

# I. Back to the Corinthians

September 2/3/4, 2014

2 Corinthians 1:1-2

**Aim:** To introduce Paul's second epistle to the Corinthian church.

## A. Establishing the Corinthian Church (Acts 18)

### 1. The City of Corinth

Greece is divided geographically into two parts. The southern part, the Peloponnesus, is attached to the northern by a very narrow, four-mile-wide isthmus. On the western side are the Gulf of Corinth and the port city of Lechaem. On the eastern side are the Saronic Gulf and the port city of Cenchreae. In the middle of the isthmus, to the south, is Corinth, situated on a commanding plateau. In ancient times all north and south overland traffic, including that to and from Athens, had to pass through Corinth, making the city a wide-open boomtown vibrant with people.

Corinth's geographical position on the narrow land bridge (4 miles across) between the Greek peninsula and the Peloponnesus was crossed by many people. It was a strategic center of commerce by land and by sea. Sea travelers and mercantile goods passed both ways across the Corinthian isthmus; the seas to the south of the Peloponnesus were dangerous to shipping. Rather than attempt the risky voyage around the southern land mass, merchants and the military often transported their goods, men, and hardware overland. Most captains even chose to carry their ships overland on skids or rollers across the narrow isthmus, directly past Corinth. This procedure was quicker, more economical, and much safer than sailing 250 miles around the peninsula. In fact, the isthmus came to be known as *dialcos*, which means 'the place of dragging across.' In peacetime, the city of Corinth controlled this lucrative traffic. Today a canal—envisioned by Perisander in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, begun by the Roman emperor Nero in the first century AD, but not completed until the end of nineteenth century—connects the two gulfs across the isthmus, greatly facilitating maritime travel.

In classical times Corinth had been a rival of Greece. The Roman invasion of Greece, however, reduced the city to rubble in 146 BC. About a century later Julius Caesar re-established the city, but as a Roman colony. Corinth was the capital of the province of Achaia and was ruled by its own Roman proconsul. The city became a melting pot for Greeks, Syrians, Jews, and resettled Roman army veterans, providing a rich mix of ethnicity and religion. As an accessible travel center, it would draw all the itinerant philosophers and rhetoricians on the circuit.

Corinth was also successful as an entertainment center. The two great athletic festivals of that day were the Olympian and the Isthmian games. Every two years the Isthmian games brought competitors and multitudes of spectators to Corinth. Furthermore, Corinth was noted for its manufacture of bronzes according to a secret formula. The city was a wealthy cosmopolitan seaport, with a reputation for being at the cutting edge of Mediterranean life and culture.

Thriving commerce often translates into thriving debauchery, but Corinth took debauchery and licentiousness to new heights – or depths! The other pagan cities of the day acknowledged Corinth's moral corruption by coining the word *corinthiazesthai* – to live like a Corinthian. This word came to represent gross immorality and drunken debauchery; the name of the city became synonymous with moral depravity.

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Like most Greek cities, Corinth had an acropolis (literally, ‘high city’), called Acrocorinth, which was used as a place of defense and for pagan worship. From its top on a clear day Athens can be seen, some 45 miles away. Situated on a 2,000-foot high granite mound, Acrocorinth was large enough to hold all the population of Corinth and of its surrounding farmlands in time of siege. It also held a famous temple to Aphrodite, goddess of love. The temple normally housed some one thousand priestesses, ritual prostitutes, who each night would come down into Corinth and ply their trade among the many foreign travelers and the local men.

Corinth appears to have been an exceptionally ‘religious’ city. Religion was plentiful and the tide of iniquity flowed on unabated. In fact, the religions of Corinth were part of the problem. A temple to the goddess of love and fertility, Aphrodite, was there. A thousand priestesses plied the trade of prostitution as part of the religious rites. Long-haired male prostitutes were also a common sight. There were many temples for the gods, shrines for the Roman imperial family, and mystery cults. All this presented a problem for the members of the church in Corinth, many of whom remained enmeshed in ‘temple culture.’

Religion and politics were inextricably linked. All the cults of the gods and the mysteries expressed solidarity with local civic life and reverence towards the Roman emperors upon whom all provincial life depended. Only the Jews were excused from participating in the sacrifices. At the beginning the Christians may also have enjoyed this liberty since officially they were viewed as part of Judaism.

The population of Corinth was largely immigrant and opportunist, filled with those seeking a better life. Corinth became the popular answer to Rome’s overpopulation—and especially its freedmen (those who had formerly been slaves), who became Corinth’s largest segment. Neo-Corinth also became a favorite venue for ex-Roman soldiers seeking a better life for their families.

Even the old Corinth had a reputation for wealth, but the new Corinthians had a passion to achieve riches, for their city was settled largely by freedmen, slaves whose services to their masters had earned them their freedom. These were often gifted and were notoriously ambitious for wealth and status. They were nouveaux riches, self-made men, and they loved self-display. They were also, of course, many inhabitants of the city who were still slaves, and there was a renowned slave-market there.

In 50 AD Corinth was a young Roman city with shallow roots. Traditions were few, and thus society was relatively open. There was no city in the Empire more conducive to advancement. Because there was no landed aristocracy in Corinth, wealth became the sole factor for respect and ascendancy.

By the time of Paul’s visit, about a hundred years after its re-foundation, Corinth was a bustling port city, a dazzling Roman city of cosmopolitan character and brash manner. Its vigorous cultic life, however, was an ever-present threat to those Gentiles who as Christians must turn their backs on the gods, the temples, and their priests. Archaeological excavations have revealed many evidences of a city lifestyle devoted to entertainment and self-indulgence. As citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we would have found much that was instantly familiar had we been with Paul in Corinth.

Travel, tourism, sex, and religious pluralism were woven together in Corinth’s new culture. Significantly, while Nero never visited Athens and Sparta, he spent considerable time in Corinth,

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enjoying the adulation of its voluptuous populace. The similarities to modern Western culture are so striking that a California pastor, Ray Stedman, used to call Paul's Corinthian letters "First and Second Californians!"

### **2. The Church of Corinth (Acts 18)**

Paul arrived in Corinth in the autumn of 50 AD and his initial ministry occupied about a year and a half. On his arrival from Athens he stayed with Aquila and Priscilla, who were fellow-Jews, fellow-tentmakers, and fellow-believers. During this period Paul taught the gospel to Jews and God-fearers in the synagogue (Acts 18:1-4). When he was rejoined from Macedonia by Silas and Timothy, Paul intensified his ministry in Corinth which now extended to the Gentile population (Acts 18:5-8).

Those whom Paul addresses in the letter would therefore have been a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, from both monotheistic and pagan backgrounds, and from the little evidence we have it is likely that they would have represented a wide social range.

