now regarding"). A few remaining topics are probably matters the three-person delegation bearing the letter reported to Paul: (1) the church failing to take disciplinary action against a man who was living in a sexual relationship with his stepmother (ch 5), (2) believers instigating lawsuits against one another (ch 6), and (3) how the Corinthian believers were conducting worship in their meetings (11:2-33). Perhaps Paul's compulsion to address the topic of the resurrection of Jesus in chapter 15 responds to the informed opinion of Apollos, but he could have had his own reasons for this extended apologetic.

Those who study 1 Corinthians contemplate whether a unified opposition group might have lurked behind Paul's variegated concerns as is the case in many of his letters (e.g., Galatians, Colossians). The first direction they look is toward 2 Corinthians, which identifies a group in Corinth who opposed Paul (2 Cor 1:5-11; 3:1-3; 11:1-12:12) and was probably influenced by outsiders whom Paul labels "false apostles" and, sarcastically, "super apostles" (2 Cor 11:13; 12:11). Some speculators consider whether this could be an ultraconservative band of Jewish Christians who did not accept the apostolic council's ruling recorded in Acts 15 (that Gentiles need not be circumcised to become Christians), who had now followed Paul from Jerusalem and Galatia (Baker 1999:27-31; Barrett 1971; Marshall 1987:260-265; R. Martin 1987). If so, a connection is often made to the Peter party of 1:12 as Paul's identification of this opposition group in 1 Corinthians (Baur 1831; Goulder 2001:22). Other speculators, not seeing any mention of circumcision or law in 2 Corinthians, think emphasis on their charismatic experiences and special knowledge (2 Cor 11:4; 12:12) makes these opponents representative of an early form of Gnosticism and thereby connect them to Paul's detailed argument against human wisdom and

knowledge in chapters 1–4 (Conzelmann 1975:15; Schmithals 1971). The difficulty with either of these two speculations is that Paul did not identify an opposition group in 1 Corinthians; rather, he focused the entire epistle on all the Corinthian believers (Fee 1987:5-6). The most that can be said is that the nucleus of the opposition to Paul, identifiable by 2 Corinthians, was probably in an early stage at the time of his writing 1 Corinthians (Marshall 1987:264-265); it had not reached the point where Paul considered it a group he must attack (whether that group is identified as Gnostics or Judaizers).

Speculators also look for evidence of an opposition group behind 1 Corinthians in the letter itself, apart from 2 Corinthians. Those who do this find that despite the lack of evidence for Paul opposing a specifically identifiable group, Paul's hard-line posturing in places indicates that he felt under attack by at least some in Corinth (Fee 1987:6-10; Furnish 1999:10-12; Garland 2003:20; M. Mitchell 1997:48). A growing suggestion is that this group consisted of people who became so enamored with Apollos's intellect and oratory skills while he was there (out of no self-promotion of his own) that they began to question Paul's authority and leadership over them (Horsley 1998:34-35; Ker 2000:76-77; Smit 2002:234; Wenham 1997:138). This may be why Apollos was so reluctant to go back to Corinth (16:12).

The third direction speculators take is to abandon any hope of discovering a completely formulated opposition group at all. They simply take the evidence from 1 Corinthians that various factions had splintered the Corinthian church, perhaps into rival house groups. Thus, the vision of 1 Corinthians was to bring them into unity around the cross (Conzelmann 1975:16; M. Mitchell 1993:198-199; Thiselton 2000:34-35). Further, it is recognized that the Corinthians were not only splintered between themselves, and some with Paul, but that the root cause of these divisions was within the materialistic, high-achievement culture of Corinth from which they really did need to separate themselves (Garland 2003:5-6; M. Mitchell 1993:6-7; Soards 1999:6-7; Witherington 1995:46-47). It is pointed out that unlike the Thessalonians, for instance, who suffered persecution for their faith and thus were forced to separate themselves from their culture, neither Corinthian letter mentions a single word about persecution. Could this be because the Corinthians generally had not distinguished themselves and Christian teaching from that of their neighbors and culture?

A fourth position is that it is not possible to identify either a single opposition group or a unified theological purpose behind 1 Corinthians and that to do so only prejudices forthright exegesis of the epistle itself (Collins 1999:17; Garland 2003:7, 13).

Perhaps a position combining various aspects of these arguments is warranted. First, what became a full-scale, open opposition to Paul in 2 Corinthians probably did begin previous to the writing of 1 Corinthians, since it was written only a matter of months before Paul's disastrous surprise visit to the Corinthians that precipitated the severe letter and 2 Corinthians. Paul probably went there because he knew trouble was brewing. Second, questioning of Paul's authority does seem evident in 1 Corinthians, particularly in the sections in which Paul responds harshly to information he received orally from Chloe's people and the three-person delegation—in contrast to the sections where he answers their questions (Thiselton

2000:35). Third, the Corinthians' failure to recognize how Christian theology and values discredited their socially inherited behaviors of individualism and success fueled their rivalries as well as their lack of respect for Paul.

## AUDIENCE

Paul addressed this letter to a small band of novice believers who met together in the homes of their wealthier colleagues, no more than 30 per home (Murphy-O'Connor 2002:178-284; 1984:157), perhaps in 8 to 10 homes. Despite the fact that the earliest converts were Jewish (according to Acts 18:4-8), none of the issues Paul addresses in the letter appear to stem from Jewish-Christian controversies. Rather, all the issues derive from the Corinthian culture and society in which they lived. This makes it paramount that we strive to understand this critical spot on the ancient map if we are to understand this letter and the people to whom it is addressed. Fortunately, we know a great deal about this city, both from ancient historians and modern archaeological excavation.

The Corinth of Paul's day had prospered enormously since being rebuilt as a Roman city in 44 BC. For a hundred years it had lain in ruins after the Roman army, incensed by its opposition to Rome, conquered it and burned it to the ground, killing the men and carting off the women and children into slavery. It was once again a very proud city by Paul's day, but the vast majority of its inhabitants were no longer native to the area. Rebuilt in the style of a Roman city, complete with public courtyards, an outdoor stadium (seating 20,000 people), a smaller theater, Roman baths, and Roman architecture throughout, it was forcibly repopulated by about 3,000 freedmen (former slaves who had originally been brought to Italy from all the lands Rome had conquered) and retired Roman soldiers. But by Paul's day its population had swelled to 100,000, far outstripping Athens, due to the fact that people were flocking to it voluntarily from all over because of the prosperity that could be gained from working there. It was a truly cosmopolitan ancient city with parallels to a modern, market-based economy (Engels 1990:19; O'Mahony 1997:117-118; Thiselton 2000:4).

Corinth flourished partly because of its unique location and its residents' ingenuity and industriousness in exploiting this advantage. It straddled the five-mile-wide isthmus (land bridge) that served as the major thoroughfare between the Greek mainland and the Peloponnese. Ancient sailing vessels often foundered because of high winds as they attempted to negotiate the extra 200 miles around Cape Malea at the tip of the Peloponnese (especially in the winter). Sailors were thus willing to pay a fee to cross at the isthmus controlled by Corinth. Back in the days of Old Corinth, in the sixth century BC, residents had constructed a grooved pavement, called the Diolkos, between the ports on either side of the isthmus. Wheeled carts actually transported smaller vessels intact, while for larger ships, goods were unloaded from a ship from one harbor and reloaded onto a waiting ship in the other harbor. By Paul's day, many industries had been built up alongside this lucrative situation: shipbuilding and repair; bronze, tile, and pottery factories; and warehousing transportable goods. Its own marketplace became a bazaar of goods and trinkets and skilled services from all over the empire. Typical of a seaport, it was known for its immorality.



**Love and the Christian Life.** Like other New Testament authors, Paul wrote in the wake of Jesus' radical teaching about love: One must love one's enemies and social inferiors, not only friends and relatives. So Paul and the other New Testament authors put love on the top of the agenda for believers. In his most famous passage on the subject, he pronounces that one of the very few human endeavors to breach the chasm between this age and the next is love (13:8, 13). Love is also one of the few human endeavors that can overcome the sinister evil of the world. It should replace human arrogance (8:1; 13:4). Without it miracles and even martyrdom are robbed of their value (13:2-3). Love should be the Christian way of life because it is always a positive force for human dignity and self-worth, both in society at large and in the fellowship of believers (8:1; 16:14).

