



CHRISTIAN STANDARD  
COMMENTARY

# 2 CORINTHIANS

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CHRISTIAN STANDARD  
COMMENTARY

# 2 CORINTHIANS



David E. Garland

Christian Standard Commentary: 2 Corinthians

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## SERIES INTRODUCTION

The Christian Standard Commentary (CSC) aims to embody an “ancient-modern” approach to each volume in the series. The following explanation will help us unpack this seemingly paradoxical practice that brings together old and new.

The *modern commentary* tradition arose and proliferated during and after the Protestant Reformation. The growth of the biblical commentary tradition largely is a result of three factors: (1) *The recovery of classical learning* in the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries. This retrieval led to a revival of interest in biblical languages (Greek and Hebrew). Biblical interpreters, preachers, and teachers interpreted Scripture based on the original languages rather than the Latin Vulgate. The commentaries of Martin Luther and John Calvin are exemplary in this regard because they return to the sources themselves (*ad fontes*). (2) *The rise of reformation movements* and the splintering of the Catholic Church. The German Reformation (Martin Luther), Swiss Reformation (John Calvin), and English Reformation (Anglican), among others (e.g., Anabaptist), generated commentaries that helped these new churches and their leaders interpret and preach Scripture with clarity and relevance, often with the theological tenets of the movements present in the commentaries. (3) *The historical turn in biblical interpretation* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This turning point emphasized the historical situation from which biblical books arise and in which they are contextualized.

In light of these factors, the CSC affirms traditional features of a *modern commentary*, evident even in recent commentaries:

- Authors analyze Old and New Testament books in their original languages.
- Authors present and explain significant text-critical problems as appropriate.
- Authors address and define the historical situations that gave rise to the biblical text (including date of composition, authorship, audience, social location, geographical and historical context, etc.) as appropriate to each biblical book.
- Authors identify possible growth and development of a biblical text so as to understand the book as it stands (e.g., how the book of Psalms came into its final form or how the Minor Prophets might be understood as a “book”).

The CSC also exhibits recent shifts in biblical interpretation in the past fifty years. The first is the literary turn in biblical interpretation. Literary analysis arose in biblical interpretation during the 1970s and 1980s, and this movement significantly influenced modern biblical commentaries. Literary analysis attends to the structure and style of each section in a biblical book as well as the shape of the book as a whole. Because of this influence, modern commentaries assess a biblical book’s style and structure, major themes and motifs, and how style impacts meaning. Literary interpretation recognizes that biblical books are works of art, arranged and crafted with rhetorical structure and purpose. Literary interpretation discovers the unique stylistic and rhetorical strategies of each book. Similarly, the CSC explores the literary dimensions of Scripture:

- Authors explore each book as a work of art that is a combination of style and structure, form and meaning.
- Authors assess the structure of the whole book and its communicative intent.
- Authors identify and explain the literary styles, poetics, and rhetorical devices of the biblical books as appropriate.
- Authors expound the literary themes and motifs that advance the communicative strategies in the book.

As an *ancient commentary*, the CSC is marked by a theological bent with respect to biblical interpretation. This bent is a tacit recognition that the Bible is not only a historical or literary document, but is fundamentally the Word of God. That is, it recognizes Scripture as fundamentally both historical *and* theological. God is the primary speaker in Scripture, and readers must deal with him. Theological interpretation affirms that although God enabled many authors to write the books of the Bible (Heb 1:1), he is the divine author, the subject matter of Scripture, and the One who gives the Old and New Testaments to the people of God to facilitate her growth for her good (2 Tim 3:16–17). Theological interpretation reads Scripture as God’s address to his church because he gives it to his people to be heard and lived. Any other approach (whether historical, literary, or otherwise) that diminishes emphasis on the theological stands deficient before the demands of the text.

Common to Christian (patristic, medieval, reformation, or modern) biblical interpretation in the past two millennia is a sanctified vision of Scripture in which it is read with attention to divine agency, truth, and relevance to the people of God. The *ancient commentary* tradition interprets Scripture as a product of complex and rich divine action. God has given his Word to his people so that they may know and love him, glorify him, and proclaim his praises to all creation. Scripture provides the information and power of God that leads to spiritual and practical transformation.

The transformative potential of Scripture emerges in the *ancient commentary* tradition as it attends to the centrality of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the One whom God sent to the world in the fullness of time, and about whom the OT anticipates, testifies to, and witnesses to. Further, he is the One whom the NT presents as the fulfillment of the OT promise, in whom the church lives and moves and has her being, and who the OT and NT testify will return to judge the living and the dead and who will make all things new.

With Christ as the center of Scripture, the *ancient commentary* tradition reveals an implicit biblical theology. Old and New Testaments work together as they reveal Christ; thus, the tradition works within a whole-Bible theology in which each testament is read in dialectic relationship, one with the other.

Finally, the *ancient commentary* tradition is committed to spiritual transformation. The Spirit of God illumines the hearts of readers so

they might hear God's voice, see Christ in his glory, and live in and through the power of the Spirit. The transformational dimensions of Scripture emerge in *ancient commentary* so that God's voice might be heard anew in every generation and God's Word might be embodied among his people for the sake of the world.

The CSC embodies the *ancient commentary* tradition in the following ways:

- Authors expound the proper subject of Scripture in each biblical book, who is God; further they explore how he relates to his world in the biblical books.
- Authors explain the centrality of Jesus appropriate to each biblical book and in the light of a whole-Bible theology.
- Authors interpret the biblical text spiritually so that the transformative potential of God's Word might be released for the church.

In this endeavor, the CSC is ruled by a Trinitarian reading of Scripture. God the Father has given his Word to his people at various times and in various ways (Heb 1:1), which necessitates a sustained attention to historical, philological, social, geographical, linguistic, and grammatical aspects of the biblical books which derive from different authors in the history of Israel and of the early church. Despite its diversity, the totality of Scripture reveals Christ, who has been revealed in the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God (Heb 1:1; John 1:1) and the One in whom all things hold together (Col 1:15–20) and through whom all things will be made new (1 Cor 15; Rev 21:5). God has deposited his Spirit to his church so that they might read spiritually, being addressed by the voice of God and receiving the life-giving Word that comes by Scripture (2 Tim 3:15–17; Heb 4:12). In this way, the CSC contributes to the building up of Christ's church and the Great Commission to which all are called.

