



# CORNERSTONE BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

## 1 Corinthians

William Baker

## 2 Corinthians

Ralph P. Martin  
*with* Carl N. Toney

GENERAL EDITOR

Philip W. Comfort

*featuring the text of the*  
NEW LIVING TRANSLATION



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Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Volume 15

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1 CORINTHIANS

*1*

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*265*

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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 (Porphyrianus) 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, ן	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
δ	delta	= d	μ	mu	= m
ε	epsilon	= e	ν	nu	= n
ζ	zeta	= z	ξ	ksi	= x
η	eta	= ē	ο	omicron	= o
θ	theta	= th	π	pi	= p
			ρ	rho	= r (ῥ = rh)

σ, ζ	<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>TC</sup>26, <sup>ZC</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

# 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 Philip-  
 pians 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 distinguish-  
 ing 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 (*eploutisthēte* [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

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# *2 Corinthians*

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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

## 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* [T<sup>H</sup>7965, Z<sup>H</sup>8934], 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* [T<sup>6</sup>3874, Z<sup>6</sup>4155]) 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* [T<sup>6</sup>3874, Z<sup>6</sup>4155]), since it is linked with Paul’s affliction (*thlipsis* [T<sup>6</sup>2347, Z<sup>6</sup>2568]; NLT, “troubles”). Then the term refers primarily to Paul’s

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