Paul's admonitions to the Corinthians show how love should be implemented as the principle for sorting through a myriad of critical issues in the church. Whether it is forgoing lawsuits against one another (6:1-8) or choosing to limit one's speaking among the gathered believers (14:26-40), love leads to these decisions. Fundamentally, practicing love means voluntarily choosing to limit what one is completely free to do for the benefit of someone else. For example, Paul encouraged women and men to limit their choices of what to wear to what is deemed appropriate in Corinthian public settings when they gather together (11:2-16). And he urged the people of wealth and status to subsume their social privileges for the sake of those who come from the working-class poor when they gather together (11:17-34). These actions befit the gospel generally, as well as people individually. By choosing to limit their freedoms, Christians refuse to make self-interest the center of their moral life.

## OUTLINE

- I. Introduction (1:1-9)
  - A. Opening Greetings (1:1-3)
  - B. Thanksgiving (1:4-9)
- II. Paul's Reaction to Alarming Reports of Division (1:10-4:21)
  - A. Divisions in the Corinthian Church (1:10-17)
  - B. Real Wisdom or True Foolishness? (1:18-31)
  - C. Wisdom from the Spirit of God (2:1-16)
  - D. Unity in Christ (3:1-23)
    1. Many laborers in God's field (3:1-17)
    2. The foolish trap of rivalry (3:18-23)
  - E. Arrogance Condemned (4:1-21)
    1. God judges motives (4:1-5)
    2. Arrogance has no part in apostolic life (4:6-13)
    3. Paul will come to confront the arrogant (4:14-21)
- III. Paul's Response to Reports of Negligent Community Discipline (5:1-6:20)
  - A. Demand for Expulsion of the Believer Guilty of Immoral Conduct (5:1-13)
  - B. Demand for an End to Internal Lawsuits (6:1-11)
  - C. Encouragement to Abandon Immoral Sexual Behavior (6:12-20)

- IV. Paul's Reply to Specific Questions in the Corinthians' Letter (7:1–16:12)
  - A. Matters Related to Marriage (7:1–40)
    - 1. Marriage should include sexual relations (7:1–7)
    - 2. Those currently unwed may marry (7:8–9)
    - 3. Believers should not divorce their marriage partners (7:10–16)
    - 4. Believers should generally maintain current personal conditions (7:17–24)
    - 5. Those currently unwed may choose to marry or remain unwed (7:25–40)
  - B. Matters Related to Food Sacrificed to Idols (8:1–11:1)
    - 1. Eating without compromising fellow believers' scruples (8:1–13)
    - 2. Paul abandons his apostolic rights for the sake of others (9:1–27)
    - 3. Lessons from Israel's wilderness experiences (10:1–13)
    - 4. Lessons from the Lord's Supper (10:14–22)
    - 5. Exercising freedom with mature compassion (10:23–11:1)
  - C. Paul's Response to Reports about the Gatherings (11:2–34)
    - 1. Women must cover their heads to speak in worship (11:2–16)
    - 2. The Lord's Supper must demonstrate community harmony (11:17–34)
  - D. Matters concerning Spiritual Gifts (12:1–14:40)
    - 1. The Holy Spirit, the source of every believer's gifts (12:1–11)
    - 2. One body with many parts (12:12–26)
    - 3. Each member serves a vital role (12:27–31)
    - 4. Love is the foundation for every gift (13:1–13)
    - 5. Everything spoken in public worship must be understandable and edifying (14:1–25)
    - 6. Public worship must be conducted in an orderly manner (14:26–40)
  - E. Paul's Defense of the Resurrection (15:1–58)
    - 1. Christ's resurrection witnessed by many (15:1–11)
    - 2. No resurrection poses dire ramifications (15:12–19)
    - 3. Christ's resurrection will make all things subject to him (15:20–28)
    - 4. Disbelief in the resurrection is an affront to God (15:29–34)
    - 5. The resurrection bodies of believers are spiritual (15:35–49)
    - 6. The resurrection of believers is natural because of Jesus' resurrection (15:50–58)
  - F. Matters Related to the Collection and to Apollos (16:1–12)
    - 1. Completion of the collection before Paul's arrival (16:1–4)
    - 2. Travel plans (16:5–12)
- V. Conclusion (16:13–24)
  - A. Final Admonitions (16:13–18)
  - B. Greetings, Invocations, and Benediction (16:19–24)



# COMMENTARY ON *1 Corinthians*

## ◆ I. Introduction (1:1-9)

### A. Opening Greetings (1:1-3)

This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and from our brother Sosthenes.

<sup>2</sup>I am writing to God's church in Corinth,\* to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made

you holy by means of Christ Jesus,\* just as he did for all people everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.

<sup>3</sup>May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

1:2a *Corinth* was the capital city of Achaia, the southern region of the Greek peninsula. 1:2b Or *because you belong to Christ Jesus*.

## NOTES

**1:1 Paul.** This lone first word opens the letter, the typical way Greek letters indicated their authors. This is the author's Greek name. Saul, his Jewish name, while probably still used by him personally, is not employed in his epistles or in Acts after he began his missionary journeys (Acts 13:9).

**chosen.** Gr., *klētos* [T62822, Z63105], used by Paul only in Romans (Rom 1:1, 6-7) and 1 Corinthians (1:1-2, 24), emphasizes his apostolic vocation by divine mandate, like that of an OT prophet.

**apostle.** Gr., *apostolos* [T6652, Z6693], used by Paul in 1 Corinthians more than in any other writing (10 times), refers to a messenger or ambassador sent out with a specific responsibility. Paul's apostolic call came not from the historic Jesus (as with the original Twelve) but from the risen Lord on the Damascus road (Acts 9:5; Gal 1:1-5, 11-16). The NT does not restrict the term to the Twelve Jesus chose to follow him in his ministry. Seventeen individuals are called apostles, adding Paul, James (Gal 1:19), Matthias (Acts 1:26), Barnabas (Acts 14:14), and Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16:7) to the original Twelve. Such people not only were eyewitnesses to the resurrection (Acts 1:22) but preached the gospel and founded Christian communities.

**Christ Jesus.** Some early mss, including  $\aleph$ , have "Jesus Christ." However,  $\text{P}46$  and B are surely correct, since Paul rarely reverses the order of Jesus' names without "Lord" preceding them, as in 1:3.

**brother.** Gr., *adelphos* [T680, Z681]. In the plural, this word usually refers to both male and female believers. In the singular, as here, it is a way for Paul to convey his feelings of kinship for someone working with him as an associate (2 Cor 1:1; 2:13; 8:22).

**1:2 church.** Gr., *ekklēsia* [T61577, Z61711]. This word originally referred to assembled Greek citizens whom a crier had "called out" to attendance. This word was used in the LXX to

refer to Israel gathered together as a community (e.g., Deut 4:10). In the NT, it came to be used mostly to designate the community of believers in a specific location, as it is here, and occasionally of the worldwide church (15:9; Eph 1:22).

**made you holy.** Paul uses the verb *hagiazō* [T637, Z639] more often in 1 Corinthians than in any of his other letters (four times). In Jewish contexts it refers to things or people who had been set apart for God's use, like the Temple, the priests, the altars, and the sacrifices.

**the name.** Gr., *onoma* [T63686, Z63950], which commonly designates the honor and integrity of an individual.

**1:3 grace and peace.** "Grace" (*charis* [T65485, Z65921]) derives from the standard Greek greeting, and "peace" (*eirēnē* [T61515, Z61645]) is the traditional Jewish greeting. Previously used together in intertestamental Jewish writings, the intercultural greeting is standard in the openings of nearly all Paul's letters, probably reflecting the multiracial composition of churches to whom he wrote. Theologically, grace constitutes the whole of God's activity in Christ, and peace the result of that activity on our behalf.

#### COMMENTARY

Paul's opening to this letter is structured like most ancient Greek letters: naming the author and the recipient and offering a blessing. This is a pattern he follows in all his letters. His openings stand out by expanding these common features, as he does here. Whether consciously intended or not, these extras often tip off primary concerns elaborated in the course of the letter.

Paul's mention of himself as the author of the letter is expanded in two distinct ways. First, he emphasizes his divine calling to be an apostle. This was not unusual for him. He mentions being an apostle at the opening of most of his letters (except Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon). This often signals that his credibility as an apostle was under attack among the people to whom he wrote, as in Galatians or Colossians, but this is not always the case, as with Romans or 1 Timothy. However, since we do know that his apostolic status suffered a major attack by Corinthian believers within the context of 2 Corinthians and the "severe letter" and painful visit mentioned there, it is not overly presumptuous to think that preliminary problems along this line began to appear among the Corinthians previous to the writing of 1 Corinthians. Though not as obvious as in 2 Corinthians, a strong case can be made that subversion of Paul's apostleship was a major issue for 1 Corinthians, rising to the surface in 4:1-5 and 9:1-23.