## AUTHOR PREFACE

John Drane wrote, “There have been few great men in history who by writing a relatively small volume of literature, have managed to provoke a great avalanche of books, all written to understand their thought with greater clarity from one angle or another. Of no genius is this more true than of the Christian apostle, Paul.” It is reported that J. B. Lightfoot once told a student, “If you write a book on a subject, you have to read everything that has been written about it.” He gave that advice in the nineteenth century, but now with the mountains of research available, it is next to impossible to follow. In studying and proclaiming the living word, one realizes that its meaning can never be exhausted, so I was not surprised to glean new insights from the many who have studied this text after I first wrote this commentary. I am indebted to them. I believe that however great the avalanche of books and articles might become, they can never fully capture the power of this divinely inspired letter to the petulant group of Christians in Corinth. Those whom God has commissioned to proclaim and explain it to the people who hunger for a word of the Lord I think best understand its power. Those who minister in trying circumstances with sometimes trying people particularly resonate with and appreciate Paul’s struggles that he so honestly discloses. May they also learn what the Lord revealed to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9).

Every letter of Paul is filled with thanksgiving for those who serve with him and for those he serves. I would like to thank the students,

pastors, and church leaders who wrote me encouraging words about the first edition of this commentary. It is most gratifying to learn that one's work, if only in a small way, contributes to the life and ministry of communities of faith. I especially want to thank my student research assistants, Tia Kim, James Heikkila, and Daniel Gao. They provided immense help in gathering new resources to probe and in reading many rough drafts. I also thank Joshua Sharp and Andrew Barrett for the joy of reading the letter together in independent studies and learning from them. I thank Ray Clendenen and Brandon Smith for offering me the opportunity to rework this text and also the editors inside and outside B&H Publishing for all of their many insightful comments and helpful corrections. Despite all their help, the errors remain mine.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

## BIBLE BOOKS

Gen	Song	Luke
Exod	Isa	John
Lev	Jer	Acts
Num	Lam	Rom
Deut	Ezek	1, 2 Cor
Josh	Dan	Gal
Judg	Hos	Eph
Ruth	Joel	Phil
1, 2 Sam	Amos	Col
1, 2 Kgdms (LXX)	Obad	1, 2 Thess
1, 2 Kgs	Jonah	1, 2 Tim
3, 4 Kgdms (LXX)	Mic	Titus
1, 2 Chr	Nah	Phlm
Ezra	Hab	Heb
Neh	Zeph	Jas
Esth	Hag	1, 2 Pet
Job	Zech	1, 2, 3 John
Ps (pl. Pss)	Mal	Jude
Prov	Matt	Rev
Eccl	Mark	

## APOCRYPHA, PSEUDEPIGRAPHA, AND OTHER ANCIENT WRITINGS

<sup>2</sup>Abot R. Nat.  
*Adul. amic.*

<sup>2</sup>Abot de Rabbi Nathan  
Plutarch, *Quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur*

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<i>Aem.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Aemilius Paullus</i>
<i>Ag. Ap.</i>	Josephus, <i>Against Apion</i>
<i>Agriculture</i>	Philo, <i>On Agriculture</i>
<i>Alex.</i>	Dio Chrysostom, <i>Ad Alexandrinos (Or. 32)</i>
<i>Alex.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Alexander</i>
<i>Am.</i>	Ovid, <i>Amores</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	Josephus, <i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
<i>Ant. rom.</i>	Dionysius of Halicarnassus, <i>Antiquitates romanae</i>
<i>Antid.</i>	Isocrates, <i>Antidosi (Op. 15)</i>
<i>Apoc. Ab.</i>	Apocalypse of Abraham
<i>Apoc. Mos.</i>	Apocalypse of Moses
<i>Apoc. Sedr.</i>	Apocalypse of Sedrach
<i>1 Apol.</i>	Justin Martyr, <i>Apologia i</i>
<i>Arist. Ex.</i>	Aristeas the Exegete
<i>Ascen. Isa.</i>	Mart. Ascen. Isa. 6–11 (Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah)
<i>Avar.</i>	Dio Chrysostom, <i>De avaritia (Or. 17)</i>
b. <sup>ʿ</sup> Abod. Zar.	Babylonian Talmud, <sup>ʿ</sup> Abodah Zarah
b. B. Bat.	Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra
b. B. Qam.	Babylonian Talmud, Baba Qamma
b. Ber.	Babylonian Talmud, Berakot
b. <sup>ʿ</sup> Erub.	Babylonian Talmud, <sup>ʿ</sup> Erubin
b. Hag.	Babylonian Talmud, Hagiga
b. Ketub.	Babylonian Talmud, Ketubbot
b. Ned.	Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim
b. Pesah.	Babylonian Talmud, Pesahim
b. Šabb.	Babylonian Talmud, Šabbat
b. Sanh.	Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin
b. Soṭah	Babylonian Talmud, Soṭah
b. Taʿan.	Babylonian Talmud, Taʿanit
b. Yebam.	Babylonian Talmud, Yebamot
b. Yoma	Babylonian Talmud, Yoma
Bar	Baruch
2 Bar.	2 Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse)
<i>Bell. gall.</i>	Julius Caesar, <i>Bellum gallicum</i>
<i>Ben.</i>	Seneca, <i>De Beneficiis</i>
<i>Bib. Ant.</i>	Pseudo-Philo, <i>Biblical Antiquities</i>
<i>Cant. Rab.</i>	Canticles (Song of Solomon) Rabbah
<i>Carm.</i>	Horace, <i>Carmina</i>
CD	Cairo Genizah copy of the Damascus Document
<i>Cim.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Cimon</i>
1 Clem.	1 Clement
<i>Confusion</i>	Philo, <i>On the Confusion of Tongues</i>
<i>Cor.</i>	Dio Chrysostom, <i>Corinthian Discourse</i>
<i>Crat.</i>	Plato, <i>Cratylus</i>
<i>Cyn.</i>	Xenophon, <i>Cynegeticus</i>
<i>Decalogue</i>	Philo, <i>On the Decalogue</i>
<i>Dial.</i>	Dio Chrysostom, <i>Dialexis (Or. 42)</i>
<i>Diatr.</i>	Epictetus, <i>Diatribai (Dissertationes)</i>
Did.	Didache