Acts 18:12 tells us that Gallio occupied the office of Roman proconsul during Paul's first visit to Corinth. An independent inscription from Delphi regarding proconsul Gallio enables historians to date the church-planting visit to 51-52 AD. After a ministry of eighteen months, Paul left Corinth in the spring of 52 AD with Priscilla and Aquila and went to Ephesus. Leaving his friends there, he returned to Palestine (Acts 18:12-22).

## **B. Interacting with the Corinthian Church**

### **1. Non-Pauline Interactions**

Silas and Timothy remained in Corinth when Paul left in 52 AD, though it is not clear how long they remained. We lose track of Silas for the next dozen or so years until he appears in Rome as Peter's amanuensis (1 Pe. 5:12). Sometime after Paul came to Ephesus, Timothy rejoined him from Corinth (1 Cor. 16:10; Acts 19:22).

A sequence of Christian leaders visited Corinth during Paul's stay in Ephesus. First came Apollos, the Jew from Alexandria. Apollos had heard about the preaching of John the Baptist. Apollos did not grasp that Christ was the fulfillment of John's preaching and teaching until he came to the synagogue in Ephesus where Priscilla and Aquila 'showed him the way of God more accurately' (Acts 18:26). He was encouraged to journey to Achaia and became the second pastor of the infant Corinthian church. Paul arrived in Ephesus shortly after Apollos left. Apollos created a great impression when he came to Corinth, both for his eloquence and the power of his spiritual fervor (Acts 18:24-25, 28). In 1 Corinthians Paul addresses the new fascinations of the Corinthians in rhetoric, wisdom, and 'spiritual' ministry. It is possible that Apollos' ministry had unintentionally inflamed these expressions of ministry in Corinth. Paul must address the issues of wisdom and rhetoric in chapters 1-4 and 'spiritual' ministry in chapters 12-14.

Sometime later Corinth was favored by a visit from Peter (Cephas) and his wife (9:5). From 33-49 AD Peter had been the apostle to the land of Israel, proclaiming the gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. After the Jerusalem Council in 49 AD Peter began to travel outside the land of Israel. He probably revisited the churches in Palestine and most likely came once more to Antioch. It is possible that he traveled through Asia Minor before coming to Corinth sometime after 52 AD. It is possible that Peter's visit, like Apollos', also unsettled the

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Corinthians in regard to Paul, though in different ways. Peter may have created the impression that since Paul had not been a disciple of the historical Jesus he was not fully an apostle. This would explain why Paul needed to insist on his genuine apostleship (9:1-3; 15:8-11).

Barnabas, Paul's colleague in Antioch and partner on his First Missionary Journey, also may have visited Corinth at some point (cp. 9:6). The coming of Apollos, Peter, and Barnabas showed the Corinthians that Paul was by no means the only preacher or Christian leader.

It also appears that a local leader or leaders had arisen who were taking the church in a rather different direction from the founding apostle (3:10, 19; 4:18-19). These have created their own loyal followings, against one another and against Paul (4:6). These new leaders are teaching a wisdom-based message, not Christ crucified and risen. Paul faces these troublemakers with his admonitions in the letter, but also by urging the Corinthians to recognize responsible local people like Stephanas (16:15-18) and welcoming warmly Timothy when he comes (16:10-11).

### 2. Pauline Interactions – Commentaries

After his departure from Corinth, disturbing news reached Paul about problems that had arisen in the Corinthian church. In response, he wrote a non-canonical letter (not extant) in which he confronted those issues (1 Cor. 5:9). While ministering in Ephesus on his third missionary journey, Paul heard of still more trouble at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:11; 16:17). In addition, the Corinthians wrote him a letter seeking clarification on some issues (1 Cor. 7:1). Paul's response was to write them the letter known as 1 Corinthians.

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus, about three years after his initial founding visit. At the time of his writing that epistle, he planned to visit Corinth again to gather up a collection for the poor in Jerusalem. But in the interim he sent Timothy to visit the Corinthian believers (cp. 1 Cor. 16:1-11).

While 1 Corinthians apparently resolved some of the problems in Corinth, a new and potentially more dangerous threat soon arose. What Timothy encountered was an incipient, growing apostasy, likely the work of Paul's enemies who had recently come from Jerusalem. False teachers, claiming to be apostles sent by the Jerusalem church, arrived in Corinth and soon wooed many of the congregation away from their loyalty to Paul and the truth. When Paul heard about this threat (possibly from Timothy), he decided to leave Ephesus, pay the Corinthians a visit, briefly to tend to matters, and be on his way.

But what a shock awaited Paul—his infamous 'painful visit' (2 Cor. 2:1)—seismic misery. The apostle's authority, even his apostleship, was called into question. If Paul was for real, why was there so much suffering in his life? they asked. Also, why was his ministry so lackluster when compared with the ministry of others? Why was his preaching so dull? And why did he change his travel plans if God was actually directing his life? Moreover, what lay behind his refusal to accept payment for his services, as most preachers did? Was he *really* collecting money for the poor? Why didn't Paul have letters of recommendation like the others? Why didn't he regale them with stories about God's power in his ministry? Was it because there were none? Tragically, this attack on Paul's ministry and person had led many of his Corinthian converts to reject him and his preaching for 'a different gospel' (cp. 11:4).

The visit (the 'sorrowful' or 'painful' visit; cp. 2 Cor. 2:1) did not go well, reaching its lowest ebb when someone (possibly one of the false apostles) defied Paul and openly insulted him (2:5-8, 10; 7:12). To his immense sorrow, the Corinthians did not take action against the offender.

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Paul left Corinth devastated and wounded. In his own words, ‘I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you’ (2:1). Still stung, back in Ephesus, Paul sent Titus to Corinth with a new and ‘severe’ letter (2:5). It was a letter of great emotion (2:4). Paul called for repentance.

Leaving Ephesus, Paul went to Troas, where he hoped to meet Titus. Though there was an open door for ministry there, Paul’s concern over the situation at Corinth prevented him from taking full advantage of it (2:12-13). Restless, unable to wait any longer for Titus, Paul went on to Macedonia, where he at long last met him. Titus’s news that most of the Corinthians had repented and reaffirmed their loyalty to Paul (7:7) brought great joy and relief to the apostle. The majority came back to Paul and his gospel, but some still rejected his authority.

Paul was wise enough to know that although the situation at Corinth had improved dramatically, the church was not out of danger yet. The false apostles were still there, and a minority of the Corinthians remained confused or loyal to them. As he prepared for his upcoming visit to Corinth (12:14; 13:1), Paul wrote the magnificent letter of 2 Corinthians from Macedonia (possibly from Philippi, as some ancient manuscripts indicate), as he began to make plans to return for a third visit (12:14; 13:1). In it he vigorously defended his apostleship against the false teachers’ attacks, gave instruction regarding the collection for the poor believers at Jerusalem, and confronted the false apostles and their followers head-on.

