

2 Corinthians

TRENT CASTO



P U B L I S H I N G

P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

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Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

ISBN: 978-1-62995-914-6 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-62995-915-3 (ePub)

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for.

To the people of Covenant Church who love God's Word, who love to hear it preached, and who love to do what it says: thank you for the privilege of being your pastor. To be called your servant is an honor too high for me. All proceeds from the sale of this book are returning to you.

In loving memory of the Rev. Michael Kendrick, a beloved colaborer in the Lord, and a true shepherd, who through his illness and death showed our Covenant family how to live 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. May the gospel seeds he planted in our hearts bear fruit for generations to come.

In memory of the Rev. Dr. George Knight III, and in honor of the Rev. Dr. Robert Palmer, the Rev. James Conrad, and the Rev. Dr. Robert Petterson: men who faithfully proclaimed not themselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord at Covenant Church of Naples from 1965 to 2016. I thank God in all my remembrances of you for the legacy of faithfulness and fruitfulness that I have been privileged to inherit from you. I aim to continue following your examples.

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

In every generation there is a fresh need for the faithful exposition of God's Word in the church. At the same time, the church must constantly do the work of theology: reflecting on the teaching of Scripture, confessing its doctrines of the Christian faith, and applying them to contemporary culture. We believe that these two tasks—the expositional and the theological—are interdependent. Our doctrine must derive from the biblical text, and our understanding of any particular passage of Scripture must arise from the doctrine taught in Scripture as a whole.

We further believe that these interdependent tasks of biblical exposition and theological reflection are best undertaken in the church, and most specifically in the pulpits of the church. This is all the more true since the study of Scripture properly results in doxology and praxis—that is, in praise to God and practical application in the lives of believers. In pursuit of these ends, we are pleased to present the Reformed Expository Commentary as a fresh exposition of Scripture for our generation in the church. We hope and pray that pastors, teachers, Bible study leaders, and many others will find this series to be a faithful, inspiring, and useful resource for the study of God's infallible, inerrant Word.

The Reformed Expository Commentary has four fundamental commitments. First, these commentaries aim to be *biblical*, presenting a comprehensive exposition characterized by careful attention to the details of the text. They are not exegetical commentaries—commenting word by word or even verse by verse—but integrated expositions of whole passages of Scripture. Each commentary will thus present a sequential, systematic treatment of an entire book of the Bible, passage by passage. Second, these commentaries

Series Introduction

are unashamedly *doctrinal*. We are committed to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Each volume will teach, promote, and defend the doctrines of the Reformed faith as they are found in the Bible. Third, these commentaries are *redemptive-historical* in their orientation. We believe in the unity of the Bible and its central message of salvation in Christ. We are thus committed to a Christ-centered view of the Old Testament, in which its characters, events, regulations, and institutions are properly understood as pointing us to Christ and his gospel, as well as giving us examples to follow in living by faith. Fourth, these commentaries are *practical*, applying the text of Scripture to contemporary challenges of life—both public and private—with appropriate illustrations.

The contributors to the Reformed Expository Commentary are all pastor-scholars. As pastor, each author will first present his expositions in the pulpit ministry of his church. This means that these commentaries are rooted in the teaching of Scripture to real people in the church. While aiming to be scholarly, these expositions are not academic. Our intent is to be faithful, clear, and helpful to Christians who possess various levels of biblical and theological training—as should be true in any effective pulpit ministry. Inevitably this means that some issues of academic interest will not be covered. Nevertheless, we aim to achieve a responsible level of scholarship, seeking to promote and model this for pastors and other teachers in the church. Significant exegetical and theological difficulties, along with such historical and cultural background as is relevant to the text, will be treated with care.

We strive for a high standard of enduring excellence. This begins with the selection of the authors, all of whom have proved to be outstanding communicators of God's Word. But this pursuit of excellence is also reflected in a disciplined editorial process. Each volume is edited by both a series editor and a testament editor. The testament editors, Iain Duguid for the Old Testament and Daniel Doriani for the New Testament, are accomplished pastors and respected scholars who have taught at the seminary level. Their job is to ensure that each volume is sufficiently conversant with up-to-date scholarship and is faithful and accurate in its exposition of the text. As series editors, we oversee each volume to ensure its overall quality—including excellence of writing, soundness of teaching, and usefulness in application. Working together as an editorial team, along with the publisher, we are devoted to

ensuring that these are the best commentaries that our gifted authors can provide, so that the church will be served with trustworthy and exemplary expositions of God's Word.