Diogn.	Diognetus
<i>Dreams</i>	Philo, <i>On Dreams</i>
<i>Drunkenness</i>	Philo, <i>On Drunkenness</i>
<i>Embassy</i>	Philo, <i>On the Embassy to Gaius</i>
1, 2 En.	1, 2 Enoch (Slavonic Apocalypse)
<i>Enn.</i>	Plotinus, <i>Enneades</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	Pliny the Younger, <i>Epistulae</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	Seneca, <i>Epistulae morales</i>
1, 2 Esd	1, 2 Esdras
<i>Eth. Nic.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Ethica nicomachea</i>
<i>Exil.</i>	Plutarch, <i>De exilio</i>
Exod Rab.	Exodus Rabbah
4 Ezra	4 Ezra
<i>Flac.</i>	Cicero, <i>Pro Flacco</i>
<i>Flight</i>	Philo, <i>On Flight and Finding</i>
<i>Flor.</i>	Stobaeus, <i>Florilegium</i>
<i>Frat. amor.</i>	Plutarch, <i>De fraterno amore</i>
<i>Gall.</i>	Lucian, <i>Gallus</i>
Gen. Rab.	Genesis Rabbah
<i>Good Person</i>	Philo, <i>That Every Good Person Is Free</i>
<i>Gorg.</i>	Plato, <i>Gorgias</i>
<i>Heir</i>	Philo, <i>Who Is the Heir?</i>
Herm. Sim.	Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude(s)
<i>Hist.</i>	Livy, <i>History of Rome</i>
<i>Hom. 2 Cor.</i>	John Chrysostom, <i>Homiliae in epistulum i ad Corinthios</i>
<i>Ign. Phld.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Philadelphians</i>
<i>Ign. Rom.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Romans</i>
<i>Ign. Smyrn.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Smyrnaeans</i>
<i>Inst.</i>	Quintilian, <i>Institutio oratoria</i>
<i>Inu.</i>	Cicero, <i>De invention rhetorica</i>
<i>Invid.</i>	Dio Chrysostom, <i>De Invidia (Or. 77/78)</i>
Ion	Plato, <i>Ion</i>
Jos. Asen.	Joseph and Aseneth
<i>J.W.</i>	Josephus, <i>Jewish War</i>
Jub.	Jubilees
1 Kgdms	1 Kingdoms (LXX 1 Kings)
<i>Lach.</i>	Plato, <i>Laches</i>
Lev. Rab.	Leviticus Rabbah
<i>Life</i>	Josephus, <i>The Life</i>
<i>Lucil.</i>	Seneca, <i>Ad Lucilium</i>
m. 'Abot	Mishnah 'Abot
m. Ker.	Mishnah Keritot
m. Ketub.	Mishnah Ketubbot
m. Mak.	Mishnah Makkot
m. Ned.	Mishna Nedarim
m. Soṭah	Mishna Soṭah
1, 2, 3, 4 Macc	1, 2, 3, 4 Maccabees
<i>Marc.</i>	Seneca, <i>Ad Marcium de consolatione</i>
Mart. Isa.	Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah 1–5

Mek.	Mekilta
Mem.	Xenophon, <i>Memorabilia</i>
Men.	Plautus, <i>Menaechmi</i>
Merc. Cond.	Lucian, <i>De mercede conductis</i>
Metam.	Apuleius, <i>Metamorphoses</i>
Midr. Ps.	Midrash on Psalms
Migration	Philo, <i>On the Migration of Abraham</i>
Moses	Philo, <i>On the Life of Moses</i>
Nat.	Pliny the Elder, <i>Naturalis historia</i>
Nat. d.	Cicero, <i>De natura deorum</i>
Nest.	Dio Chrysostom, <i>Nestor (Or. 57)</i>
Noct. att.	Aulus Gellius, <i>Noctes atticae</i>
Off.	Cicero, <i>De officiis</i>
Or.	Tertullian, <i>De oratione</i>
Or. Brut.	Cicero, <i>Orator ad M. Brutum</i>
Paneg.	Isocrates, <i>Panegyricus</i>
Peregr.	Lucian, <i>The Passing of Peregrinus</i>
Pesah.	Pesahim
Pesiq. Rab.	Pesiqta Rabbati
Planting	Philo, <i>On Planting</i>
Pol.	Aristotle, <i>Politica</i>
Pol. Phil.	Polycarp, <i>To the Philippians</i>
P.Oxy	Oxyrhynchus Papyri
Pr Azar	Prayer of Azariah
<i>Praec. ger. rei publ.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Praecepta gerendae rei publicae</i>
Prot.	Plato, <i>Protagoras</i>
Ps.-Philo	Pseudo-Philo
Pss. Sol.	Psalms of Solomon
Pud.	Tertullian, <i>De pudicitia</i>
<i>Quaest. rom.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Quaestiones romanae et graecae (Aetia romana et graeca)</i>
QE	Philo, <i>Quaestiones et solutions in Exodum</i>
4QFlor	(Midr)Eschata) Florilegium, also Midrash on Eschatology
1QHa	Hodayota or Thanksgiving Hymnsa [Dead Sea Scroll]
1QM	Milhamah or War Scroll [Dead Sea Scroll]
4QMMT	Miqsat Ma'asê ha-Toraha
1QS	Serek Hayahad or Rule of the Community [Dead Sea Scroll]
11QT <sup>a</sup>	Temple Scroll <sup>a</sup> [Dead Sea Scroll]
Resp.	Plato, <i>Respublica</i>
Rhet.	Aristotle, <i>Rhetorica</i>
<i>Rhet. praec.</i>	Lucian, <i>Rhetorum praeceptor</i>
Sat.	Horace, <i>Satirae</i>
Sat.	Juvenal, <i>Satirae</i>
Sel. Ps.	Origen, <i>Selecta in Psalmos</i>
1 Serv. lib.	Dio Chrysostom, <i>De servitute et libertate i (Or. 14)</i>
2 Serv. lib.	Dio Chrysostom, <i>De servitute et libertate ii (Or. 15)</i>
Sib. Or.	Sibylline Oracles
Sipre Deut.	Sipre Deuteronomy
Sir	Sirach/Ecclesiasticus