### 3. Pauline Interactions – DSB Summary

The following is my [DSB] proposed sequence of events outlining Paul’s complex interactions with the Corinthian church from 50-56 AD.

#### *a) Events Leading to the Writing of First Corinthians*

- Paul plants the church of Corinth during his Second Missionary Journey, staying in Corinth eighteen months from about Sep-50 to Mar-52 AD (Acts 18:1-18).
- Paul departs Corinth via Cenchreae, leaves Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus, and returns to Antioch via Jerusalem, ending the Second Missionary Journey around May-52 AD (Acts 18:18-22).
- After a short stay in Antioch, Paul begins the Third Missionary Journey (Aug-52 AD), returning overland through Galatia to Ephesus as promised, arriving in the spring of 53 AD (Acts 18:23; 19:1).
- In Ephesus, Paul learns from Aquila and Priscilla about Apollos, who had gone on to minister in Corinth (Acts 18:24-28). Paul apparently approves (later) of Apollos and his ministry (1 Cor. 3:5-6; 16:12).
- While Paul is in Ephesus, apparently Peter visits Corinth (1 Cor. 1:12; cp. 9:5), and also possibly Barnabas (cp. 9:6).
- During Paul’s three-year ministry in Ephesus, he writes the ‘lost’ or ‘previous’ letter (1 Cor. 5:9), which was also apparently corrective in nature.
- By the spring of 56 AD, news regarding the Corinthian church reaches Paul from a variety of sources:
  - Members of Chloe’s household report that divisions exist in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:11).
  - Apollos has returned to Ephesus at some point, perhaps embarrassed at being set up as a rival to Paul (1 Cor. 1:12), and gets to know Paul (1 Cor. 16:12).
  - A delegation from Corinth – composed of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus – comes to Paul in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:17-18), likely carrying a letter with specific

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questions (1 Cor. 7:1). Perhaps some of the questions were prompted by the ‘lost’ letter.

- Given all these sources of information, and in response to the questions in the letter, Paul writes 1 Corinthians from Ephesus in early 56 AD. The epistle is likely carried directly back to Corinth by the delegation of Stephanas.
- Paul plans to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost 56 AD; after Pentecost Paul plans to travel via Macedonia to Corinth where he hopes to spend the winter (1 Cor. 16:5-9); after that he intended to carry the Collection to Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4) and then go on to Rome and Spain (Acts 19:21; cp. Rom. 15:22-28).
- Meanwhile, Paul sends (or had already sent) Timothy and Erastus from Ephesus into Macedonia (Acts 19:22), apparently intending that Timothy, at least, should work his way down to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10-11).

### *b) Events Leading to the Writing of Second Corinthians*

- Timothy apparently arrives in Corinth (after the delivery of First Corinthians?), but he is unable to enforce Paul’s directions. Paul receives news (probably from Timothy upon his return to Ephesus) that the situation in Corinth has worsened rather than improved. Paul decides that an immediate, direct confrontation with the church is necessary. Therefore, Paul changes his travel plans, deciding to go directly to Corinth in the summer of 56 AD and expecting to visit Macedonia afterward (reversing his original plan), and then returning once again to Corinth (2 Cor. 1:15-16).
- This second visit of Paul to Corinth is a painful experience and a ‘sorrowful visit’ (2 Cor. 2:1). Opposition to Paul apparently comes to a head and one member in particular defies his authority (2 Cor. 2:5; 7:12). Unsuccessful in reconciling the church, Paul is deeply humiliated and leaves Corinth, scrapping his plan to travel to Macedonia, and returns directly to Ephesus (2 Cor. 1:17, 23).
- Back in Ephesus, Paul writes the ‘severe’ or ‘sorrowful’ letter (2 Cor. 2:3-4, 9; 7:8-9). This letter is carried to Corinth by the hand of Titus (2 Cor. 7:5-7), who is a stronger personality than Timothy.
- Paul is assailed by severe depression and extreme external danger in Ephesus (2 Cor. 1:8-11), perhaps a reference to the Ephesian riot (Acts 19:23ff).
- Paul leaves Ephesus (Acts 20:1) and travels to Troas, hoping to find Titus there, but he does not (2 Cor. 2:12-13).
- Paul hurries on to Macedonia (Philippi) where he finds Titus (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:5-6).
- Titus reports that the severe letter has been effective. Most of the Corinthians have repented and were eager for Paul’s return. Further, they had disciplined the one who had wronged Paul, and he, too, had repented. Paul was overjoyed at the news (2 Cor. 7:6-16).
- With a third visit to Corinth now on his mind (2 Cor. 12:14; 13:1), Paul writes 2 Corinthians in autumn 56 AD from Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:5-6; 8:1; 9:2-4).
- Paul sends Titus back to Corinth with two others to deliver the epistle and assist with the Collection (2 Cor. 8:16-9:5).
- Paul visits Corinth for the third time and spends three months there during the winter of 56-57 AD (Acts 20:2-3). During his stay in Corinth, he writes the epistle to the Romans (cp. Rom. 15:25-28), delivered by Phoebe of Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1), the port city of Corinth.

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### C. Writing the Corinthian Church

#### 1. The Opponents of 2 Corinthians

Broadly speaking, there are two factors that contributed to the Corinthian's unhappiness with the apostle, as reflected in his second letter to them. First, there were what we might call residual cultural problems. It is evident that Paul's relationships with these southern Greeks had been strained for some time. The first letter, written about two years earlier than the second (*i.e.* in about 54 or 55) reveals that not all the Corinthians acknowledged Paul's authority as an apostle, some preferring the ministry of Apollos, others the ministry of Cephas (Peter), both of whom had visited Corinth more recently than Paul (Acts 19:1; 1 Cor. 1:12; 9:5).

That Paul in his second letter as well as in his first continued to admonish the Corinthians about idolatry and immorality indicated that these were ongoing, unresolved problems among them. It is clear that some at least of the criticisms against Paul, which are so evident in the second letter, had their origins in his earlier relationships with them.

The second and major source of criticism of Paul arose, apparently, from the recent arrival of certain Jewish 'ministers' or 'apostles' (as they call themselves; 11:13, 23), whom, however, Paul does not name or identify. These newcomers were seeking to persuade the Corinthian church that Paul's theology was in error and, specifically, that the covenant of Moses was still in force. They argued for their legitimacy as ministers on the grounds of mystic and paranormal abilities, claiming that Paul lacked these superior gifts and, moreover, that he was personally and morally deficient in many ways. The coming of these 'apostles' may have heightened some of the long-standing Corinthian criticisms of Paul as well as creating new complaints. Unquestionably the arrival of these intruding 'ministers' and their campaign against Paul's doctrines and character are the chief reason for the difference in emotional tone evident between the first and second letters.