Paul stresses the divine origin of his apostleship in a way comparable only to Galatians and Romans. In other letters he mentions both the "will of God" and "apostle of Christ" (Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Tim 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1), but only here does he insert the word "chosen" (also used in Rom 1:1) immediately after his name, making the first three words of the letter "Paul, chosen apostle." He desired his readers' first and lasting impression to be that his role as their apostle was not just a title for him or even something he sought. Rather, he was compelled by God himself to enter God's service (bringing to mind Acts 9:1-5 and Gal 1:13-17). In 2 Corinthians 11:16-12:10, he will recount for the Corinthians that his life as an apostle was not filled with glory and honor but with suffering and pain (as predicted in Acts 9:16) like the life of Christ himself, whose message he has doggedly brought to Gentiles like the Corinthians. It is not without design that Paul will emphasize in the very

next verse that the Corinthians are also “chosen” themselves (“chosen, holy”) not for an easy life but for one which must struggle against the forces of the world.

Paul was first and foremost an “apostle of Christ,” a commissioned messenger of the gospel sent especially to the Gentiles. Simultaneously, he viewed his apostolic life as occurring within God’s overarching providence. Thus, he says he is an apostle “by the will of God.” God himself was not merely the agent but also the compelling cause of his vocation to serve Christ rather than to oppose Christ and persecute his followers, as Paul once thought God wanted.

Paul’s second expansion of his name adds “our brother Sosthenes.” Paul often added the names of working companions who were with him at the time of writing (e.g., 2 Cor 1:1). Though some maintain that this means Sosthenes had a role in writing the letter (Murphy-O’Connor 1993), this does not fit with Paul’s normal intention of including names at the beginning of a letter (Garland 2003:26). The intriguing mention of Sosthenes as “our brother” could be because he is the same man who failed to make the case against Paul and Christianity to Gallio in the days when Paul originally brought the gospel to Corinth (Acts 18:14-18). Could he have become a Christian since then and afterward begun serving with Paul in Ephesus? Calvin (1960:17) thought the identity was certain, but most today assert no more than that this is probable (Garland 2003:26; Hays 1997:15).

Paul’s expansion on the addressees of this letter in 1:2 is more elaborate than usual. It underscores God’s expectation for the Corinthian believers to view their assembly as God’s special, holy people, like Israel of old. This can be seen first in Paul’s designating them “God’s church,” a term he normally uses to identify the worldwide church (10:32; 11:22; 15:9; Gal 1:13). The Corinthians were God’s people “in Corinth,” a vital part of God’s new work to bring “all people everywhere” into relationship with him through Christ. Their commission mirrors Paul’s own, and so they are “called” like Paul was.

Second, encouragement for the Corinthians to view themselves as God’s holy people can also be seen in Paul’s double emphasis on their holiness. They are both “called” holy and “made” holy, having been summoned and prepared to function as God’s people. They are separate from other people yet are entrusted with a mission to enable others to join God’s people by calling “on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul’s desire for the Corinthian believers to live as a holy community encompasses this epistle, even if the precise words are not used in each context.

Paul intentionally invoked the words of Joel 2:32, “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.” God was now assembling his new covenant people from city to city around the world, including Corinth. The rallying cry voiced the name “Jesus Christ,” who is now “Lord.” He shares the title “Lord” with God because he has completed God’s mission to save all people through his death on the cross. Both the worldwide church and its local representation in the Corinthian believers as God’s people serve “their Lord and ours” and swear their allegiance to him. Indeed, it is “by means of Christ” that each one then and now enters into God’s people, uniting with Christ and the church in baptism (Conzelmann 1975:21-23) and confessing Christ as Lord (Rom 6:1-7; 10:9).

Paul’s blessing in 1:3 is a standard part of his introductions, appearing word for

word in Romans 1:7, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, and Philipians 1:2. This formula's coordinated appeal to both God and Christ exemplifies the Christian belief, well established by Paul's day, that the two govern with equal power. The risen Christ stands at the right hand of the Father administering his rule (Acts 7:56; Eph 1:10; Phil 1:5-11; Col 1:15-20). Thus, to invoke both is fitting. Attributing fatherhood to God and lordship to Christ is a typical way of distinguishing their functions. Jesus himself encouraged his followers to address God as Father (Matt 6:9), not because he is either male or female, but because he is the Creator and Provider for humanity, as well as for each individual. Addressing Jesus as Lord honors his resurrection, our devotion to him, and his cause to redeem every person from the bondage of sin.

## ◆ B. Thanksgiving (1:4-9)

<sup>4</sup>I always thank my God for you and for the gracious gifts he has given you, now that you belong to Christ Jesus. <sup>5</sup>Through him, God has enriched your church in every way—with all of your eloquent words and all of your knowledge. <sup>6</sup>This confirms that what I told you about Christ is true. <sup>7</sup>Now you have every spiritual gift you

need as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup>He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. <sup>9</sup>God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says, and he has invited you into partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

### NOTES

**1:4 I always thank.** This follows the typical pattern of Greek letter writing by initiating a “thanksgiving” section following the opening of the letter. Paul did this in all of his letters except Galatians, where the thanksgiving section was replaced by a stern rebuke.

**my God.** Gr., *theos mou* [T<sup>6</sup>2316/1473, Z<sup>6</sup>2536/1609]. Though missing from the normally reliable B and X\*, the “my” (*mou*) should be retained due to the widespread manuscript evidence. The NIV and RSV leave it untranslated, while NASB, ESV, and TEV have “my God.”

**gracious gifts.** Simply “grace” (*charis* [T<sup>6</sup>5485, Z<sup>6</sup>5921]) in Greek, this is a dominant word in Paul’s theological vocabulary. Though not employed as much as in Romans (24 times) or even in 2 Corinthians (18 times), its use in 1 Corinthians (10 times) is still significant. Paul’s use of the word is wide-ranging; he even employed it to refer to the collection of money (16:3; 2 Cor 8:4, 6, 19). However, it is at the heart of his gospel—often pitted against law—blending together both the undeserved kindness of God for humanity as well as the expression of God’s love in the decisive saving act of Christ on the cross. Here, it is the fount from which the spiritual gifts flow.

**you belong to Christ.** This is a two-word prepositional phrase in Greek (*en Christō* [T<sup>6</sup>5547, Z<sup>6</sup>5986]); it is Paul’s most common, shorthand term for distinguishing a believer’s total identification with Christ from a person who is outside of Christ. The term “Christ” occurs a surprising five times in 1:4-9.

**1:5 God has enriched your church.** In Greek the verb is passive (*ep<sup>l</sup>outisthēte* [T<sup>6</sup>4148, Z<sup>6</sup>4457], “you have been enriched”). The NLT interprets this as a divine passive, meaning that God is assumed as the active agent, and makes the agent explicit. The verb’s tense (aorist) communicates that this action has already taken place. The word and its cognates

normally denote the accumulation of material wealth (Luke 18:25; 1 Tim 6:17), though Paul uses it here and elsewhere (2 Cor 6:10) to refer to spiritual wealth. The verb communicates that the recipients are “you,” plural; NLT clarifies the limits of who is included with “your church.”

**eloquent words.** This is a singular, lit., “word” (*logos* [T63056, Z63364]), which can refer literally to an actual word but also to a collection of written words or to a collection of oral words. The NLT interprets it in the latter sense. Speech contests were part of the biannual Isthmian Games in Corinth (Keener 1993:454). The addition of “eloquent” by the NLT may add a hint of sarcasm (in view of Paul’s later criticism of the Corinthians’ overvaluing the finely spoken words of public speakers) that Paul does not intend this early in the letter since these words are stated as gifts of God.

**knowledge.** Gr., *gnōsis* [T61108, Z61194]. This word appears 10 times in 1 Corinthians, far more than in any other letter of Paul. The accumulation of knowledge was a valuable human ambition in the Greek world. The appearance of this word here and elsewhere in 1 Corinthians prompted earlier scholars to propose that Paul combated a form of Gnosticism in Corinthians. Since the idea of offering special, “secret” knowledge about the nature of Christ to initiates is not documented earlier than the second century, current scholarship does not connect formal Gnosticism with Corinth (Schmithals 1971; Thiselton 2000:92-93; R. Wilson 1972-1973), though some less sophisticated, early type of Gnosticism may be a factor.

**1:6 This.** A few scholars lobby for *kathōs* [T62531, Z62777] to be taken in its normal sense of comparison and translated “just as” (Orr and Walther 1976:40; Soards 1999:25). However, this seems forced in this context compared to taking it as an explanation of how the gifts function (Robertson and Plummer 1911:6; Thiselton 2000:94).