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<i>Soph.</i>	Isocrates, <i>In sophistas</i>
<i>Spec. Laws</i>	Philo, <i>On the Special Laws</i>
<i>Symp.</i>	Plato, <i>Symposium</i>
T. Ab.	Testament of Abraham
T. Benj.	Testament of Benjamin
T. Dan	Testament of Dan
T. Gad	Testament of Gad
T. Job	Testament of Job
T. Jos.	Testament of Joseph
T. Jud.	Testament of Judah
t. Ketub.	Tosefta Ketubbot
T. Levi	Testament of Levi
T. Naph.	Testament of Naphtali
T. Reu.	Testament of Reuben
T. Sim.	Testament of Simeon
1 <i>Tars.</i>	Dio Chrysostom, <i>Tarsica prior</i> (Or. 33)
2 <i>Tars.</i>	Dio Chrysostom, <i>Tarsica altera</i> (Or. 34)
Tg. Onq. Deut	Targum Onqelos to Deuteronomy
Tg. Ps.-J. to Exod	Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Exodus
<i>Tim.</i>	Plato, <i>Timaeus</i>
Tob	Tobit
<i>Tusc.</i>	Cicero, <i>Tusculanae disputationes</i>
<i>Tyr.</i>	Dio Chrysostom, <i>De tyrannide</i> (Or. 6)
<i>Ven.</i>	Dio Chrysostom, <i>Venator</i> (Or. 7)
<i>Verr.</i>	Cicero, <i>In Verrem</i>
<i>Virt.</i>	Dio Chrysostom, <i>De virtute</i> (Or. 8)
<i>Virtues</i>	Philo, <i>On the Virtues</i>
<i>Vit. auct.</i>	Lucian, <i>Vitarum auctio</i>
<i>Vit. beata</i>	Seneca, <i>De vita beata</i>
Wis	The Wisdom of Solomon
<i>Worse</i>	Philo, <i>That the Worse Attacks the Better</i>

**COMMONLY USED SOURCES FOR NEW TESTAMENT VOLUMES**

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	D. N. Freedman (ed.), <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ACNT	Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AJT	<i>American Journal of Theology</i>
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
ATRSup	Anglican Theological Review Supplemental Series
AusBR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BBB	<i>Bonner biblische Beiträge</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDAG	W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd ed.
BDF	F. Blass, A. Debrunner, R. W. Funk, <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
BEvT	Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie
BGBE	Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese
BHT	<i>Beiträge zur historischen Theologie</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
BJS	<i>Brown Judaic Studies</i>
BT	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BTS	Biblical Tools and Studies
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur ZAW
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum</i> . Edited by August Boeckh, 4 vols.
CP	<i>Classical Philology</i>
ConBNT	Coniectanea biblica, New Testament
CP	<i>Classical Philology</i>
CRINT	Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
CSB	Christian Standard Bible
CTM	<i>Concordia Theological Monthly</i>
CTR	<i>Criswell Theological Review</i>
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
EBC	<i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>
EC	<i>Early Christianity</i>

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<i>ECL</i>	<i>Early Christianity and Its Literature</i>
<i>EDNT</i>	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>ESV</i>	English Standard Version
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</i>
<i>ETR</i>	<i>Etudes théologiques et religieuses</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>Exp</i>	<i>Expositor</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>FNT</i>	<i>Filologia Neotestamentaria</i>
<i>FRLANT</i>	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>GNBC</i>	Good News Bible Commentary
<i>GTJ</i>	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>HNTC</i>	Harper's New Testament Commentaries
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUT</i>	Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
<i>IB</i>	<i>The Interpreter's Bible</i>
<i>IBS</i>	<i>Irish Biblical Studies</i>
<i>ICC</i>	International Critical Commentary
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>INT</i>	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching
<i>IVPNTC</i>	IVP New Testament Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>LCL</i>	Loeb Classical Library
<i>LNTS</i>	The Library of New Testament Studies
<i>LouvSt</i>	<i>Louvain Studies</i>
<i>LXX</i>	Septuagint
<i>MNTC</i>	Moffatt New Testament Commentary
<i>MT</i>	Masoretic Text
<i>NAB</i>	New American Bible
<i>NASB</i>	New American Standard Bible
<i>NCB</i>	New Century Bible
<i>NCBC</i>	New Century Bible Commentary
<i>NEB</i>	New English Bible
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
<i>NIBC</i>	New International Biblical Commentary
<i>NICNT</i>	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
<i>NIGTC</i>	New International Greek Testament Commentary

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NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NKJV	New King James Versions
NLT	New Living Translation
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	<i>Novum Testamentum</i> , Supplements
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTD	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
NTL	The New Testament Library
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i> OCD</i>	<i>Oxford Classical Dictionary</i>
<i>PGM</i>	<i>Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri.</i> Edited by Karl Preisendanz. 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1973-1974
PNTC	Pelican New Testament Commentaries
<i>PTR</i>	<i>Princeton Theological Review</i>
RAC	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum.</i> Edited by Theodor Klauser et al. Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950–
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RBL</i>	<i>Review of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>RHPR</i>	<i>Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses</i>
RRA	Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Recherches de science religieuse</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>RTR</i>	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
SANT	Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testaments
SBEC	Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBL SBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLTT	Society of Biblical Literature Texts and Translations
<i>SE</i>	<i>Studia Evangelica</i>
<i>SEÅ</i>	<i>Svensk exegetisk årsbok</i>
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNT	Studien zum Neuen Testament
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SO	Symbolae Osloenses
SPCK	Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge
<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia theologica</i>
TBC	Torch Bible Commentaries
<i>TBT</i>	<i>The Bible Today</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TEV	Today's English Version
THKNT	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament

TLZ	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TRE	<i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i>
TS	<i>Theological Studies</i>
TSK	<i>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</i>
TynBul	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
TZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
UBS	United Bible Societies
VC	<i>Vigiliae christianae</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>



# 2 CORINTHIANS



## **INTRODUCTION OUTLINE**

- 1 Political History of Corinth
  - 2 Paul's Mission in Corinth
  - 3 Chronology of Events
  - 4 The Corinthians' Displeasure with Paul and the Letter's Purpose
  - 5 The Unity of 2 Corinthians
    - 5.1 General Considerations for the Unity of the Letter
    - 5.2 Specific Evidence Arguing for the Unity of the Letter
- Outline of 2 Corinthians

# **INTRODUCTION**

## **1 POLITICAL HISTORY OF CORINTH**

The Roman consul Lucius Mummius destroyed Corinth in 146 BC, killing most of the Greek male population and selling the women and children into slavery. The site then lay desolate, although not totally deserted, for 102 years. Its grand old shrines became a curiosity for tourists, and the ruins provided shelter to visitors to the Isthmian games (held in Sicyon). In 44 BC, shortly before his assassination, Julius Caesar decided to establish a Roman colony on the site. Corinth's location near the land bridge between the Peloponnesos and mainland Greece and its two nearby ports, Cenchreae, six miles east on the Saronic Gulf, and Lechaem, two miles north on the Corinthian Gulf, ensured its prosperity.