Our only knowledge of the problems in Corinth is Paul's letter, which is written to counteract the problems as he saw them. Unfortunately, he does not name or identify the 'wrongdoer,' the injured part (7:12), the unnamed critic (10:7-1), or the newly arrived 'apostles' (11:13). We can only guess at the numbers and alignments of those who supported and those who opposed Paul.

Who were his opponents at Corinth? What kind of people were they? It is not easy to tell, as there is too little express information in the letter. If there was only one group, they were certainly Jews (2 Cor. 11:22). Beyond that we may infer that they preached a different Jesus from Paul (11:4), were intruding into his sphere of ministry (10:12-18), were receiving financial support (11:12), and were behaving in a heavy-handed manner (11:18-20).

The identity of the newcomers remains one of the great unsolved mysteries of the New Testament. The data from the letter, when analyzed, suggests a profile that is difficult to imagine. Clearly they are 'Hebrews ... Israelites ... Abraham's descendants' (11:22), which suggests that, like Paul, they are Jews with roots deep within Judaism. That they are 'servants of righteousness' (11:15) suggests service of the Jewish law and of Pharisaism. His insistence that the glory of Moses is now outshone appears to be in rebuttal of the newcomers' promotion of the Mosaic covenant (3:7-17). Their missionary labors, he implied, were a (Jewish) intrusion into his (Gentile) sphere of ministry and therefore in breach of the missionary concordat at Jerusalem a decade earlier, which allocated to Paul the apostolate to the Gentiles. This side of their profile

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is not too difficult to comprehend, given what we know of the Judaizing, anti-Pauline mission reflected in the letter to the Galatians.

The problem with identifying these ‘ministers’ lies in their ready welcome in Corinth, in particular by those who valued rhetoric and speech, the very people who were so critical of Paul for his deficiencies in this area (10:7-11). How was it possible that these ‘Hebrews’ were so well received by (at least some of) the educated Greek members of the Corinthian church? If these new ministers were Aramaic-speaking ‘Hebrews,’ why does Paul need to engage in *Greek* rhetorical practices of ‘comparison’ and ‘boasting’ which are so dominant in chapters 10-11? The difficulty of the newcomers’ identity is that some of the data suggest they are Jews while other data suggest they were of Greek culture and origin.

There are two main views among the welter of theories. Were they Judaizing Christians from the Holy Land, very much like the Galatian heretics who insisted that circumcision must be added to simple faith for Gentile converts? This theory is based largely on 11:4. Are we, on the other hand, to think of their outlook as being more Hellenistic? For example, did they think of the future life as being without bodily form, so prompting Paul to write not only 1 Corinthians 15 but also 2 Corinthians 5? Likely the newcomers were Judaizers but they formed an alliance with disaffected Hellenistic Jewish Christians at Corinth, whose outlook had posed problems for Paul earlier, problems reflected in 1 Corinthians.

Two comments may be made about this problem. First, it must not be assumed that being ‘Hebrews ... Israelites ... Abraham’s descendants’ demands that they spoke only in Aramaic or Hebrew (cp. Paul himself). Since Paul’s written Greek reveals no small rhetorical ability, it is by no means inconceivable that these Palestinian ‘apostles’ possessed skills of eloquence. Secondly, a close examination of the passages where Paul defends his speech (10:7-11; 11:5-6) suggests that Paul may be answering long-term, indigenous Corinthian criticisms rather than responding to comments that his rhetoric is inferior to the newcomers’. The arrival of the newcomers, with their mystical gifts, may have provoked further opposition of Paul from sections of the Corinthian church who were already critical of him.

What then, was the mission of these newcomers in Corinth? These ‘apostles’ do not appear to be promoting the circumcision of the Gentiles, as the Judaizers had done ten years earlier, reflected in Galatians. Second Corinthians does not refer to the Gentile-circumcision dispute. The complaint made against Paul in Jerusalem was that he told Jews to abandon Moses, the circumcising of their children, and the Jewish customs, and that he did not impose the Jerusalem decree requiring Gentiles to desist from idol-sacrificed meat and eat only kosher-butchered meat (Acts 21:20-25). Quite possibly these carefully phrased criticisms of Paul in Jerusalem represented the main elements of the Judaizing anti-Pauline agenda. On this theory these ‘apostles’ sought to maintain Jewish Christians in Corinth within the Mosaic covenant and to bring Gentile Christians under the requirements of the Jerusalem decree.

### 2. The Unity of 2 Corinthians

While the authorship of 2 Corinthians has not been questioned, its unity has been the subject of much debate. In particular some scholars, without any reason other than their bent to discredit the integrity of Scripture, deny the book’s unity. Noting the abrupt change in tone between chapters 1-9 and 10-13, they argue that they were originally two separate letters that somehow became fused into the letter now known as 2 Corinthians.

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At various times, it has been suggested that Second Corinthians, as we have it, is not a unity. Most who have made this point have accepted that all the chapters were written by Paul and all of them to the Corinthians, but not at the same time. Various scholars have made this suggestion about different parts of the letter, especially from about 6:14 to 7:1, about chapters 8 and 9, and about chapters 10 to 13. The main argument against chapters 10-13 being part of the same letter as chapters 1-9 is the change of tone at 2 Corinthians 10:1, which is ‘announced, unexpected, pronounced, and sustained.’ If Second Corinthians has given some readers the impression that it is a kind of ‘scissors and paste’ composition, we should remember that Paul was writing in a situation of serious controversy. His style here perhaps reveals a certain agitation of spirit in the writer (cp. Galatians).

### *a) The ‘Severe’ Letter*

Some propose that chapters 10-13 are the severe letter mentioned in 2:4, and hence were written before chapters 1-9. This theory, however, faces major difficulties, in addition to the lack of textual evidence. First, the absence of any reference to the false apostles in chapters 1-9 is puzzling if the Corinthians had already received chapters 10-13. Even if they had rejected the false apostles before Paul wrote chapters 1-9, he surely would have commended them for doing so. Yet, chapters 1-9 do not mention the conflict between Paul and the false teachers, only the single individual who defied him (2:5-11; 7:12).

Second, chapters 10-13 are silent regarding that individual. Yet, the severe letter was written to deal with the Corinthians’ refusal to discipline him (2:4-9). If chapters 10-13 constitute the severe letter, how could they fail to refer to the offense that prompted its writing?