It is our goal and prayer that the Reformed Expository Commentary will serve the church by renewing confidence in the clarity and power of Scripture and by upholding the great doctrinal heritage of the Reformed faith. We hope that pastors who read these commentaries will be encouraged in their own expository preaching ministry, which we believe to be the best and most biblical pattern for teaching God's Word in the church. We hope that lay teachers will find these commentaries among the most useful resources they rely on for understanding and presenting the text of the Bible. And we hope that the devotional quality of these studies of Scripture will instruct and inspire each Christian who reads them in joyful, obedient discipleship to Jesus Christ.

May the Lord bless all who read the Reformed Expository Commentary. We commit these volumes to the Lord Jesus Christ, praying that the Holy Spirit will use them for the instruction and edification of the church, with thanksgiving to God the Father for his unceasing faithfulness in building his church through the ministry of his Word.

Richard D. Phillips
Philip Graham Ryken
Series Editors

PREFACE

While I was pastoring a small church during my seminary years, Paul's second letter to the Corinthians was the first book of the Bible I ever preached. It is a testament to how little I knew then that out of all the books of the Bible, I would choose to preach this one first. And yet, as is always the case, the Lord's strength was made manifest in my weakness. Sixteen years later, and still not really knowing what I was getting into, I was led to preach again through this letter to the people of Covenant Church of Naples. When I planned the series, "God's Strength in Our Weakness," I had no idea of the events that would unfold in the year 2020. But God knew. And week after week he spoke to us through this holy and inspired text. In a year when I felt more keenly than ever my own weakness as a pastor, the Lord was bringing forth his strength.

Many of these sermons were originally applied to the pressing issues of 2020, such as our individual and collective responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, tremendous racial tensions, and a deeply contentious presidential election. Preachers of the Word must apply the truth of the gospel to the people in their local context with specificity. Interestingly, the sermons that packed the most powerful punch in real time because of their specificity tended to be the weakest when I revisited them more than a year after the events they related to. In editing, I have sought to expand those applications for a more universal time and audience. I trust that in these general applications teachers of the word will still see paths to more specific application among their own people for the pressing needs of the day.

Additionally, I have sought to keep the text of each chapter of this commentary as close to the actual sermon I preached as possible, showing mostly

Preface

only the fruit of my exegetical work rather than the work itself. But I have made use of footnotes where I thought it would be helpful for preachers and teachers to see why I came to the conclusions I did. Moreover, I have included some additional quotes in the footnotes that did not make it into my sermons, but may well be low-hanging fruit for your own purposes.

In my opinion, 2 Corinthians is Paul's most intensely personal and pastoral letter of all. This fact makes it difficult in many instances to fully grasp what he is driving at, and also at times gives the letter a disjointed feel. Consequently, some excellent scholars believe that the letter should not be understood as one unified whole. While I acknowledge the difficulties, I will attempt to show in my exposition that 2 Corinthians is still best understood as one cohesive letter, as all the extant manuscripts indicate.

With this preface, I also offer this prayer for you who teach and preach God's Word. May the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness" shine in your hearts "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

Trent Casto
July 2022
Naples, Florida

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to John Hughes, Karen Magnuson, and the wonderful team at P&R Publishing, who helped bring this book into existence. As a first-time author, I am grateful for the care with which you guided me through the process.

Thank you to Sarah Schultz, Peggy Carpenter, Pam Sanborn, and Jennifer Denard, who faithfully read these pages many times over with attention to detail, week after week, offering helpful corrections and encouragement. A special thank-you to Sarah, who did the painstaking work of double-checking the accuracy of all the quotations as well as handling so many tasks that freed me to write. You are a gift.