**confirms . . . is true.** Gr., *bebaioō* [T6950, Z61011], which is an aorist passive. This word is often associated with verifying the truth of a person’s word and is highly appropriate in conjunction with testimony.

**what I told you about Christ.** This accurately renders “the testimony of Christ” (*to marturion tou christou* [T65547, Z65986]) as an objective genitive. It spells out what is implied in Paul’s statement—that he had in mind his own personal witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ delivered when he was in Corinth with them. The word *marturion* [T63142, Z63457], originally a legal term, is commonly used in reference to the gospel in the NT (Acts 4:33; 23:11) and in later centuries to honor Christians who chose to be executed rather than deny Christ.

**1:7 spiritual gift.** Gr., *charisma* [T65486, Z65922]. This is not the same word translated “gracious gifts” in 1:4. *Charisma* refers to a favor or a free gift. Nearly exclusive to Paul’s writings in the NT, his use of it is concentrated in 1 Corinthians (seven times) and Romans (six times) and always refers to special abilities provided by the Holy Spirit to Christians as a blessing for the Christian community. He will have much to say about this in ch 12.

**the return.** Gr., *apokalupsis* [T6602, Z6637], usually translated “revelation.” This word was used by Paul to refer to special revelation of knowledge from God as a spiritual gift (14:6, 26; 2 Cor 12:1, 7), revelation of the gospel in particular to him (Rom 16:25; Gal 1:12; Eph 3:3), revelation of action he should take (Gal 2:2), and the great revelation of judgment against sinners (Rom 2:5; 8:19). As in 2 Thess 1:7 (also 1 Pet 1:7, 13; 4:13), Paul uses it here in association with the idea of the return of Christ.

**1:8 will keep you strong.** From *bebaioō* [T6950, Z61011], which is the same word translated “confirms” in 1:6. The NLT (also NIV) is consistent with the implications of the word.

**end.** Gr., *telos* [T65056, Z65465]. This refers to the accomplishment or completion of a goal.



*free from all blame.* Gr., *anenklētos* [T6410, Z6441], a legal term denoting blamelessness, having no hint of accusability.

*when our Lord Jesus Christ returns.* Lit., “in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The phrase “day of the Lord” was formulaic in the OT prophets for God coming in judgment (Isa 13:6, 9; Jer 25:33; Ezek 7:10; 13:5; Joel 2:1; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obad 1:15; Zeph 1:7, 14; Mal 4:1). So now in the NT, the return of Christ signals his appropriation of God’s role as eschatological judge over humanity (2 Cor 1:14; Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16; 1 Thess 5:2).

*Lord Jesus Christ.* Like most versions, the NLT retains “Christ,” following the vast majority of textual witnesses, including  $\aleph$ . It is notably missing in  $\Phi$ 46 and B. If the original excluded it, a scribe could have added it to conform to 1:7 (Comfort 2008:484).

1:9 *he is faithful.* The word *pistos* [T64103, Z64412] refers to a person who is trustworthy in character, who can be believed. God has demonstrated his trustworthiness throughout the pages of Scripture, in keeping his end of the covenant with Israel even when they did not and in bringing to fruition his plan to save humanity through Jesus Christ.

*invited.* This passive form of “call” (*kaleō* [T62564, Z62813]) can mean “invite” as the NLT translates it. However, it has a much broader, theological connotation in the NT and in Paul’s writings than the English word “invite” allows. For Paul, all believers have been called, with the implication that God not only has invited each one with the Good News, but that they have accepted the invitation and have come into his family, his people, the church. In ch 7 (7:15, 17, 18 [twice], 20, 21, 22 [twice], 24) he uses this term to refer to the precise point of a believer’s conversion.

*partnership.* Gr., *koinōnia* [T62842, Z63126], which refers to people holding things in common. For Greek philosophers this kind of brotherhood bonding was foundational to their utopian dreams. However, for Paul this was never rooted in mere human solidarity but through kinship created by the common dependence believers have on Christ for salvation. In fact, the only other uses of this word in 1 Corinthians are in the context of the Lord’s Supper (10:16 [twice]). Demonstrating its lexical fluidity for Paul, it refers to the collecting of offering money in 2 Cor 8:4; 9:13.

#### COMMENTARY

Paul’s thanksgiving sections typically offer a preview of key themes to arise later. In 1:4-9, Paul first employs words that will return in force, like “gracious gifts” (*charis* [T65485, Z65921]), “eloquent words” (*logos* [T63056, Z63364]), “knowledge” (*gnōsis* [T61108, Z61194]), “spiritual gift” (*charisma* [T65486, Z65922]), and “partnership” (*koinonia* [T62842, Z63126]). Though Paul announces these ideas in positive terms, he will harshly criticize the Corinthians for their incorrect perspective on these matters.

The expression “I always thank my God” (1:4) refers to Paul’s custom in his personal prayer life to include prayer for the various churches in his orbit, churches he had a hand in planting and which continued to fall under his pastoral care. His prayers for the Corinthians focused on how God demonstrated his benevolence in their lives in ways they could see and experience since they became Christians. So, “grace” (NLT, “gracious gifts”) here does not focus simply on God’s mercy to accept sinners into a saving relationship with him through Christ. Rather, grace envelops the whole of believers’ lives, manifesting itself in observable activities in the life of the church. The expression “he has given you” (1:4) underscores the truth that God is the great benefactor in believers’ lives. The precondition for

receiving the benefits of God's grace is "now that you belong to Christ Jesus," that is, by confessing Christ and entering into his corporate body, the church, through baptism (Rom 6:3; 10:6).

In 1:5, Paul provides evidence for the presence of God's grace that he is sure the Corinthians had observed. He reemphasizes that this has happened because they are "in him" (NLT, "through him"), meaning they are connected to Christ and, through him, to the Christian community and the pipeline of God's bountiful spiritual blessings. He chooses two blessings, speech and knowledge, to showcase. No doubt he is looking ahead to his criticisms of the Corinthians' less-than-acceptable approach to both of these. In chapter 2 he will chastise them for confusing rhetorically well-crafted speeches with knowledge, and in chapters 11–13 he will criticize their practice of elevating the spiritual gifts of speaking in tongues and special knowledge over the supreme gift of love. His mention of these two here, however, is not tongue-in-cheek, for he genuinely believes these two to be real gifts God provides the church, even if they are misunderstood or abused (Soards 1999:25). Paul's emphatic repetition of "all" three times in this short verse (NLT, "every," "all," "all") emphasizes the overabundance of God's riches, more than enough to supply the church's needs.

In 1:6, Paul explains how the Corinthians' demonstration of speech and knowledge relates to being recipients of God's gracious gifts (1:4). They function as tangible evidence that the gospel Paul preached to them is in fact the true gospel, fully sanctioned by God. (This is a bigger issue in Galatians and addressed more fully there, but it is never far from Paul's concern.) Why else would God pour out his gifts of speech and knowledge on them? This confirmation of God's grace occurred primarily within them as a group, meaning they could see that speech and knowledge from God was manifested when they were congregated.

In 1:7, Paul places the reality of the spiritual gifts in the context of eschatology. As a result of being "enriched" (1:5), the Corinthians had everything they needed to thrive until Christ returns in eschatological splendor and judgment. The NLT appropriately puts in the positive what Paul actually says in the negative (NET, "so that you do not lack in any spiritual gift"), gauging that this verse falls under the umbrella of the positive language of 1:5 (Fee 1987:42). Since "you" is plural, Paul's perspective continues to be corporate. It is the spiritual needs of the church that will be satisfied by the spiritual gifts God supplies its members, a principle he will elaborate in chapters 12–14. The spiritual gifts help the church wait for the Lord expectantly because they occur as an overture or foretaste of the things to come, just as the miracles of Jesus demonstrated that the messianic age had arrived with his presence.

Paul acknowledges in 1:8 that remaining true to the gospel to the end might seem difficult, but the Corinthians would receive divine aid. The source of this help is interpreted as either God or Christ. The immediate proximity of Jesus Christ to the relative pronoun (*hos* [IG3739, Z64005], "he") favors him as the referent (Thiselton 2000:101). Although some make a strong case that "God" (from 1:4) remains the primary agent throughout this paragraph through the repeated divine passives (Fee 1987:44; Soards 1999:27), Paul's emphasis that they will be (lit.) "confirmed

blameless” indicates that it is the testimony of Christ, the content of the gospel (1:6), that is foremost in mind. People cannot be made blameless apart from God’s grace, but it is Christ’s death on the cross for humanity’s sins that makes them blameless when they believe in Christ and continue to do so until he returns. The repetition here and in 1:7 of the title “Lord” with “Jesus Christ” emphasizes both his resurrection and his role as sovereign judge in light of his eschatological return.