Third, Paul described the severe letter as one written ‘out of much affliction and anguish of heart ... with many tears’ (2:4). That description does not seem to fit the contents of chapters 10-13, with Paul’s biting irony and stern rebukes of the false teachers and their followers. Why would he regret (cp. 7:8) having so forcefully defended his apostleship, or relating his human weakness that proved God empowered his ministry?

Fourth, in 12:18 Paul spoke of Titus’ trip to Corinth in connection with the collection (cp. 8:6, 16-24) as having already taken place. Since as noted above, he brought the severe letter to Corinth on that trip, chapters 10-13 obviously cannot be the severe letter. Titus could not have delivered a letter describing his bringing of that letter as having already happened. Finally, Paul sent the severe letter to avoid visiting Corinth (2:1-4), but he wrote chapters 10-13 to prepare for an upcoming visit (12:14; 13:1).

### *b) Two Letters*

Others, acknowledging those difficulties, argue that chapters 10-13 were a separate letter, but one that was written after chapters 1-9. Once again, it must be noted that there is no evidence that chapters 10-13 ever circulated separately from chapters 1-9. A variation of that view is that before Paul sent chapters 1-9, he received word of further troubles in Corinth. He then wrote chapters 10-13 and sent the entire letter. Yet nowhere in chapters 10-13 does he mention receiving new information from Corinth.

F. F. Bruce suggests that the epistle of 2 Corinthians was written in two parts. Chapters 1-9 were written first and delivered to Corinth by Titus in the autumn of 56 AD. In this letter, Paul explained that he sent Titus first instead of coming himself to avoid causing pain. Paul wears his heart on his sleeve and enlarges on the hardships and splendors of apostolic service. Paul tells

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them he will soon return to Corinth for the Collection; meanwhile, he is sending Titus back with two friends to help.

According to Bruce's theory, the second visit of Titus to Corinth did not go as well as his first. Some members in Corinth may have felt pressure to give generously like the Macedonians. Meanwhile certain visitors ('superlative apostles') in Corinth had begun to undermine Paul's prestige by insisting upon the authority of Jerusalem. Therefore, Paul follows up with another letter, sent a little bit later and composed of chapters 10-13 of Second Corinthians. This theory attempts to explain why there is an apparent change of tone and emphasis between chapters 1-9 and 10-13 of Second Corinthians.

### *c) One Letter*

There is no evidence from early translations of the Bible, or from the writings of the church fathers that 2 Corinthians ever existed as two or more separate letters. There is also no evidence as to who compiled those hypothetical letters into 2 Corinthians, when they did it, or why they did it, only conjecture on the part of the critics. What happened to the conclusion of the first letter and the introduction to the second to allow the two to be joined is also unknown.

An important point, often missed, relates to the way Paul praises and blames his readers in his epistles generally. If he wants to praise a church but also needs to criticize it, he always starts with the commendations (e.g., Romans, 1&2 Thessalonians, Philippians; cp. Rev. 2-3). Viewed in this light, the change from chapters 1-9 to chapters 10-13 is simply the major example of a general phenomenon. What is the real tone of 10-13? We can characterize these chapters as strong but pastoral. In chapters 10-13 Paul is still writing to sheep, but he refers to wolves, and especially in 11:3-15.

The difference in tone between the two sections of the epistle must not be overstated. In chapters 1-9 Paul defended himself (e.g., 1:17; 4:2; 5:12-13), and rebuked the false teachers (e.g. 2:17); while in chapters 10-13 he expressed his love and concern for the Corinthians (11:11; 12:14-15; 13:9). When the plan of the epistle is taken into account, the reason for Paul's change in tone is perfectly understandable. Chapters 1-9 are addressed to the majority (cp. 2:6), who repented because of the severe letter; chapters 10-13 to the unrepentant minority, who still clung to the false apostles (the 'some' in 10:2 who still regarded Paul as if he 'walked according to the flesh').

## 3. The Character of 2 Corinthians

### *a) Purpose*

In First Corinthians, we see the culture's competitiveness in the church's party-spirit, its intellectualism in the quest for wisdom and knowledge, its licentiousness in the problems of sexual morality, its paganism in the questions related to idolatry, its desire for display in the exaltation of the more showy spiritual gifts, and its emphasis on incorporeal immortality in the debate about the resurrection.

It is clear from the first letter that there was a lot of spiritual pride in the Corinthian church, pride of party, pride of wisdom, pride of freedom, pride of gift, pride of theology. Paul deals with these issues piecemeal, but does he deal adequately with the spiritual disposition that unites them all? It would not seem so, although of course 1 Corinthians 13 was highly relevant, but in fact he goes on to do this in his Second Letter.

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First Corinthians was written to deal with problems in the church, many of them outlined in a letter he had received from it. Some of these were theological, while others were ethical and pastoral. Second Corinthians too is a problem-addressing letter, but in many ways it is quite different, for, rather than handling different issues one by one, this letter instead seeks to deal with the whole spiritual ethos of the church as shown in its view as to the marks of a true servant of Christ.

What about Second Corinthians? It might appear that the issues here are completely different, but this is not altogether true. The problems in 1 Corinthians sprang largely from the values they had imbibed from their environment. Their criticisms of Paul, which made it necessary for him to write a letter like 2 Corinthians, were influenced by their image of what a leader should be, and this too reflected their environment. Leadership style and the principles of Christian ministry constitute the great theme of this second letter.

### *b) Tone*

There are major differences of emotional tone between the two surviving letters of Paul to the Corinthians. The first indicates major problems of behavior (e.g., divisions, slack moral standards, lawsuits, unkindness to the poorer or less-gifted members) and of doctrine (e.g., doubts about the coming resurrection of believers). There is evidence that the believers questioned Paul's abilities and authority (1 Cor. 2:1-5; 4:8-13). Nevertheless, the apostle writes objectively, confidently, and with his emotions well controlled throughout.

The second letter, however, is less well arranged than the first, and, moreover, reveals a range of emotional extremes in the author. On the one hand he is overjoyed and has confidence and pride in the Corinthians (7:4), while on the other, he is deeply hurt that they are withholding their affection from him (6:1) and that they have to 'put up' with him (11:1). Moreover, they have been ready to believe a whole range of criticisms against him – of being worldly and irresolute (1:17), of moral cowardice in writing instead of coming (1:23), of his lack of inner strength (4:23), of being an imposter (6:8), of being corrupt and exploitative (7:2), of not being a true minister of Christ (10:7), of being weak in speech when present and powerful only by letter, when absent (10:1, 10; 11:6, 21), of being a fool, even mad (11:1, 16, 23), of breaching convention or of craftiness in declining their financial support (11:7; 12:13-16), and of lacking mystical and miraculous credentials of ministry (12:1, 11-12). Throughout this letter Paul is forced to defend his doctrines, his ministry, and his character. Nevertheless, despite the emotions he displays, the letter ends in a strong and confident way, evidence perhaps of Paul's God-given resilience.