Thank you to the Session and congregation at Covenant Church for granting me time out of the office to pull this book together, and for your constant support. To John Hunter, my right hand whose sandals I am unworthy to untie, and to my copastors while preaching this series, Chris Voorhees, Brent Whitefield, and Aaron Dean: to serve this church alongside you is one of the great joys of my life. Thank you to Keith Manley, facilities director at Covenant Church, for all the work you have done to turn my office into a study in which to do deep work in the biblical text; and to the rest of our staff, too numerous to mention, thank you for providing a collaborative and joyful environment in which to work together.

Thank you to Dr. Phil Ryken, who served to edit the manuscript and provided countless helpful suggestions. To my friend and mentor Dr. Dan Doriani, thank you for believing that I had a contribution to make to this commentary series that I have long admired, and also for your sacrificial work in helping to make it better.

Acknowledgments

To the staff, residents, and visiting scholars at Tyndale House, thank you for the hospitality and intellectual stimulation during my short visits there.

To the brothers of New Camaldoli, thank you for providing a shelter from the storms of life (and modern technology) in which to pray, think, read, and write. Thank you for your kindness, your hospitality, and the gift of *hesychia*.

I also want to thank Carl Dill who has walked with me not only as a coach but also as a friend for many years now. Carl and Carol, your lives have become a living illustration of 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. Thank you for your faithfulness to Jesus and to me.

To my parents, Jerry and Vickey Casto, thank you for raising me in such a way that what Paul wrote to Timothy could also have been written to me: “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:14-15).

Finally, to my wife, Emily, and my children, Hudson, Anna Kate, and William, who more than anyone else witness my weaknesses daily, and yet continue to love, encourage, and support me in this ministry as God manifests his strength—thank you. Apart from the Savior, who I pray is exalted on every page of this book, you are God’s greatest gift to me. I love you.

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
BCO	<i>The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America</i> , 6th ed. (N.p.: Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2021)
BDAG	Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds., <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
CTS	Calvin Translation Society edition of <i>Calvin's Commentaries</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
GSC	Geneva Series Commentary
GWFY	God's Word for You
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
KJV	King James Version
NAC	New American Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIDNTTE	Moisés Silva, ed., <i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> , 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014)
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary

Abbreviations

NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
PCA	Presbyterian Church in America
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
PTW	Preaching the Word
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
s.v.	<i>sub verbo, sub voce</i> (“under the word”)
<i>TLNT</i>	Ceslas Spicq, <i>Theological Lexicon of the New Testament</i> , trans. and ed. James D. Ernest, 3 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994)
TTI	The Timothy Initiative
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith

 *2 Corinthians*

GOD'S STRENGTH IN OUR WEAKNESS

1

WHOM CAN WE TRUST?

2 Corinthians 1:1–2

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus . . . , To the church of God that is at Corinth . . . : Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 1:1–2)



I live in a beach community on the Gulf of Mexico, a gift for which I thank God every day. But the beauty of the beach masks its deadly power. Occasionally, storms rage through our community, creating violent turbulence in the Gulf. One manifestation of that turbulence is a rip current. Typical beachgoers do not know how to recognize a rip current, and once they get into one, they frequently do not know how to get back out. For this reason, many lifeguard rescues are due to rip currents. The following story illustrates the danger of rip currents and what it takes to escape them.

A child was playing in the water on the shore not long after a storm had passed through. A wave toppled her, and she lost her grasp on her raft. As the tide pulled the raft out deeper, she moved in pursuit of it—soon past her reach. Her mother and a friend were standing by on the shore. It was the friend who first noticed that the young girl was farther out than she should be. She called to the girl to leave the raft and swim to shore. The girl

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obeyed and turned around. She began to swim in the direction of the shore but made no progress. In fact, the rip current pulled her still deeper. The friend shouted, “Swim harder!” and the girl did swim harder, but to no avail.

At this point, the mother heard the commotion. She quickly assessed the situation and realized that her little girl was caught in a rip current. The mother ran to the edge of the water and commanded the girl to stop swimming toward the shore, and swim parallel to the shore instead. The friend, rip-current ignorant, couldn’t believe her ears and exclaimed: “Are you crazy? She has to get to shore now!” The girl was receiving conflicting information. Whom should she trust and what should she do? The friend’s advice made sense, and she feared that if she swam parallel to the shore, she would not have the strength to ever make it to the shore. But then again, this was her mother. Her mother knew her. Her mother knew the water. Whom could she trust?