The ultimate confirmation of the reality of salvation at Christ’s return, Paul affirms in 1:9, is the proven character of God himself. Paul can testify to God’s faithfulness from his own experience. Knowledge of God’s character is certainly obtainable from reading his interactions with Israel in Jewish Scripture, but it was also experienced by the Corinthians in the gifts of words and knowledge they had seen working in their midst. In fact, it was God who made possible what they already had, even before the return of Christ.

## ◆ II. Paul’s Reaction to Alarming Reports of Division (1:10–4:21)

### A. Divisions in the Corinthian Church (1:10–17)

<sup>10</sup>I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters,\* by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. <sup>11</sup>For some members of Chloe’s household have told me about your quarrels, my dear brothers and sisters. <sup>12</sup>Some of you are saying, “I am a follower of Paul.” Others are saying, “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Peter,”\* or “I follow only Christ.”

<sup>13</sup>Has Christ been divided into factions?

Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not! <sup>14</sup>I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup>for now no one can say they were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup>(Oh yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas, but I don’t remember baptizing anyone else.) <sup>17</sup>For Christ didn’t send me to baptize, but to preach the Good News—and not with clever speech, for fear that the cross of Christ would lose its power.

1:10 Greek *brothers*; also in 1:11, 26. 1:12 Greek *Cephas*.

#### NOTES

**1:10 I appeal.** Gr., *parakaleō* [T63870, Z64151]. Standing as the very first word in the body of 1 Corinthians, it sets the tone for the whole of the letter. Used five more times in the epistle (4:13, 16; 14:31; 16:12, 15) but 18 times in 2 Corinthians and another 30 times scattered through his other letters, it can be translated “urge,” “comfort,” and “appeal,” as the NLT does here. More than a request, less than a command, it signals that what follows originates in concerned friendship. (See extensive discussion of its rhetorical function in Thiselton 2000:111-115; Witherington 1995:96-98.)

**the authority.** Lit., “the name.” This word was commonly used with the understanding that one was invoking the presence of the person named, appealing to the full authority of that person over those addressed. It assumes the person invoking that name has the official capacity to function as a representative.

**to live in harmony.** This translates an idiomatic phrase literally rendered “that you might say the same thing.” The phrase was heavily used in politics to refer to people who were ideologically allied (M. Mitchell 1993:68). The NIV reads, “that all of you agree with one another.”

# *2 Corinthians*

RALPH P. MARTIN  
WITH  
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## INTRODUCTION TO *2 Corinthians*

SECOND CORINTHIANS is one of the most autobiographical books of the Bible (Hengel 1983:69). In this epistle, Paul's emotions are displayed before the reader: both his depression and his elation. Paul's personal feelings and thoughts are time and again revealed unguardedly. Because he was speaking as a father to his beloved children in the faith, he forwent formality and even politeness. Here we see Paul as Paul, in his heights and in his depths. Because certain interlopers at Corinth were undermining his apostolic authority, Paul was forced to present his apostolic biography—with intimations of supernatural revelations and details about his sufferings. Acting as the Corinthians' spiritual father, he reproved them, encouraged them, disciplined them, and loved them. As a father jealously protective of his daughter, Paul wanted to preserve the Corinthians' spiritual purity and thereby present them as a chaste virgin to Christ (11:2).

### AUTHORSHIP

The apostle Paul is the acknowledged author of 2 Corinthians, and the genuineness of his authorship remains unchallenged today. The only place where serious doubt is cast pertains to the authorship of 6:14–7:1, which is sometimes taken to be a non-Pauline insertion into the text on account of the unusual language and the way 6:13 links with 7:2 with no apparent break. But this is not certain. (See the commentary on this section for further discussion.)

The first possible allusion to the letter (9:12) is found in *1 Clement* 38:2, followed by later echoes in Polycarp (*To the Philipppians* 6:2) and the letter to Diognetus (*Diognetus* 5:8-16; 6:8) and the explicit attribution of the letter to Paul in Tertullian (*Against Marcion* 5). (See the discussion in Becker 2004:140-166.)

The author of Acts tells us that "Saul, [was] also known as Paul" (Acts 13:9). "Saul" (Gr., *Saulos*) was Paul's Jewish birth name (*signum*). As a Benjamite (Rom 11:1; Phil 3:5), Saul was named after Israel's first king, who was from the same tribe. However, in his letters, Paul greets his audiences using the Greek *Paulos* (Paul), which is his Roman family name (*cognomen*) and means "small." Roman names consisted of three parts—personal (*praenomen*), clan (*nomen*), and family (*cognomen*). See Fitzmyer 1992:230-231.

While there is no physical description of Paul in the New Testament, we have some interesting extracanonical speculation. For example, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 3.1 (from the late second century AD) describes Paul as "a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and a nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness, for now he appeared like a man, and now

he had the face of an angel" (Hennecke and Schneemelcher 1965:2.354). Such a portrait offers a lesson in the value of historical backgrounds. Although this portrait does not match modern ideals of beauty, it is still probably an idealized image of Paul. Short people were thought to be quick. Baldness was a distinctly human trait (animals do not go bald). Crooked legs showed a person to be realistic (i.e., firmly planted). Meeting eyebrows portrayed beauty. A hooked nose indicated a royal or magnanimous person (Murphy-O'Connor 1996:44-45; also see Malherbe 1986:173).

Within the New Testament, our portrait of Paul is a hybrid derived from his own letters and a cautionary use of Acts. According to Acts, Paul was born a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37-38; 22:27-28; 25:10-12) and was a citizen of Tarsus (Acts 9:11; 21:39; 22:3). At some point, he moved to Jerusalem and was educated under Gamaliel I (Acts 22:3; cf. Gal 1:14; Phil 3:5). Paul's letters reflect a basic familiarity with Greek literacy and rhetoric, presenting the possibility that in addition to his Jewish education, Paul also received some elementary and possibly secondary Greco-Roman education either in Jerusalem or Tarsus.

From Paul's letters we discover that he was a Benjamite (Rom 11:1; Phil 3:5). As a former Pharisee who zealously practiced the law, he considered himself a "Hebrew of Hebrews" and blameless by the law's standards (11:22; Phil 3:6; cf. Acts 23:6; 26:4-6). Paul's crisis on the Damascus road (Acts 9) involved his discovery not of the insufficiency of the law but rather of the abundant sufficiency of Christ, who came to fulfill the law. While Paul did not describe his vocation, he was boastful in his ability to be self-sustaining in his ministry (11:9; 1 Cor 9:14-15; 1 Thess 2:9), and Acts informs us that he was a tentmaker (Acts 18:3), who probably made linen tents and awnings (used in the marketplace, beaches, atriums of homes, etc.) rather than leather tents (which were mainly restricted to the military, which had its own tentmakers). Acts gives the impression that Paul made several missionary journeys, traveling to and from Jerusalem and Antioch (Acts 12:25-13:3; 14:26-15:6; 18:22-23; 21:15-17), while Paul's letters give a general impression of his movement from east to west.

Turning to 2 Corinthians, Paul revealed many autobiographical and personal details of his life, because in Corinth, Paul's defense of his gospel was equally a defense of his apostleship (4:5, 10; 13:3). A rejection of Paul was tantamount to rejecting his gospel and vice versa, so it became important for him to defend both. In the midst of such a defense, Paul painfully recounted his general troubles as an itinerant preacher, including his opposition in Corinth (2:5), his troubles in Asia, likely alluding to an Ephesian imprisonment (1:8-11; cf. 1 Cor 15:32; Thrall 1994:117), and his recent afflictions in Macedonia (7:5-6). He highlighted social and political dangers like receiving lashes five times (11:24), being beaten with rods three times (11:25), being stoned once (11:25), and escaping Damascus (11:32-33). He reminded the Corinthians that his missionary activities involved the dangers of travel (11:26), being shipwrecked three times (11:25), and experiencing hunger and loss of sleep (11:27). Paul's anchor in the midst of these troubles was his hope of God's continual deliverance. Paul placed himself in positions of weakness to identify with the sufferings of Christ, so that God could vindicate him as he did Christ. We overhear Paul's joy in sharing the gospel in Troas (2:12-13), his hurt in being rejected in Corinth (1:23; 2:1), and his elation at hearing of the hope of rec-

conciliation with the Corinthians (ch 7). We also learn of Paul's mystical visionary experience (12:1-10) as well as his mysterious thorn (12:7).

As we listen in on Paul's half of his conversation with the Corinthians, modern readers are challenged on several fronts, especially as Christian leaders.