What comes through so strongly is the consistently pastoral motivation of all his contacts with them. We see him as a most able teacher, well able to relate Christian teaching to the practical situations faced in the churches. We also see him as a most diligent, responsible, and sensitive pastor. He knew when to be gentle and tender, and when to be strong and stern. We see that he was a sensitive man, and that he could be hurt. Was he over-defensive? Some have thought so. We can only really assess this, however, when we realize what issues were at stake. Without doubt they were major ones. The criticisms of him, if true and appropriate, would have undermined his whole ministry.

What is particularly marked in this letter, however, is the personal and sometimes autobiographical note, and this is interwoven with the theological and the pastoral. There is in

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fact no chapter written simply in theological treatise form, but everything is touched by the personal.

Second Corinthians is the most personally revealing of all Paul's epistles. At the same time, it is perhaps the least familiar of all his inspired writings, often overlooked both by individual believers and preachers alike. No one in ministry should be ignorant of the riches of these insights. A church should not ordain anyone who has not read this epistle and commentaries on this treatise.

### *c) Content*

Second Corinthians, then, was written to prepare the way for Paul's pending farewell visit to them. In it he attempts to explain why he deferred the third visit and wrote to them instead (chapters 1-2), expressing joy, nevertheless, that the moral problem which necessitated the second, painful visit and the (now lost) 'sorrowful' letter has been resolved (chapter 7). Further, in writing to them he urges that the collection of money for the Jerusalem church, which had lapsed, be revived and completed before his arrival (chapters 8-9). The major part of the letter, however, is devoted to his answer to these recently arrived 'apostles' – to their 'different gospel' (chapters 3-6) and to their assault on his character (chapters 10-13).

The letter that ensues for the next 257 verses is passionate and uneven, and sometimes explosive. The most compelling defense of Paul's apostolate and ministry in all his letters extends from the middle of Chapter 2 and continues to the beginning of Chapter 7 (2:12-7:1). Then chapters 7-9 lay out the implications for the repentant Corinthians, while chapters 10-13 describe the implications for the unrepentant.

The epistle contains theological material, where Paul is expounding some great Christian theme, like the glory of the gospel (chapters 3 and 4) or reconciliation through Christ (chapter 5), but there are also strongly pastoral passages, where his concern for the church is strongly felt, such as chapters 8 and 9, and 12 and 13.

Readers of Paul's letters are familiar with his tendency to go off at a tangent. He leaves his main argument for a while to discuss some theme, usually an exalted one, before rejoining the main line of argument once more. There are at least two digressions of this sort in Second Corinthians. We have already noted and commented on 6:14-7:1. The longest of such digressions is, however, the one that extends from 2 Corinthians 2:14 to 7:4, and, of course, it includes the smaller digression to which we have already referred. This long passage is known to scholars as 'the Great Digression.' The accusations some at Corinth have made against Paul touch very sensitively his concept of what Christian service really is, and so, thus stimulated, he writes these great chapters.

### *d) Theme*

The theme or melodic line of 2 Corinthians concerns the nature of ministry under the new covenant of Christ. Paul's use of many Old Testament texts trumpets his conviction that the new-covenant ministry has been inaugurated in Christ. Here, in no uncertain terms, is the pattern for all authentic ministry.

If this personal note gives unity to the book, so also does the one subject which keeps making its appearance, and which is never really completely out of sight. This is the theme of the nature of Christian service. In fact, this letter is really Paul's *magnum opus* on the theme, and this is made all the more valuable by the personal touches that keep appearing. In 1 Corinthians 1-4 Paul

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expounds on Divine wisdom in such a way as to show how it cuts right across human wisdom. Throughout Second Corinthians he does the same kind of thing in relation to Christian service. The Christian preacher is no mere variant of the Greek rhetorician any more than the Christian leader is of a modern business executive.

Because Paul's letter to them was so self-revelatory, it shows us very clearly the principles of his Christian service. These basic principles have very wide application in every age and place, such as faithfulness to the gospel, sensitivity to people, the humility of Christ, acceptance of the cross, and willingness to be persecuted and reviled for Christ's sake.

Despite the structural unevenness of the letter and its emotional extremes, 2 Corinthians makes a magnificent and abiding contribution to our understanding of Christianity. This letter is very important because it is Paul's major defense of his apostleship to his detractors – both ancient and modern. In it Paul answers the perennial question why he should be regarded as having authority of churches and Christians.

Paradoxically, it seems to have been some of the spiritual qualities of Paul that reduced his status in the eyes of many of the Corinthians, because they were looking at him in the way their non-Christian contemporaries would have viewed him. Fancy not charging for the work he was doing among the Corinthians and actually doing manual work in order to help keep himself (1 Cor. 9:3-23; 2 Cor. 11:7-12; 12:14-16)!

Much of Paul's suffering in connection with the Corinthian church came from savage attacks launched against him by a group of false apostles. Those charlatans had deceived some of the Corinthians into believing that Paul was weak, ineffective, and not a true apostle. The major theme of this epistle is Paul's defense of his integrity and his apostleship against those attacks. Though it is an intensely intimate look at Paul, 2 Corinthians nevertheless contains rich theological truth. Second Corinthians also has much to teach regarding the practical aspects of living the Christian life.

### *e) Motif*

The motif that keeps emerging throughout this epistle is that weakness is the source of strength and that suffering is the vehicle for God's power and glory. This theology of weakness and suffering was foolish in new Corinth with its worship of self-made wealth and power. Only believing hearts could understand it—and they embraced it. It is no different today. Some (who actually claim to be in the church) likewise find it unbelievable as they preach a gospel of health and wealth.

The gospel does not ride on health and wealth but on weakness. The ministry of the Spirit is not one of splash and flash but of meekness and weakness. The gospel does not need the front pages of any paper. And when it brags, it brags of its weakness—and of God's power. God's church, which listens to the word of the apostle of God, can expect two things: grace (the ongoing covenant love of God) and peace (His well-being that always accompanies his grace).

### *f) Summary*

The following points are some of the distinctive features of 2 Corinthians:

- It reveals the tensions in Paul's relations with the Corinthians caused by his detractors.
- It is Paul's most autobiographical letter, in which he opens his heart more than in any other.