The Corinthians found themselves in a similar—though more sinister—situation. Strangers had entered the church at Corinth while Paul was away and were giving a message contrary to his. The intruders sought to undermine the Corinthians’ confidence in Paul’s love for them and his authority as a minister of the gospel. They even called into question whether he was a Christian at all. And some of the Corinthians were listening. As we read this letter, we hear Paul’s perplexity over their questioning his love. But the Corinthians were faced with a choice: listen to Paul or listen to the outsiders. Could Paul and his associates be trusted as faithful messengers of the true gospel, or did his own personal sufferings and weaknesses prove that he was not a true apostle? This letter was written to give a definitive answer to that question, among others.

Perhaps now more than ever, people both inside and outside the church question the authority of the apostle Paul. Various groups label him as a misogynist, a bigot, and a homophobe. Unpopular teachings in his letters are treated as material that one can ignore depending on the reader’s personal views. I am not talking here about legitimate approaches to interpretation, such as considering the cultural context of a given passage—although that can become a convenient way to dismiss Paul. I am talking instead about those who declare in no uncertain terms, “Paul got it wrong.”¹ Perhaps we

1. For one example of those who claim that Paul got it wrong on original sin, election, and homosexuality, see <https://www.secondreformation.com/paul>.

have felt that way ourselves at times. Admittedly, it can be hard to trust a message that does not line up with our expectations, just as it was for the girl to consider swimming parallel to the shore. And some of who Paul is and what Paul says may not align with our expectations of the gospel and gospel ministry. Can a man who suffers as Paul does be God’s chosen instrument? Can we trust Paul, or are the voices of his critics valid? I will make the case from these opening lines that Paul can be trusted as a faithful messenger because of who he is, who we are, and what the true message brings.

Before proceeding, however, we should orient ourselves to the structure of the letter itself. In 2 Corinthians chapters 1–7, the apostle recounts a history of past events in his relationship with the Corinthians while defending the legitimacy of his apostolic ministry and the superiority of the new covenant. In chapters 8–9, having ascertained their repentance, he prepares them to give to the collection for Jerusalem when he arrives. In chapters 10–13, he warns the unrepentant about what will take place during his third visit when he will demonstrate the power of his apostolic ministry. We can better understand the complexities of interpreting the letter when we realize that in chapters 1–9 the apostle Paul is addressing the repentant Corinthians directly and the rebellious indirectly, while in chapters 10–13 he addresses the unrepentant directly and the repentant indirectly.² And now to the letter itself.

WE SHOULD TRUST PAUL BECAUSE OF WHO HE IS

Paul opens this letter, as he does every letter, by identifying himself: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God” (2 Cor. 1:1). He sends this letter as an apostle of Christ Jesus. Paul uses the word “apostle” in one of three ways outlined by Murray Harris: “in reference to the Twelve and himself; of a limited number of church leaders who had a permanent but specific commission from Christ or the local church; and of those with a temporary and humanly approved commission.”³ That last sense is the broadest usage of the word and is found later in 2 Corinthians 8:23. The second usage finds its roots in the Old Testament. In Greek translations

2. Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, ed. Terry C. Muck, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 32–33.

3. Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 611.

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of the Old Testament, “apostle” is used to refer to a person who was commissioned and sent somewhere to act as a representative of the one who sent him. The emphasis is on the commission to speak for another, even more than on being sent.⁴ In this sense, Paul has been commissioned by Christ to represent Christ to the Corinthians and to everyone else. But Paul does not understand himself to be one of many people who had been sent out by Christ in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20). Paul specifically numbers himself among *the* apostles, the Twelve, the first sense of Harris’s three categories. An apostle in this sense was one who served as an eyewitness to Jesus’ life, ministry, death, and resurrection, and who was chosen by Jesus to take that witness to the world (Eph. 2:20; 3:5; 4:11).⁵ Jesus chose twelve of this sort of apostle, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel. One of those twelve apostles, Judas, was a traitor who died prematurely of suicide—though still according to the will of God (Acts 1:16–20). But after his death, the Twelve were incomplete. So one day, while the disciples were devoting themselves to prayer before the day of Pentecost, Peter announced that Judas needed to be replaced. Two men who met the criteria were put forward (Acts 1:21–22). The apostles cast lots, leaving the final decision in the hands of the Lord himself. The lot fell to Matthias, who replaced Judas and brought the full number of apostles once again to twelve.