*We should be ready to forgive (2:10), grateful for uplifting news (2:13-14; 7:6), and courageous and hopeful in trying circumstances (4:8-10), recognizing that affliction is the church's true glory (4:8-10, 16-18; 6:3-10). There should be true ambition to please God (5:9). We should see that life contains paradoxes (6:10). There should be a concern to aid poor church members (chs 8-9). We should not be eager to defend ourselves against the attacks of others, but there are times when it is right and necessary to do so, especially when the integrity of the gospel is at risk (chs 10-11). We should be glad to suffer as God wills (12:8-10). We should be strictly honest (8:16-22; 12:17-18). The call of the Gospel is "come . . . and die" with Christ (4:10-12) in expectation of God's future, which, at present veiled from our eyes, is grasped by faith (5:7) and awaited with confidence. (R. Martin 1986:lxiii)*

## DATE AND OCCASION OF WRITING

Scholars are aware of at least five letters written to the Corinthians (or four, if 2 Corinthians is a unity). Prior to the writing of what is known as 2 Corinthians, Paul wrote three of those letters to the Corinthians: (1) a lost letter referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:9 (called a "previous letter"); (2) the letter known as 1 Corinthians, which may be dated in the spring of AD 54 or 55 (see commentary on 1 Corinthians); and (3) another lost, "severe letter" referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:4 and 7:8, which may be dated in the summer of AD 55. The last two letters have likely been combined into the canonical 2 Corinthians: (4) 2 Corinthians 1-9 was probably written in Macedonia during the fall of AD 55 after Paul left Ephesus and proceeded to northern Greece via Troas (2:12; 7:5); then (5) after Paul received word concerning a new crisis, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 10-13 in AD 56 (on the compositional integrity of 2 Corinthians, see the discussion under "Canonicity and Textual History").

In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 Paul implies that the collection for the poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem had not been started at Corinth. But in 2 Corinthians 8:10 and 9:2 he writes that the Corinthians began the collection "a year ago." The relationship between the two canonical letters to the Corinthians turns on this time reference. Another clue is the role played by Titus. After Paul's "intermediate" visit, rather than returning to Corinth as promised (1:15-16), Paul had sent Titus to Corinth. After his stay in Ephesus (Acts 20:1), Paul first went to Troas (7:6; 12:18). Titus went to Corinth to deal with a crisis that had been provoked by a serious challenge to Paul's authority as an apostle (2:4-5; 7:8-13). Titus went there to enforce the apostle's views and bring back word to Paul concerning the effect produced by a previous letter, which Paul had written in view of a crisis in the Corinthian church. This letter (the third written by Paul to the Corinthians) is known as the "severe letter," concerning which Paul wrote, "I am not sorry that I sent that severe letter to you, though I was sorry at first, for I know it was painful to you for a little while" (7:8; cf. 2:4).

Paul came to Macedonia to seek Titus about AD 56. When he learned from Titus that the crisis was over—at least for the time being—he wrote and sent chapters



1–7, followed by an encouragement to Titus to take up the collection for Jerusalem (chs 8 and 9). So there was a year's interval between the sending of 1 Corinthians and the dispatch of 2 Corinthians (8:10). This places chapters 1–9 in the fall of AD 55 or 56 (probably the latter). The arrival of certain teachers, however, reopened the problems Titus thought he had solved (11:4, 13–15), thereby prompting Paul sometime later to write chapters 10–13, also from Macedonia. Therefore, the letter we know as 2 Corinthians most likely contains Paul's fourth letter (chs 1–9) and fifth letter (chs 10–13) to the church at Corinth.

This period of Paul's relationship with the church at Corinth was filled with days of anxious strain (2:13; 7:5). Paul failed to find Titus at Troas, which was where the two men had agreed to meet. So Paul left Troas to cross over to Macedonia (2:13). There Titus met him and brought good news. He reported that Paul's severe letter, written at great cost to the apostle (2:4), had done its work well, though Paul feared earlier that he might have written too severely (7:8). He now rejoiced, however, that the crisis was apparently over, and the estrangement between him and the church, occasioned by one prominent individual's opposition to him at Corinth (2:5–11), had passed, and the church had disciplined this person. The occasion of 2 Corinthians is to be found at this point. The major part of the letter (chs 1–7) is devoted to the theme of joy, expressing Paul's relief and thanksgiving to God.

Yet it is clear that the troubles at Corinth were not over. Beginning at 10:1 we learn that Paul was facing a new threat to his apostolic standing, following the arrival of a party of teachers who came to Corinth with what he regarded as false ideas (11:4, 13–15). The last four chapters (chs 10–13) are Paul's rebuttal of these teachers, expressed in vitriolic and ironical tones, unparalleled in his other letters. How this part of the canonical letter was received is unknown, but we may infer from the fact that it was preserved that it succeeded in answering these charges against him.

But perhaps not finally: By the time of a letter called *1 Clement*, written in AD 96 from Rome, the church in Corinth was still racked by dissensions, infighting, and contending with false teachers (*1 Clement* 1:1; 47:5–6: "Consider who they are who have perverted you"). The lesson for the modern reader of 2 Corinthians is clear. There is no lasting reconciliation between antagonistic groups, even Christian groups, in this age. Every generation of believers needs to heed the apostle's call to live in peace and unity (13:11). And we can only respond by a continued reliance on those forces that moved and motivated Paul in his role as a reconciling agent to bring together alienated parties at Corinth, namely, "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (13:14).

In the midst of Paul's conflict with the Corinthians, one of the major points of contention was his shifting travel plans. Between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, we can see at least three itineraries, listed as follows:

1. Plan A: Ephesus—Macedonia—Corinth (second)—Jerusalem
  2. Plan B: Ephesus—Corinth (intermediate)—Macedonia—Corinth (second)—Judea
  3. Actual: Ephesus—Corinth (intermediate)—Macedonia—Ephesus—Troas—Macedonia
- Future promised visits: Corinth (third)—Judea

Paul's first two plans never quite materialized. According to 1 Corinthians 16:2-8, after leaving Corinth the first time, Paul promised a lengthy second visit in Corinth *after* his ministry in Macedonia (Plan A). However, in 2 Corinthians 1:15-16, Paul presented a modified plan, intending to give the Corinthians the pleasure of a double visit before (intermediate) *and* after (second) going to Macedonia (Plan B).

In actuality, Paul left Ephesus and visited Corinth for an "intermediate" visit before going to Macedonia. Paul then left for Macedonia, but because he met such severe opposition in Corinth, he canceled his promised return for a second visit to Corinth (1:23; 2:1-11). Instead, he returned to Ephesus, opting to write a "severe letter," which he sent to Corinth with Titus, rather than make his promised second trip to Corinth (7:8, 12). Because Paul was anxious for the results of his letter and about news of the collection, and because he also saw an opportunity for evangelism, he went to Troas to meet Titus returning from Corinth (2:12-13a). Not willing to wait for Titus, Paul pushed on for Macedonia, where he found him (2:13b; 7:5-6). After hearing from Titus of the Corinthians' change of heart (7:7-16), Paul composed 2 Corinthians 1-9 and had to explain why they had now received two letters rather than the promised second visit. Finally, in response to the new crisis brought by outside opponents, Paul composed chapters 10-13 and promised to make his "third" visit to sort out the Corinthian situation (12:14; 13:1). The situation was resolved enough for Paul finally to visit Corinth, where he wrote Romans and sent it with a delegate from Cenchrea (Rom 16:1) and where he successfully gathered his Jerusalem collection (Rom 15:26). (For more on Paul's travel itinerary, see Barrett 1973:7 and the notes on 1:15-16, 23; 2:1; 12:14; 13:1.)

In light of the above discussion, the chronology of Paul's visits and letters to Corinth may be charted as follows:

CORINTH AD 50-51	First visit where Paul established the church but leaves for Ephesus after a judgment before Gallio (Acts 18:1-17).
EPHESUS AD 51-54 AD 54	<b>First Letter</b> (lost) mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9. <b>Second Letter</b> (1 Corinthians) written in response to problems (1 Cor 1:11) and questions (1 Cor 7:1).
CORINTH AD 55 (spring)	Emergency, "intermediate" visit (2 Cor 1:16; 2:1) prompted by Timothy's failed mission (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10), where Paul is confronted and leaves quickly with plans to return for a longer second visit for a "double blessing" (2 Cor 1:15-16, 23).
EPHESUS AD 55 (summer)	<b>Third Letter</b> (lost) is mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:4; 7:8 as the "severe" letter.
MACEDONIA AD 55 (fall) AD 56 AD 56-57 (winter)	<b>Fourth Letter</b> (2 Cor 1-9) written in confidence because of Titus's report that the Corinthians had a change of heart. <b>Fifth Letter</b> (2 Cor 10-13) written in response to outsiders who turned the Corinthians against Paul. "Third" visit (2 Cor 12:14; 13:1) where Paul achieves reconciliation (Acts 20:2-3) and writes Romans (Rom 16:1-16).