Corinth's resettlement gave the city a decidedly Roman character. It was geographically in Greece but culturally in Rome. Stansbury notes, "The Greek Corinth of old would live on in folk memory and

literature, reinforced by the traditions of the Isthmian festival.”<sup>1</sup> The city’s status as a Roman colony made it dependent on Rome’s power and goodwill. Roman colonies were established to foster the majesty of Roman culture, religion, and values. Aulus Gellius claimed that Roman colonies were “miniatures” of Rome.<sup>2</sup> The city adopted Roman laws, political organizations, and institutions. The official language of Latin dominates the extant inscriptions. Eight of seventeen names in the NT of persons connected to Corinth are Latin: Fortunatus (1 Cor 16:17); Lucius (Rom 16:21); Tertius (Rom 16:22) Gaius and Quartus (Rom 16:23); Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2); and Titius Justus (Acts 18:7).<sup>3</sup> The city also took on a different appearance from its Greek period. Although the Romans used many existing Greek buildings in the redesign of the city, the organization and city plan differed from its Greek predecessor.<sup>4</sup> The imposing mass of the Acrocorinth, however, continued to overshadow the city. At its summit, the many shrines and temples were dominated by the Temple of Aphrodite.

According to Strabo, Caesar colonized the city predominately with “freedmen” and some soldiers.<sup>5</sup> As a result the city had a mixed

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<sup>1</sup> H. A. Stansbury, “Corinthian Honor, Corinthian Conflict: A Social History of Early Roman Corinth and Its Pauline Community” (PhD diss., University of California Irvine, 1990), 116. Wendell Willis argues that we should not de-emphasize the Greek past of Corinth and stress its Roman character in studying the Corinthian correspondence. He makes the case for the continuation of the Hellenistic character of Corinth (“Corinthusne deletus ist?,” *BZ* 35 [1991]: 233–41). D. W. J. Gill effectively disputes his conclusions and contends that scholarship should continue to read the correspondence against the background of a Roman city (“Corinth: A Roman Colony in Achaëa,” *BZ* 37 [1993]: 259–64). See also B. W. Winter, “The Achaean Federal Imperial Cult II: The Corinthian Church,” *TynBul* 46 (1995): 169–78.

<sup>2</sup> Aulus Gellius, *Noct. att.* 16.13.89.

<sup>3</sup> T. B. Savage, *Power through Weakness: Paul’s Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians*, SNTSMS 86 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 35.

<sup>4</sup> For a general discussion of the history of Corinth during this time period, see J. Wiseman, “Corinth and Rome I: 228 BC–AD 267,” *ANRW* II, 7.1 (Berlin: 1979): 438–548. See also O. Broneer, “Corinth: Center of St. Paul’s Missionary Work in Greece,” *BA* 14 (1951): 78; J. Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983); V. P. Furnish, “Corinth in Paul’s Time,” *BAR* 15 (1988): 14–27; and D. W. J. Gill, “Achaia,” in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting, Volume 2: Greco-Roman Setting*, ed. D. W. J. Gill and C. Gempf (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994): 433–53. The Corinth Computer Project seeks to reconstruct the city plan and landscape of Roman Corinth. See D. G. Romano and B. C. Schoenbrun, “A Computerized Architectural and Topographical Survey of Ancient Corinth,” *Journal of Field Archaeology* 29 (1993): 177–90; D. G. Romano and O. Tolba, “Remote Sensing, GIS and Electronic Surveying: Reconstructing the City Plan and Landscape of Roman Corinth,” in *Computer Applications and Quantitative Methods in Archaeology 1994*, ed. J. Huggett and N. Ryan, *BAR International Series* 600 (1995), 163–74.

<sup>5</sup> Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.23; 17.3.15.

ethnic population that included descendants from the original Greek population as well as freedmen from around the world—Egypt, Syria, Judea, and elsewhere. A Greek poet laments this situation:

What inhabitants, O luckless city, hast thou received, and in place of whom? Alas for the great calamity of Greece! Would Corinth, thou didst lie lower than the ground and more desert than the Libyan sands, rather than that wholly abandoned to such a crowd of scoundrelly slaves, thou shouldst vex the bones of the ancient Bacchiadae!<sup>6</sup>

In the time of Paul, one third of the population consisted of slaves, and Corinth served as a main depot for the slave trade in the Aegean.

As a Roman colony, Corinth was comparatively posh. Stansbury observes, “The city’s position in relation to the sea made it comparable to an advantageously located island. Its attachment to the mainland made it viable as an administrative center.”<sup>7</sup> Concannon writes that, as a seaport, “Corinth was a crucial node in the movement of goods from the east to the west,” which also enabled it to serve “as an agent for expanding Roman economic power from abroad.” As this “friendly emporium” of imported and exported commodities, it “opened the door to ethnic interaction among Greeks, Romans, Italians, and others who found their way to one of Corinth’s ports.”<sup>8</sup>

A building boom between the reigns of Augustus and Nero made it one of the most splendid and modern of the Greek cities with the longest stoa in the world. Corinth also presided over the Isthmian games, having taken over control from Sicyon. It was a major festival honoring the sea god Poseidon that attracted hosts of people every other spring. Dio Chrysostom relates how the philosopher Diogenes, who had moved to Corinth, observed the vast crowds attending the Isthmian games. His description of that visit is probably colored by Dio’s own experiences there:

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<sup>6</sup> Crinagoras, *Greek Anthology* 9.284, cited by V. P. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, AB (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Stansbury, “Corinthian Honor,” 22.

<sup>8</sup> C. W. Concannon, “When You Were Gentiles”: *Specters of Ethnicity in Roman Corinth and Paul’s Corinthian Correspondence*, *Synkrisis: Comparative Approaches to Christianity in Greco-Roman Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 54–56.