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- It is outstanding for its demonstration of the privileges and pressures of pastoral work.
- It contains unique passages about perseverance under trials, the nature of Christian service, evangelism, and giving.
- It is a neglected letter, probably because its subjects do not divide up so neatly as happens with most other New Testament books and letters.

So today we can read and study this letter, the most emotional of all the apostle's writings. Nowhere is Paul's heart so torn and exposed as in this letter. Second Corinthians bears a fierce tone of injured love, of paradoxically wounded, relentless affection. This book is about the nature of the gospel and authentic ministry. Those who really care about the gospel and the care of souls will find 2 Corinthians captivating.

### **D. Introducing the Second Epistle to the Corinthian Church (2 Corinthians 1:1-2)**

At Corinth, Paul, their father in the faith, had been rebuffed and criticized. In Ephesus a citywide riot had occurred over his ministry so that it was no longer safe to remain there. Unwelcome in the one and endangered in the other, he went to Macedonia where he began to write his letter. As in his other letters Paul introduced near the beginning what would be a major theme throughout, in this case his experience of suffering.

As Paul conveys his brief two-verse greeting to the Corinthians, he leaves no uncertainty as to what he is about—namely, to *preserve* his apostleship and to *preserve* the church.

Paul's opening greeting and introduction have four important truths and principles behind them. They all illustrate how God was at the center of Paul's life.

#### **1. The Senders (2 Cor. 1:1a)**

<sup>1</sup>*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother...*

##### *a) The Apostle*

*God's will determines our service and function in the church.* The letter begins, 'Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus *by the will of God.*' Paul was *an apostle*. The noun comes from the verb 'to send,' and means a person sent by another. The term can be used simply of messengers 'sent' by the churches, but that is not how it is used here. In particular, Paul was an apostle '*of Christ Jesus.*' The Lord Jesus Christ met him on the Damascus road and commissioned him (Acts 26:16-18).

Paul was 'an apostle of Christ Jesus *by the will of God.*' God alone determines our function in the body of Christ. His will is a sovereign will. He has authority to do with His creatures as He pleases. Paul probably begins his letter with this emphasis because some at Corinth cast doubt upon his apostleship for their own ulterior motives. From the beginning he reminds them that his position in the body of Christ, as theirs, is not a matter of self-selection but of God's choice.

By his opening words, 'Paul, an apostle ... by the will of God,' Paul pointedly reminds the Corinthians, some of whom were questioning his authority, that he is not an apostle by self-appointment but 'by the will of God.' From their point of view he had been but one of a number of notable ministers who had visited Corinth. Apollos and Cephas (Peter), perhaps in their own ways more impressive than Paul, had been in Corinth more recently and had created, no doubt

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unintentionally, their own factions within the church (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:5; 9:5; 16:12). Even more recently a group of ministers had arrived whom Paul neither names nor identifies, but who had actively opposed his teaching and influence among the Corinthians (2 Cor. 2:17-3:1; 10:12; 11:4-5, 12-14, 20-23). Understandably some of the Corinthians were wondering why Paul thought his relationship with them was so special.

*Paul's high authority:* Since false teachers invariably challenged his apostolic credentials, Paul states that he was not self-appointed, but an apostle 'by the will of God.' To reject the authority of the one who is an apostle of 'Messiah Jesus by the will of God' is to reject the authority of God Himself! Further, anyone who would dare to buck Paul's authority had, in effect, challenged God. This is awesome, terrifying authority.

There is in fact an added dimension to his awareness of apostolic authority in two of his epistles, Galatians and 2 Corinthians, for in these two letters certain circumstances in the churches to whom he was writing made it necessary for him to defend his apostleship. The challenge was not precisely the same in both places, for it seems to have been far more radical in Galatia. There the heretics had totally rejected his apostleship, whereas, we will see, the issue at Corinth may have been related more to his apostolic style and humble demeanor which did not fit the Corinthian stereotype of authoritative leadership, nor the style adopted by the 'false apostles.'

At the beginning of the letter Paul is establishing his apostleship as a point of contrast with these newly arrived ministers who, apparently, also presented themselves as 'apostles' (11:13). They based their claim on 'letters of recommendation' (3:1) as demonstrated by supposedly 'superior' displays of gifts, superior, that is, to Paul's gifts (11:5-6; 12:11-12). Paul described them as 'false apostles' (*pseudoapostoloi*) masquerading as apostles of Christ' (11:13). The opening words of this letter indicate Paul's concern to impress upon the Corinthians his credentials as a genuine apostle of Christ. It is striking that while the *basis* of Paul's apostleship was Christ's Damascus Road call, the *evidence* he gives in support relates to his lifestyle – a lifestyle characterized by the sacrifice of Christ expressed in apostolic ministry. Although he could point to the existence of the Corinthian church as a 'letter of recommendation' and refer minimally to mystical and miraculous elements in his ministry (2 Cor. 3:2; 5:13; 12:1-6; 12:12), his chief self-characterization was in a life of hardship, conflict, and weakness as the bearer of the word of God focused on the death and resurrection of Jesus.

### *b) The Brother*

*The gift of spiritual life brings about our membership of God's family.* Paul carefully associates Timothy with his letter to the Corinthians, for he writes, 'Timothy *our brother.*' Paul recognized Timothy to be his brother in Christ through new birth. For Timothy, new birth came about first through the background influence of his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5) and then through the ministry of Paul (2 Tim. 1:2) as they taught him the Scriptures and pointed him to the Lord Jesus (2 Tim. 3:15). While Timothy recognized Paul as his spiritual father, and Paul regarded him as his spiritual son, a superior relationship was that of brother, since that extended to all the members of God's family.

The addition of Timothy's name reminds us that this young man joined Paul in his missionary work at Corinth shortly after it commenced (Acts 18:1, 5). Paul alludes to this fact later in this chapter (1:19). The Corinthian Christians must have known Timothy well, for he had paid another visit to them some time after the initial one (1 Cor. 4:17).

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Timothy was such a faithful reproduction of Paul that the apostle confidently sent him as his representative to the churches in Macedonia (Acts 19:22), Philippi (Phil. 2:19-24), Thessalonica (1 Th. 3:2), and Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3). The Corinthians also knew him; he was there when the Corinthian church was founded (Acts 18:5) and later served as Paul's personal emissary to that congregation (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10).

Although Timothy was a missionary and a Christian leader, he was not an apostle of Christ. Although there may be no harm in using the word 'apostle' metaphorically of certain Christian leaders today, it is unhelpful to use the word in a theological sense apart from those to whom it is applied in the New Testament. Some ministers today, like Paul's opponents in Corinth, also call themselves 'apostles' to reinforce their authority over churches. It is preferable to limit the word 'apostle' to *the* apostles within the apostolic age.