All of these shifting promises created fertile ground for the accusation that Paul was fickle (1:17). In chapters 1–9, Paul answers this charge of fickleness with the image of Christ leading him in a triumphant procession. While Paul appeared to be a defeated prisoner being led in humiliation, in actuality Paul's weakness was what identified him with the sufferings of Christ, and this weakness was intended to display the strength of God (P. B. Duff 1994:20).

## AUDIENCE

Second Corinthians is addressed not only to the congregation in Corinth but to "all of his holy people [believers] throughout Greece [Achaia]" (1:1; see NLT mg). Acts indicates that Paul visited Corinth on his second missionary journey (for about 18 months) and third missionary journey (for about 3 months). It was here that Paul met his fellow tentmakers Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:18-19). Paul's appearance before Gallio (Acts 18:12-17), who was in office as proconsul in AD 51–52, provides an anchor for Pauline chronology. Gallio's verdict allowed Christianity to operate legally in the city. Another anchor, which is mentioned in 11:32, is Paul's escape from Damascus when it was under the control of King Aretas IV between AD 37 and 39/40. In Paul's day, Corinth's population would have been anywhere from 70,000 to 100,000 people, with the Corinthian congregation consisting of a few house churches of up to around 30 members meeting in various wealthier members' homes.

While originally a prominent Greek city-state, Corinth was destroyed by Roman forces in 146 BC and left to ruin. However, in 44 BC it was refounded as a Roman colony by Julius Caesar with the formal name "Colony of Corinth in Honor of Julius" (*Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis*). Corinth was the capital of the senatorial province of Achaia, which was located in southern Greece (9:2; 11:10). As a Roman colony, the city was considered to be an extension of Rome operating under Roman law, governed by Roman citizens, and with Latin as the official language (although Greek was also spoken in the city, especially by locals and travelers from the eastern part of the Roman Empire). Both citizenship and, usually, the possession of property were required to be part of the local government, which consisted of an assembly of citizen voters, a city council, and annual magistrates (*duovir*), who were assisted by two business managers (*aedile*). Corinthian citizens (*cives*) were typically Romans who were the descendants of former soldiers and freed slaves, while the Greek Corinthians would have been resident aliens (*incolae*).

Corinth was a metropolitan city where opportunity existed for the ambitious entrepreneur (Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 10.19.25). There was a spirit of self-promotion and pride as the numerous public inscriptions throughout the city indicate. This spirit would have penetrated the Corinthian congregation, and it is no wonder that the Corinthians were attracted to Paul's boastful opponents while being suspicious of the apostle of weakness. In fact, there is an inscription crediting the *aedile* Erastus for paving the street near the Corinthian theater; he is very likely the same Corinthian Christian Erastus mentioned by Paul in Romans 16:23. The Corinthian Christians consisted of a mixture of the wealthy and poor, from all strata of society.

Corinth maintained a diverse economy with a focus on service and goods for those visiting the city. It was a natural center for trade because it controlled the nar-

**OUTLINE**

- I. Opening Greetings (1:1-2)
- II. Thanksgiving for God's Comfort (1:3-11)
- III. Paul's Defense of His Travel Plans and Severe Letter (1:12-2:13)
  - A. Paul's Change of Travel Plans (1:12-22)
  - B. Paul's Justification of His Severe Letter (1:23-2:13)
- IV. Paul's Apostolic Ministry (2:14-7:1)
  - A. Paul's Qualifications for Ministry (2:14-3:6)
  - B. Life under the Two Covenants (3:7-18)
  - C. The Setting for Paul's Ministry (4:1-7)
  - D. Paul's Life of Hardship (4:8-18)
  - E. The Heavenly House (5:1-10)
  - F. Motives for Paul's Preaching and Living (5:11-15)
  - G. Living in the New Creation (5:16-6:2)
  - H. Paul's Defense of His Ministry (6:3-10)
  - I. The Temple of the Living God (6:11-7:1)
- V. The Good Report of Titus (7:2-16)
- VI. The Collection for the Jerusalem Church (8:1-9:15)
  - A. The Macedonians' Example (8:1-7)
  - B. Appeal to the Corinthians (8:8-15)
  - C. The Forthcoming Visit of Titus and His Associates (8:16-24)
  - D. The Delegation Commended to the Corinthians (9:1-5)
  - E. The Collection for Christian Unity (9:6-15)
- VII. Paul's Defense of Himself and His Apostleship (10:1-12:21)
  - A. Paul's Defense of His Authority (10:1-18)
  - B. The Opponents Identified and Condemned (11:1-15)
  - C. Paul's Many Trials (11:16-33)
  - D. Paul's Vision and Weakness (12:1-10)
  - E. Paul's Defense of His Apostleship (12:11-21)
- VIII. Warnings and a Promised Third Visit (13:1-10)
- IX. Final Greetings (13:11-14)

## COMMENTARY ON *2 Corinthians*

### ◆ I. Opening Greetings (1:1–2)

This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and from our brother Timothy.

and to all of his holy people throughout Greece.\*

I am writing to God's church in Corinth

<sup>2</sup>May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

1:1 Greek *Achaia*, the southern region of the Greek peninsula.

#### NOTES

**1:1 Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.** Paul greets his audience with his Roman family name (*cognomen*), which means “small” (see Acts 13:9; also see the Introduction on “Authorship”). Paul’s name stands first, following the custom of how letters were written in the ancient world. The author’s name is followed by that of the person(s) addressed. What is unusual in Paul’s letter writing is (1) his appeal to his own authority, conveyed in the title “apostle of Christ Jesus” backed by his claim that his role as God’s messenger is endorsed by the divine will, and (2) his inclusion of “brother Timothy” along with his own name. See the Introduction for more on Paul’s biographical details.

The note of apostolic authority is sounded throughout 2 Corinthians (1:21; 2:17; 4:5; 5:20; 10:8; 13:10). These references pay tribute to Paul’s self-conscious claim to be God’s servant uniquely set apart and commissioned for the task of ministry in the “new covenant” (3:6). In this letter Paul has to defend his apostleship in opposition to those who made the same claim (which he denies by labeling them “false apostles,” 11:13) and who denied his apostolic calling (implied in 2:17). More significantly, this epistle contains the real meaning of what Paul meant by apostleship (Barnett 1993:45–51; Barnett 1997:35–46).

C. K. Barrett considers 2 Corinthians to be Paul’s fullest and most passionate account concerning his understanding of apostleship (1970:35–46; 1973:53). On the term “apostle” (lit., “one sent”; *apostolos* [TG652, ZG693]) there is much recent discussion, especially as Paul’s claim to apostleship was questioned at Corinth, and there is a full discussion of the term in Barnett 1993:45–51. In Corinth there were those who claimed to be apostles and challenged Paul’s authority. They are the occasion for his writing chs 10–13. The issue is not merely personal apostolic authority, but also the geographic territory belonging to Paul (see notes on 10:12–18).

Prior to the NT, “apostle” was used rarely—in classical Greek it is found in seafaring contexts, and the LXX uses it only once for “messenger” (1 Kgs 14:6, LXX), but it is found 80 times in the NT and 34 times in Paul’s letters. The term is usually used either in a technical sense for someone bearing divine authority (1 Cor 1:1) or in a nontechnical sense for a messenger (8:23; Phil 2:25).

There is no doubt Paul claimed to be a genuine apostle by virtue of his having seen the Lord and receiving a commission to be a missionary to the Gentiles (cf. 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8; Gal 1:11-17). Further, Paul claimed his initially successful ministry in Corinth to be a metaphorical letter of his apostolic authority (on this letter metaphor, see the note on 3:3). Although Paul considers himself an apostle, that is, “one sent” from Christ, he does not group himself among the Twelve nor does he consider James the brother of Jesus to be among the Twelve, but he does consider himself among a wider collection of apostles (cf. 1 Cor 9:1; 15:5-9). It is possible that Paul understands himself to be the least of the apostles (1 Cor 15:9) because he considers himself to be the last of the apostles, having received a distinct vision and calling on the Damascus road. (For more on how the Damascus road experience shaped Paul’s self-understanding, see S. Kim 1982.) It is also debated whether Paul’s Damascus road encounter with Christ is modeled after a prophetic calling (often highlighting Christianity as the fulfillment or continuation of Judaism) or a conversion (often highlighting Christianity as a distinct movement from Judaism).