That was the time, too, when one could hear crowds of wretched sophists around Poseidon's temple shouting and reviling one another, and their disciples, as they were called, fighting with one another, many writers reading aloud their stupid works, many poets reciting their poems while others applauded them, many jugglers showing their tricks, many fortune-tellers interpreting fortunes, lawyers innumerable perverting judgment, and peddlers not a few peddling whatever they happened to have.<sup>9</sup>

Many inhabitants of Corinth were prosperous, and "wealth and ostentatious display became the hallmark of Corinth."<sup>10</sup> The great orator Aelius Aristides in the mid-second century praised it as a center of Panhellenic culture, "full of wealth and an abundance of goods" and rich with culture from far and wide from which one could find "wisdom" with "the treasures of paintings all about" and "the gymnasiums and schools."<sup>11</sup> Many inhabitants, however, were impoverished. A second-century writer explained why he did not go to Corinth: "I learned in a short time the nauseating behavior of the rich and the misery of the poor."<sup>12</sup> Because the city was relatively new, its aristocracy was fluid. Since it was refounded largely as a freedman's city, upward social mobility was more attainable than in more established cities with entrenched aristocracies. Socially ambitious Corinthians with the means could advance themselves. As a result, there was an even greater preoccupation with the symbols of social status in this city.<sup>13</sup> Citizens were obsessed with their status and their ascent up the ladder of honor. Savage asks, "What kind of people created such a city?" His answer: people "impressed with material splendour and intent on raising their standing in the world."<sup>14</sup> In this society one can only rise via a "combination of patronage, marriage, wealth, and patient cultivation of connections."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Dio Chrysostom, *Virt.* 8.9 (Cohon, LCL).

<sup>10</sup> H. D. Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9: A Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostle Paul*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 53.

<sup>11</sup> Aelius Aristides, *Orations* 27–28, cited by Concannon, "When You Were Gentiles," 48.

<sup>12</sup> Alciphron, *Epistles* 3.60.

<sup>13</sup> Stansbury describes it as a commercial city, but "Corinth's political oligarchy . . . [was] a rather rigid elite with a typical zeal to promote its own honor and perpetuate its own power" ("Corinthian Honor," 87).

<sup>14</sup> Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 35.

<sup>15</sup> Stansbury, "Corinthian Honor," 87.

The precious commodity of honor was scarce, and not everyone could rise to the pinnacle of society, even with incredible wealth. Petronius's bawdy novel, *Satyricon*, contains the famous account of a lavish dinner given by the freedman Trimalchio, who had attained fabulous wealth as a merchant.<sup>16</sup> The story reveals Trimalchio's shameless craving for higher status and honor. No matter how wealthy he had become, a glass ceiling (or a class ceiling) prevented the fulfillment of his social aspirations. Since the satire was written by one of the nobility and a member of Nero's court (his minister of culture), it reflects an upper-class contempt for freedmen like Trimalchio. He can never attain what he yearned for—honor from those above him in rank—and they will always regard him as a crass bumpkin.

People compensated for this situation by seeking honor wherever they could get it. Stansbury observes:

The shortage of reasonable avenues of honor at the top of the political structure meant many well-to-do sought it elsewhere by somewhat similar methods. The options included endeavors such as private entertainment, games and festivals, patronage of new cults or collegia, demonstration of rhetorical skill or philosophical acumen, sponsorship or receipt of an approved honorary statue with appropriate epigraph, and socially conspicuous displays of a private retinue of slaves and freedmen.<sup>17</sup>

For some in Corinth the church may have been attractive as another forum to compete for status according to the norms of society. It may have offered more promise of success in winning influence and honor in the small gathering of Christians. The Corinthian correspondence reveals that Paul had to deal with a church overcome by vanity and rent asunder by an overweening desire for honor and distinction. It created a spiritual and theological problem. Those who already enjoy status and privilege and those who strive for upward mobility to enjoy status and privilege are hardly attracted to the downward path on which Jesus leads them toward weakness and vulnerability, self-giving and humility, and love and benevolence for others.

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<sup>16</sup> Furnish notes that a prominent citizen in Corinth according to inscriptions was Gnaeus Babbius Philenus, a freed slave who attained his wealth from shipping and served in prominent offices as *aedile*, city commissioner, *duovir*, one of two magistrates, and *pontifex*, the foremost religious office (*II Corinthians*, 11–12).

<sup>17</sup> Stansbury, "Corinthian Honor," 278.

## 2 PAUL'S MISSION IN CORINTH

Given Corinth's strategic location, we can understand why Paul spent so much time there, and Engels lists the following reasons. First, "As a major destination for traders, travelers, and tourists in the eastern Mediterranean, Corinth was an ideal location from which to spread word of a new religion."<sup>18</sup> Second, the city would have given Paul "an opportunity to practice his own trade as tentmaker since there was probably a high demand for his products: tents for sheltering visitors to the spring games, awnings for the retailers in the forum, and perhaps sails for merchant ships."<sup>19</sup> It gave him the opportunity for some measure of economic independence. Paul did not separate working from preaching. He tells the Thessalonians, "Working night and day so that we would not burden any of you, we preached God's gospel to you" (1 Thess 2:9). His workshop became a public place from which he could preach the gospel to passersby (Acts 17:17; 19:11–12). Third, Corinth's flourishing manufacturing, marketing, and service sectors attracted immigrants from all over the eastern Mediterranean. These people were largely poor and powerless. They had broken with their "cultural ties and their homelands and were probably more susceptible to a new and, in some respects, unconventional religious message."<sup>20</sup> Engels cites a modern sociological assessment of those who live in cities: "A population concentrated in cities was more accessible to the influence of new ideological trends than a population scattered throughout the countryside. The man who had severed his traditional local ties to live in the impersonal and anonymous city searched for something he could identify with, for new loyalties and attachments."<sup>21</sup> A city like Corinth provided many more persons who might be open to hearing and believing the gospel of the crucified Lord and forming a new identity by belonging to a family of faith grounded in divine love and grace that erase social and ethnic divisions.

According to Acts 18:1–8, Paul spent his first visit to Corinth trying to convince Jews attending the synagogue to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. He instructed the household of Gentiles who lived next

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<sup>18</sup> D. Engels, *Roman Corinth: An Alternative Model for the Classical City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 112.