How, then, can Paul be considered an apostle in the sense of the Twelve? His opponents frequently wondered the same thing (1 Cor. 9:1–2). Paul did not follow Jesus during the time of his earthly ministry, death, or resurrection. In fact, Paul not only did not follow Jesus, but sought to kill the people who did! And it was while Paul was on his way to Damascus for precisely that purpose that he met Jesus for the first time—not Jesus in his meek-and-mild earthliness, but Jesus in his blazing glory. Paul was knocked to the ground, and his life would never be the same. Describing this event later to King Agrippa, Paul recounted what Jesus had told him:

But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people

4. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 45.

5. Acts 1:21–25 lays out the basic criteria for one of the Twelve. Paul does not measure up well to these criteria from a purely human perspective, and this, along with his persecution of the church, is likely why he calls himself “the least of the apostles” in 1 Corinthians 15:8–9.

and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. (Acts 26:16–18)

And that was what Paul did: he went to the Gentiles with the gospel.

Paul felt himself unworthy to be called an apostle because of his persecution of the church (1 Cor. 15:9). But by the grace of God, he is what he is (v. 10), namely, the last of the apostles to whom Jesus appeared personally (v. 8). Paul acknowledges that he was a latecomer to the apostolic party due to the circumstances of his birth and timing of his conversion, but this did not negate the validity of his calling to the apostolic office. In fact, as Paul says and the New Testament record confirms, he “worked harder than any of them” (v. 10). The gospel that Paul proclaimed was not taught to him by any man, but instead it was received through a revelation of Jesus (Gal. 1:11–12). Paul preached and taught as one with authority equal to the Twelve (Gal. 2:6–9). Therefore, the message that he brings is the one that he was commissioned by Christ to bring. He delivered only what he received (1 Cor. 15:3), and this was in agreement with the message delivered by the other true apostles. He did not appoint himself to be an apostle; that was done by the will of God. If the Corinthians are going to reject Paul’s message, therefore, they are not rejecting Paul primarily but the One who commissioned him to speak that message, as Jesus says in Luke 10:16: “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”

Furthermore, Paul was not alone in his work. Several associates worked alongside him, and here he mentions “Timothy our brother” (2 Cor. 1:1). In 2 Corinthians 1:19, he adds Silvanus as one who joined him and Timothy in proclaiming Jesus. Titus was also there, probably carrying this letter (8:16–18), accompanied by two other unnamed brothers (vv. 18–23). Paul does not refer to any of these men as apostles⁶ in the sense that he is, but they are Paul’s coworkers, and because they preach the same gospel, their message carries the same authority. Therefore, Paul is not just another man with an opinion

6. Paul uses the Greek word for “apostles” in 2 Corinthians 8:23, but the *ESV* is correct to translate it as “messengers” in this context. Notably, they are not called “apostles of Christ Jesus” but “apostles of the churches,” since the churches appointed them to this task. For more, see Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 611.

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in Corinth. He is not just another traveling preacher carrying his letters of recommendation. Paul is an apostle of the first order, and so to oppose him is to oppose Christ. Scott Hafemann summarizes: “Paul’s opening introduction thus strikes at the very heart of the controversy now raging in Corinth and opens the way for the defense of Paul’s legitimacy that will occupy so much of this letter. Either Paul is the true apostle, called by God, or his opponents are; but not both.”⁷ That was true for the Corinthians, and it remains true today. Either Paul is true or those who oppose him are true, but not both. To accept Paul’s message on justification or adoption, therefore, while simultaneously rejecting his teaching on matters of biblical sexuality, male eldership, or suffering ministers is incongruent. We trust Paul because he is Christ’s apostle by the will of God, and the message he carries is the true one.