**and from our brother Timothy.** Timothy is designated “the brother” (so in Greek), the same wording found in Col 1:1; 1 Thess 3:2. In other places (1 Cor 4:17; Phil 2:22) it speaks of the intimate relationship between Paul and his “child in the faith,” as in the letters to Timothy. Here it suggests a more formal relationship, since Timothy was Paul’s envoy to Corinth (1 Cor 4:17), and the term “brother” suggests a title of one of Paul’s authorized messengers to the churches (as in 8:22). The use of the definite article (*the* brother) supports this idea (Thrall 1994:84-85). This portrayal of Timothy and the portrayal of Titus as an envoy are helpful reminders of the authority that these men bore as coworkers of Paul, which is sometimes forgotten when reading the Pastoral Epistles.

**God’s church in Corinth.** The “church” (*ekklēsia* [TG1577, ZG1711]) means the assembly of believers as the people of the new covenant (a theme developed in ch 3), the new Israel of God.

**his holy people.** Christians are the “holy ones” (*hagioi* [TG40A, ZG41]), a title with roots in the OT, deriving from the Hebrew word meaning “to separate,” which LXX renders by the term *hagios* in its various forms. The “holy ones” (traditionally rendered as “saints”) are separated in a twofold way: Negatively, there is separation from moral evil, and positively, there is dedication to God and his service as his “holy nation” (Exod 19:5-6; Lev 11:44-45; 19:1-2; Deut 7:6). Outward signs of this separation included the physical separation created by circumcision, Sabbath observance, and food laws. Allegiance to these customs became marks of a covenantal loyalty during the intertestamental period (1 Macc 1:62-63; cf. 2 Macc 5:27; 4 Macc 4-18; Josephus *Antiquities* 11.346). Paul vigorously argues against Gentiles taking up these practices for purposes of salvation (Gal 2:3, 11-14; 4:10; 5:1-12; 6:12-15) while allowing Jews to maintain them so long as they are done in service to Christ (Rom 14-15; 1 Cor 7:18-20). For Paul, these marks no longer define covenantal loyalty or the people of God; rather, it is belonging to Christ (Gal 3:28-29) and having the Holy Spirit that now mark off the people of God (Rom 15:13; Gal 5:18). See C. N. Toney 2008 for Paul’s stance on the law and his inclusive ethic.

**throughout Greece.** Lit., “the whole of Achaia” (so NLT mg). After 27 BC “Achaia” became the name of the whole of Greece, but in earlier times it denoted a smaller territory on the northern coast of the Peloponnese, i.e., southern Greece (so NLT footnote). Paul’s usage here (as in 1 Cor 16:15; cf. Rom 15:26; 1 Thess 1:7-8) probably reflects the earlier designation, with Corinth as the chief city and the important trading center of the province.

**1:2 grace and peace.** Paul modified the standardized greeting in Hellenistic letters (*chairein* [TG5463, ZG5897], “greetings”) by using the Christian terms “grace” (*charis* [TG5485, ZG5921]),

which sounds like *chairein*) and “peace” (*eirēnē* [T<sup>G</sup>1515, Z<sup>G</sup>1645]), which is virtually the Greek equivalent of the Heb. *shalom* [TH7965, ZH8934], meaning the blessing of God’s salvation (Num 6:26). In this way he turned the colorless contemporary greeting into a wish-prayer for his readers, calling down God’s gracious favor to the undeserving and his gift of well-being. A strikingly similar expression occurs in Jewish literature in 2 *Baruch* 78:2: “Thus speaks Baruch, the son of Neriah, to the brothers who were carried away captive: Grace and peace be with you” (A. F. J. Klijn 1983).

#### COMMENTARY

Paul’s opening address and greeting focus attention on a number of issues that will be developed and enlarged in the rest of the letter. Foremost among these is the question of his authority as an apostle. From what we know of Paul’s dealings with the congregations that had their central meeting place in the city of Corinth, this authority was under fire and was a matter of heated debate. Throughout the letter Paul is on the defensive (albeit with a new set of opponents in chapters 10–13).

How Paul offers his defense will be addressed throughout this commentary. It is simply noted here that he was engaged in an extended debate with those who made two claims. On the one hand, they asserted that they were the true apostles of Christ since they alone represented the original apostles in the mother church at Jerusalem. And, on the other side, these persons took exception to Paul’s claim to be Christ’s apostle to the Gentiles (as in Rom 15:16) and even doubted his Christian standing (a criticism implied in 10:7).

For these two reasons Paul began his letter with a robust assertion of his calling as “chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.” The expanded description of his calling “by the will of God” recalls his account of his conversion in Galatians 1:15-16, and this allusion is well brought out by the NLT’s rendering, “chosen by the will of God,” to underline Paul’s sense of conviction that his vocation was not his own choice. Rather, he was responding to the divine summons for his life (1 Cor 9:16).

We should not fail to notice how Paul thought of his apostolic service. He claimed to have received his authority from the Lord himself (13:10), yet it was not an authority that was overbearing and dictatorial, imposing itself on others in a rough and insensitive manner. So he was clear to qualify his authority in two ways. First, he denied any coercive attitude when he wrote, “That does not mean we want to dominate you. . . . We want to work together with you” (1:24). Second, he saw such God-given authority as serving to build up the church, not tear it down (10:8; 13:10). He viewed his authority as modeled on the figure of the suffering Lord Jesus, whose weakness became the power of compelling love (13:4). The Lord’s word spoken to him, “My power works best in weakness” (12:9), is a true reminder to all who aspire to leadership in the church that our stewardship is best exercised when we follow this road.

The character and calling of the church is the other prominent feature highlighted in this prefatory address. By using the title “holy people,” Paul described the intention and design of the church’s Lord that they should be like him in holiness. This is the call to consecrated living and service in the world, even when the setting is the unpromising moral atmosphere of such a city as Corinth. Moral problems plagued



Corinth. In several places in the following letter (e.g., 6:14–7:1; chs 10–13) Paul would have to deal severely with various issues of idolatry and immorality. So it is appropriate at the beginning of the letter that the character of the church as God’s “sanctified” people, set apart for him and his service as Israel of old, should be displayed and held up before this congregation as its calling in the world.

## ◆ II. Thanksgiving for God’s Comfort (1:3–11)

<sup>3</sup>All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. <sup>4</sup>He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. <sup>5</sup>For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. <sup>6</sup>Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. <sup>7</sup>We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us.

1:8 Greek *brothers*.

<sup>8</sup>We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters,\* about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. <sup>9</sup>In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. <sup>10</sup>And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us. <sup>11</sup>And you are helping us by praying for us. Then many people will give thanks because God has graciously answered so many prayers for our safety.

### NOTES

1:3 *All praise to God*. Lit., “Blessed [be] God.” Paul’s use of this formulaic statement is taken from the worship of the Jewish synagogue, in particular the prayers known as the Eighteen Benedictions, which are intercessions framed by the call to praise the Lord. In Jewish prayers God is “blessed,” that is, praised for his kindness and grace to Israel. There are parallels, too, in the Dead Sea Scrolls; one scroll is actually called “Thanksgivings” or “Praises.”

*the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . our merciful Father*. Also taken from Paul’s Jewish worship heritage is the character of God as “the Father of mercies.” It forms a praise of God in the daily prayer known as the Shema (“Hear, O Israel”) based on Deut 6:4. For Paul as a Jewish believer in Jesus, the fatherhood of God is patterned on the sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom God’s mercy (favor-in-grace) is clearly known as he redeems his people. However, it should be noted that God is neither male nor female and the Bible does, in fact, also use female images for God—a mother (Jer 31:15-22; Isa 66:7-14; Job 38:28-29), a pregnant woman (Isa 42:14), a midwife (Ps 22:9), a mistress (Ps 123:2), a woman (Luke 15:8-10; Matt 13:33//Luke 13:20-21).

*comfort*. The connection of God’s mercy to “comfort” (*paraklēsis* [T63874, Z64155]) may imply Paul’s sharing in the messianic deliverance promised in the OT (Isa 40:1; 51:3, 12, 19). The Messiah is described in Jewish literature as Israel’s “comforter.”

1:4 *He comforts us . . . same comfort God has given us*. The alternative rendering to “comfort” is “encouragement” (*paraklēsis* [T63874, Z64155]), since it is linked with Paul’s affliction (*thlipsis* [T62347, Z62568]; NLT, “troubles”). Then the term refers primarily to Paul’s