<sup>19</sup> Engels, *Roman Corinth*, 112.

<sup>20</sup> Engels, *Roman Corinth*, 113.

<sup>21</sup> Engels, *Roman Corinth*, 231, n. 82, citing N. Rich, *The Age of Nationalism and Reform: 1850–1890* (New York: Norton, 1977), 26.

to the synagogue, and Jewish anger over his preaching, and perhaps his encroaching on the pool of Gentiles attracted to Judaism, led to a riotous brush with the Roman governor, Gallio. The result of this first mission was that some Jews and Gentiles responded to the gospel (see 1 Cor 12:2). Many things would have attracted both Jews and Gentiles to become Christian, namely, signs, wonders, and mighty works (12:12); Paul's persuasive interpretation of the Scripture (see 3:12–18); the community's care for one another; the open acceptance of Gentile members without requiring circumcision that would have been obligatory for full acceptance in the synagogue; the theoretical absence of social boundaries (1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27–28); and the personal transformation worked by the Spirit (5:17). The result was a blossoming congregation composed of persons from mixed backgrounds and social standings. It was an explosive mix that also led to dissension and rivalry, which caused Paul much anguish and concern.

### 3 CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

Second Corinthians contains significant biographical information about Paul's varied hardships and revelatory visions that we otherwise would not have known. Reconstructing the events leading up to this letter is difficult because one's conclusions about the literary unity of the letter have a direct bearing on the sequence of what happened. The following outline of events after Paul left Corinth assumes that 2 Corinthians was not assembled from shorter letters Paul sent to them but is a unified, single letter.

1. Paul's physical absence from Corinth created a theological and administrative vacuum that others moved in to fill.<sup>22</sup> Paul may not have appointed specific leaders in the church since the Christians met in the houses of individuals who naturally tended to exert influence over others because of their wealth and social prominence. Paul argues that though they have a myriad of guardians in Christ, they have only one father in the gospel (1 Cor 4:15). This statement suggests that

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<sup>22</sup> S. J. Hafemann conjectures from 1 Cor 4:18–21 that some were objecting that while Paul may have been the founder of the church, "his absence now meant that his authority was no longer valid for the entire church, but only for those whom he personally won to the Lord. As for the rest, they owed their allegiance to their own particular guides" (*Suffering and Ministry in the Spirit: Paul's Defense of His Ministry in II Corinthians 2:14–3:3* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 60).

the church was beset by would-be guides even before any interlopers arrived.

2. In two letters, a previous letter now lost (1 Cor 5:9–13) and 1 Corinthians, Paul challenged important persons in the community for their ethical misbehavior and their association with idolatry. He sent Timothy to Corinth from Ephesus with 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10–11). The guilty parties did not accept his discipline passively. His bold rebukes caused them to lose face and sparked deep resentment. They counterattacked by impugning his motives, methods, and person to undermine his authority in the church. The result: some members continue as avid supporters of Paul, some waver, and some comprise a determined element of resistance to his leadership.<sup>23</sup> Anyone who has held a leadership position in a church can probably identify with this scenario.

3. Paul has changed his plans from what he sketched out in 1 Cor 16:5–9. He intended to come to them after passing through Macedonia and perhaps spend the winter with them. Later, he says he wanted to go to Macedonia via Corinth and then return before setting sail for Jerusalem (2 Cor 1:15–16). Instead, Timothy may have returned from Corinth with bad news that caused Paul to make an emergency visit.<sup>24</sup>

4. The visit turned out to be bitter and distressing for Paul (1:23; 2:1; 12:14; 13:1). He was the object of an attack by someone in the community (2:5–8; 7:11–12), and no one from the Corinthian congregation took up his defense.

5. Paul beat a hasty retreat and returned to Ephesus and did not go on to Macedonia as previously planned.

6. He then wrote the sorrowful letter from Ephesus in lieu of another visit (1:23; 2:3–4; 7:8, 12) in which he sought to test their obedience (2:6). The letter called on them to take action against the

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<sup>23</sup> J. Murphy-O'Connor contends, correctly in our view, that Paul's treatment of them in 1 Corinthians was so "harsh and unsympathetic that it can only have antagonized them even more. It would be extremely unrealistic to think that their anger and frustration has dissipated in the twelve months that separates 1 Cor from 2 Cor 1–9. They remained a focus of opposition to Paul at Corinth" ("Philo and 2 Cor 6:14–7:1," *RB* 95 [1988]: 65–66).

<sup>24</sup> J. B. Lightfoot argues that Timothy was detained by circumstances in Macedonia (Acts 19:22) and never made it to Corinth. Paul speaks of his coming with uncertainty in 1 Cor 16:10, and he is not mentioned in 2 Cor 12:17–18. Instead, Lightfoot believes the mission was carried out by Titus, one of the "other brothers" mentioned in 1 Cor 16:11–12 ("The Mission of Titus to the Corinthians," in *Biblical Essays* [London: Macmillan, 1893], 276–80).

offender and to demonstrate their innocence in the matter and their zeal for him before God (7:12).<sup>25</sup>

7. After this letter was written, Paul's life became so endangered in Asia that he attributes his survival to God's miraculous deliverance.

8. Titus probably delivered a severe letter to the Corinthians. He stayed to ensure their repentance, to cement their renewed commitment to Paul, and to rejuvenate their dedication to the collection for the poor of the saints in Jerusalem. Paul had assured Titus of his confidence in the Corinthians' positive response to the letter (7:14) and expected to hear some word from Titus about the Corinthians' response.

9. Paul planned to meet Titus in Troas (2:12–13). He had an evangelistic opportunity there, but his nagging worries about the situation in Corinth (see 11:28) caused him to leave this work. Presumably, when Paul realized Titus was not on the last boat of the season (now autumn), he assumed Titus would have to travel by land through Macedonia. He left for Macedonia in hopes of meeting Titus there (2:12–13).

10. Titus's arrival with good news about the repentance of the majority (2:6) and their renewed zeal for Paul greatly comforted him (7:6–7, 9, 11, 13, 15). His expression of joy in chap. 7 indicates that the severe letter and Titus's visit had repaired, at least partially, the breach.