### 2. The Recipients (2 Cor. 1:1b)

*To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia:*

*God's purpose determines how we should think of the church.* Paul addresses his letter to 'the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia.' Achaia was a province of southern Greece, governed by Corinth.

#### a) *The Church*

What would the Corinthians have understood Paul to mean when he addressed them as 'the church'? Paul's readers, would have understood 'church' (*ekklēsia*) as an everyday term for a gathering of people or, more technically, for an official assembly such as a parliament or court. The Corinthians would have read Paul's words as being directed to the 'gathering' or 'assembly' of Christians in Corinth.

The word *ekklēsia* occurred frequently in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, which Paul usually quoted. There it was used of great 'gatherings' of the people of God (e.g., Jud. 20:2; 1 Chr. 23:8; cp. Acts 7:38). In addressing them as 'the church of God' Paul meant the Corinthian believers to understand that in their gathering together they were all that the gathered tribes of Israel had been – the church of God, no less.

The word 'church' is used in two basic ways in the Bible. It first describes the whole body of Christ, including its members already in heaven, as well as those on earth. It is used, secondly, to describe the church in its local setting. The church finds geographical expression in different places. It is a term to be used therefore either of all God's people everywhere or of God's people in one place.

Paul clearly intended this letter for a wider readership than this particular local church, for he addressed it 'to the church of God in Corinth,' together with all the saints throughout Achaia.' This in itself may be related to his consciousness of apostleship, for as an apostle his commission was not to serve one church only but to give help to many.

#### b) *The Saints*

Paul's introductory statement clearly defines the church as God's possession. It belongs to Him and is His creation. It is the fruit of His Son's saving work. Not only does the church belong to God, but it consists of those whom God has set apart for Himself and whom He is sanctifying – that is to say, it is made up of 'saints.' All Christians, though sinners, are saints! Unfortunately, in everyday language the title is reserved for people of particular sanctity or goodness. The

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Bible uses it to describe all who know new birth and are part of the church of the church of God. Always used in the plural, it points to believers as a group and clearly identifies God's purpose: His purpose is to make us holy like Himself (1 Pe. 1:15-16).

In addressing his readers as 'saints' Paul does not imply that they were exceptionally heroic or devout, as we infer from the word, but rather that they were, in God's eyes, His 'holy people.' (The words 'holy' and 'saint' are the same in Greek – *hagios*). The church in Corinth fell far short of the standards of belief and behavior many since that time have demanded. Nevertheless Paul addresses the Corinthians as 'the church of God,' as God's 'holy ones,' and teaches and exhorts them to behave as if they were.

He refers to this people as 'saints.' Clearly this is not a term introducing some distinction within the church but rather Christians and the world around them. It is almost defined in the introduction to 1 Corinthians, where he describes the church of God in Corinth as 'those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy' (1 Cor. 1:2). The terms 'saints' and 'sanctified' designate them as 'set apart' by God for Himself. It does not mean they were spotless in character but rather that they had experienced God's saving grace.

*The church's high position:* The complement to Paul's exalted position is the exalted position of the church that he lifts up. The interchangeable designations 'saints' and 'church of God' states the astonishing high truth about the believers of Corinth. But the terms are freighted with irony. 'The saints,' these holy ones, had sinned greatly against Paul. Clearly they were not saints because of their recent behavior, but solely because they were in Christ, the Holy One of God. The power of Paul's argument would penetrate their souls precisely because they were *God's church* and not Paul's church

### *c) The Apostle ... to the Church*

It may be observed that the substance of this letter is encapsulated within the first verse: 'the apostle ... to the church.' Here on the one hand is the church; here on the other is the apostle who now addresses it. The question is: Will the church at Corinth submit to the authority of the apostle Paul? There is no doubt that Paul claimed such authority (2 Cor. 10:8-11; 13:10; cp. 1 Cor. 14:36-38). And it seems that the Corinthians ultimately followed Paul, not the intruding ministers. The very survival of his letters *is* evidence of that. The question for us today is: Are Paul's letters authoritative outside the immediate period in which he lived and wrote? Are they 'Scripture' for us? Was he right in claiming this authority.

From here on, Paul's passionate letter rides on two elevated designations—that of himself and that of the church. 'The church of God' must listen to the 'apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.'

### **3. The Blessing (2 Cor. 1:2)**

<sup>2</sup>*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Grace and peace are our greatest need and God's most appropriate gifts.* 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.' The Father is mentioned first because He is the fountain of the Godhead. 'Father' does not mean 'Creator' in Bible language. He is not the Father of all men and women, but of His own people, of those who through faith in His Son have become members of His family and of His Son's body, the church. God's Fatherhood of those who are in Christ may be seen as the climax of New Testament revelation.

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God is not just the Father, but our Father; Jesus is not just our Lord but the Lord. The Father and the Son delight to give the best gifts, and this prayerful greeting powerfully reminds us that grace and peace are our greatest daily need.

### a) *Grace*

*Paul's high hopes:* Paul always replaced the Greek word for 'Hello' (*charein*) with the Christian term for 'grace' (*charis*). So when Paul's readers expect 'Hello,' Paul wished them 'Grace.' 'Grace' originates from an Old Testament term meaning 'to bend' or 'to stoop.' It points to God's amazing condescension and kindness.

What is grace? Simply 'unmerited favor,' and this is the basis of everything Christians enjoy in Christ. Paul thought of grace as both glorious and immensely rich (Eph. 1:6-7), because it was the source of every blessing of the Christian's life in Christ.

### b) *Peace*

Along with grace goes peace, and always in that order, because peace/*shalom* always follows the loving favor of God. Only as we know the grace of God's forgiveness may we know the renewal of His peace in our lives. Peace is well-being and includes freedom from anxiety. In relationships, peace is good will and harmony, the opposite of conflict.

He follows his use of the word here with another very rich word, the normal term employed by Jews when greeting each other. This would remind the readers of the historical roots of their faith, which were in the Hebrew Scriptures. This word *eirene*, usually rendered 'peace,' is actually so full of meaning as to be almost untranslatable by one word or phrase, although the often-suggested 'well-being,' would not be too wide of the mark. It sums up the very practical difference Christ and the salvation God has given us through Him have made. We are no longer outsiders, estranged from God because of the barrier our sin has erected between us and Him. Instead, we have now been welcomed into a place of peace, love, security, warmth, fellowship and plenty, a place of sure and certain hope.

The more we daily enjoy God's grace and peace, the more like Paul we respond in gratitude and put God at the center of our life.

So then, he is reminding the Corinthians that these blessings are undoubtedly theirs, with perhaps an implied exhortation to ponder them and to live in the good of them.

For next time: Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-11.