WE SHOULD TRUST PAUL BECAUSE OF WHO WE ARE

Paul addresses his letter as follows: “To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia” (2 Cor. 1:1). While the letter is addressed to the church at Corinth, he expects it to be read to the churches in the surrounding region, who likewise would benefit from its contents, since they were likely also being influenced by whatever was happening in the city. It is important to remember that this is not the first letter that Paul sent to the Corinthians. This is obvious, given that it is called 2 Corinthians. What is not obvious is that although it is called 2 Corinthians, it is the fourth letter he sent to them.

While it is difficult to put together a precise chronology of dates, we can be certain of the following events. Paul first visited Corinth and planted the church there in the early 50s. After ministering in Corinth for eighteen months (Acts 18:11), he set sail for Syria and ultimately settled into Ephesus for an extended ministry (19:10). From there, Paul sent his first letter to the Corinthians, what we might call the “previous letter” referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:9. We do not possess this letter today. After that, Paul received a report from Chloe’s delegation about the church in Corinth. First Corinthians was Paul’s response to that report and those questions. The apostle sent Timothy to Corinth around this time (1 Cor. 16:10). Later, when

7. Scott Hafemann, “The Comfort and Power of the Gospel: The Argument of 2 Corinthians 1–3,” *Review & Expositor* 86, no. 3 (Summer 1989): 326.

Timothy returned to Paul in Ephesus, he brought painful news about the state of the church in Corinth. Paul then decided that the issues were serious enough that he needed to go and visit the church in person. This visit is known as the “painful visit” (2 Cor. 2:1), and it occurred a year earlier than he had planned. His painful visit was not able to resolve the issues in Corinth, but before leaving he told them that he would come and see them again before going to Macedonia, and that he would also visit them again after Macedonia. But when Paul arrived back at Ephesus, he decided that another visit so soon would just cause more grief (vv. 1–2), so he sent Titus along with a third letter back to Corinth. This letter is known as the “severe letter” (2:3–4; 7:8–12). Paul had some regret in sending it because he knew that it would grieve his friends in Corinth, and he was anxious for months about how they would respond. He left Ephesus greatly afflicted (1:8) and went north to Troas in hopes of reconnecting with Titus there to hear a report on the Corinthians (2:12–13). But Titus was not there. So Paul went on to Macedonia, where he met up with Titus and heard that the severe letter had had a good effect (7:5–7). At this point, Paul was ready to go and visit the Corinthians again to be reconciled with the majority of them, to continue to take up his collection for the poor Christians in Jerusalem, and to bring judgment on the troublemakers in the church if they had not repented by the time he arrived. Around the year 55, while he was in Macedonia, he wrote a fourth letter to them to prepare them for his third visit. This is the letter that we call 2 Corinthians.

What kind of environment was Paul walking into that required a preparatory letter? Corinth was a wealthy city, strategically located on an isthmus connecting the Peloponnesian Peninsula to the Greek mainland.⁸ It had a historical reputation for bronze artistry as well as wanton sexuality. As we read both 1 and 2 Corinthians, it is clear that sex remained a cultural obsession. More germane to the central issue of this letter, however, is that the Corinthians’ view of leadership had been thoroughly shaped by Greco-Roman values, rather than biblical ones. As George Guthrie writes, “The Greco-Roman world celebrated the attainment of ‘glory’ and ‘honor’ and emphasized the corresponding avoidance of ‘shame’ in a leader of society.”⁹

8. For a relatively brief and excellent introduction to the city of Corinth, see George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 9–17.

9. Guthrie, 15.

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Additionally, that honor or shame did not remain with the individual only, but was also transferred, for better or worse, to the person's family, clan, group, and city.

If we consider the kinds of things that increased or decreased a person's honor in ancient times, it will be apparent to us why some people in Corinth were not pleased with Paul's ministry. Here are some of the factors by which a person could climb the glory ladder in Corinth: (1) ability to achieve certain goals in society and get things done, (2) rhetorical skills in public speaking, (3) occupation, (4) wealth and income, (5) education and knowledge, and (6) status in the local community.¹⁰ In a glory-hungry city such as Corinth, Paul was marginal at best. In our modern secular culture that values these same things, we would esteem him similarly.

Walking through that list again, Paul always insisted that things he accomplished were not from his own power, but the power of God at work through him. He was derided as being a poor public speaker, a charge that he did not dispute. He willingly chose an occupation that involved working with his hands, while at the same time he sometimes declined money that he could have received from a patron. And though he had excellent training in biblical knowledge under the Rabbi Gamaliel, he refused to play it up. The apostle Paul resisted conformity to the culture of Corinth with regard to his view of leadership or anything else. Instead, he calls the Corinthians, and us, to something better: "a theocentric and biblical vision of authentic leadership."¹¹ In fact, in both letters that we possess, he is calling God's people to a theocentric and biblical vision of all of life. Why? Because that is the only view fitting for who the Corinthians have become in Christ. Once they were drunken, sexually perverted, greedy, thieving adulterers, to put it mildly (1 Cor. 6:10), but not anymore! "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (v. 11). Or to say it as Paul does in his opening, "[You are] the church of God" (2 Cor. 1:1). That one fact changes everything for them and for us.

We are not our own, but we belong to God as part of the new humanity called "the church." As such, we are called to embody, in the present age, the reality of the coming age by the presence of the Holy Spirit who indwells us. God is making all things new through Christ, and the church is to be

10. Guthrie, 16.

11. Guthrie, 17.

a preview of coming attractions for the whole universe. And it is the message of Paul, as well as the other apostles and prophets, that the Spirit uses as one of the primary means of our transformation today. Therefore, we should trust Paul and heed his message because he is an apostle and we are the church of God.

WE SHOULD TRUST PAUL BECAUSE OF WHAT HIS MESSAGE BRINGS

Paul greets the Corinthians with these familiar words: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 1:2). This is not a unique greeting that the apostle comes up with for the Corinthians, but the exact greeting he used in Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon.

Paul wrote his letters according to the conventions of his day, and one common letter-opener was to say the word *charein*, which means “greetings.” Paul takes the conventional greeting form, however, and changes just a few letters to make a theological statement. So instead of saying *charein*, meaning “greetings,” he says *charis*, meaning “grace.” Along with this, he adds the word “peace.” The standard Jewish greeting was to say *shalom*, which means “peace.” So here he combines a variation on the Greek form of greeting with the Hebrew form of greeting to draw our attention to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ as the source of grace and peace, for both the Jew and the Gentile. That is true not only in the first century, but also in the twenty-first century. The whole Bible gives witness to this grace and peace, and Paul testifies to the reality of it. The only grace and peace we will find in this life comes from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through trusting in the message of the gospel, the gospel that Paul proclaims and embodies in this letter. For the Corinthians, as for us, to reject the apostle Paul is also to reject the divine source of grace and peace.

What does Paul mean when he extends grace and peace to the Corinthians? To receive God’s grace is to receive the benefits of his favor without merit. Jesus himself is the literal embodiment of God’s grace to his people, and through him come particular graces such as forgiveness of sin, persevering hope in the face of tribulation, the Holy Spirit’s empowering presence, and the certainty of bodily resurrection. If we have received this grace, the most appropriate response is to extend the same grace to others. We cannot

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give someone the gift of salvation, but we can share the gospel and embody the gracious posture toward others that God has toward us. Moreover, to receive God's peace goes beyond a simple freedom from anxiety (which is no small thing today) to something more like an Edenic state of wholeness, the Hebrew concept of *shalom*. The peace we receive from God leads to peace within ourselves that extends to our relationships with other human beings. Having received this peace from God, we are called to live at peace with everyone, at least as far as it depends on us (Rom. 12:18). Grace and peace are gifts we receive freely from God that should become defining characteristics of our relationships with other humans. Our homes and churches should be communities defined by grace and peace, the continual extension of unmerited favor to one another resulting in relationships marked by wholeness all around. Even as Paul extends grace and peace to the Corinthians, he is likely desiring the extension of the same from them.

As we head into this extraordinary letter, a great place to start is by asking ourselves these questions: Do I know what grace is, and have I experienced it? Do I know what peace is, and am I experiencing it now? And are grace and peace evident in my life by the way I am extending these gifts to others? The apostles and prophets all bear witness to this one fact: grace and peace come from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and apart from a personal relationship with him as he is offered in the gospel, we can never know grace or peace. Paul offers us that gospel, and the grace and peace that come with it. We can trust him as one appointed by Jesus himself to carry this message. If we are wise, we will listen to what he has to say.