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<sup>25</sup> D. H. Liebert helpfully describes the dynamic of the group letter ("The 'Apostolic Form of Writing' Group Letters before and after 1 Corinthians," in *The Corinthian Correspondence*, ed. R. Bieringer [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996], 433–40):

1. There must be multiple addressees who know each other well.
2. There must be at least some minimal identifiable diversity in the audience that becomes a conscious focus of the communication.
3. The author must know the kinds of people intimately enough to address their differences.
4. The communication must be designed to be delivered to the group orally.
5. The author intends to adjust the relationships between the people in the audience.

Liebert contends that the public reading of a will is a good analogy, "The potential beneficiaries are gathered together to hear the words of the absent one." What is read will affect the way the people gathered see each other. "Someone who had received very little recognition in the community could suddenly receive much attention" (p. 437). He contends, "The best way to write to friends who disagree is to write them in a group letter, especially if you want them to adjust the way they look at each other" (p. 438). In 1 Corinthians Paul writes about the "insignificant and despised" (1:28), the "weak" (12:22), those married to non-Christians (7:12–15), the uncircumcised (7:18–19), slaves (7:21–22), and those who have nothing (11:22) in front of people who may well look down on them. In 2 Corinthians Paul talks about himself in front of people who do look down on him.

11. Healing a broken relationship takes time, as does ethical reformation. Paul responded by writing 2 Corinthians and sending Titus back with two brothers to complete the collection (8:6, 17–18, 22). Murphy-O'Connor writes, "Ministry has two facets, the activity of the apostle and the receptivity of the community."<sup>26</sup> Paul is concerned about both in this letter. He defends his activity as an apostle and makes a fervent appeal for the Corinthians to be receptive to him again. Their affection for him, however, has been alienated by the presence of boastful rivals, and he is still concerned that their former openness to him has diminished.

12. At some point during this time, these interlopers arrived in Corinth. They came off as "super-apostles" who seemed more spiritual, eloquent, and compelling than Paul (11:5, 23; 12:11). When they came to Corinth they likely made inroads with the group in Corinth already at odds with Paul and most receptive to alternative views. Murphy-O'Connor believes they would have captured the interest particularly of the spiritual ones (*pneumatikoi*) and "flattered their sensibilities" with "themes developed at some length and with a spice of mystery."<sup>27</sup> These rivals sought to capitalize on the disaffection with Paul and undermined his influence further to enhance their own status. The boastful rivals also embraced the prevailing self-assertive demeanor of the age, which may explain why some gladly welcomed them. They confirmed the Corinthians' own prejudices. Throughout his correspondence with them Paul asserts repeatedly that glory, ease, and exaltation were yet to come. Now was the time for self-emptying not self-exaltation, suffering not contentment, humiliation not self-advancement. The presence of rivals forces Paul to address the issue of how they can discern a true apostle from a huckster, a true witness from an imposter, and true speech from foolishness.

In 2 Corinthians Paul explains why he changed his travel plans and why he wrote them the severe letter instead of coming himself (1:15–2:1; 2:3–4; 7:8–12). He justifies his frank criticism that filled the letter of tears and explains his suffering and seeming weakness as an apostle. He then addresses the arrangements for the collection, castigates them for flirting with boastful rivals, and warns them that they should not mistake his meekness and gentleness in person for

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<sup>26</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, "Philo and 2 Cor 6:14–7:1," 65.

<sup>27</sup> J. Murphy-O'Connor, "*Pneumatikoi* and Judaizers in 2 Cor 2:14–4:6," *AusBR* 34 (1986): 49.

impotency. If they have not broken off their entanglement with the super-apostles, completely dissociated themselves from idolatry, rectified the moral problems, and stopped all their bickering and dissension, he will discipline them on his anticipated visit (12:20–21; 13:2). He does not relish a confrontation and writes in hopes that the letter will motivate them to amend their ways.

Paul has been comforted by God with the Corinthians' positive response to his severe letter and to Titus, but this letter reveals that he continues to suffer some measure of distress from what has happened in Corinth. He has experienced turbulent times in the two places where he concentrated his ministry efforts, Corinth and Ephesus. In Asia his life was seriously threatened. In Corinth his relationship with the church was seriously threatened. Paul has to deal with difficult external circumstances and a difficult church. Feeling imperiled in Ephesus and unwelcome in Corinth, he went to Troas and later to Macedonia where he writes this letter. The Corinthian crisis "wings out of Paul passages of remarkable oratorical power,"<sup>28</sup> and his later readers are blessed and comforted by this crisis as much as its original.

The letter appears to have resolved some issues. Paul spent three months in Greece (Acts 20:2–3) before leaving for Jerusalem with the collection, and, presumably, most of that time was spent in Corinth. The letter to the Romans was therefore probably written from Corinth on the eve of his departure. He notes that the Achaeans contributed to the fund (Rom 15:26), but his warning in Rom 16:17–18 fits the situation he has faced in Corinth: "Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who create divisions and obstacles contrary to the teaching that you learned. Avoid them, because such people do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites. They deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting with smooth talk and flattering words." This reference to people who cause divisions, who do not serve the Lord but use smooth talk and flattery to deceive people, leads us next to the question of the perpetrators of the problems between Paul and the Corinthians and the roots of the dispute.

The problems Paul deals with in this letter are complex. He is not engaged merely in damage control but must mend a fractured relationship with the church so that he might continue to guide it in spiritual matters. He therefore must do more than refute various charges. How

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<sup>28</sup> R. E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 544–45.

does he prove that he does not make his decisions according to the self-centered wisdom of this world but that he always has their best interests at heart? How does he defend his sufficiency as Christ's apostle when he appears to be so weak and afflicted? How does he change their attitudes toward his afflictions and suffering as an apostle? How does he convince them to give generously to the collection for Jerusalem and assure them that he has no intention of profiting from it? He must also quash the deleterious influence of the super-apostles. How does he counter their boasts without boasting in the same way they have? He must curb the continued immorality and association with idolatry. How does he get them to accept his frank criticism so that they will not take offense but will change their ways? If they do not appreciate his sincerity as an apostle and accept his correction, they will not contribute to the important project for Jerusalem and, worse, will fall further away from the true gospel under the toxic influence of false apostles.

#### **4 THE CORINTHIANS' DISPLEASURE WITH PAUL AND THE LETTER'S PURPOSE**

The breach between Paul and the Corinthians was not simply over theological issues but had its roots in Corinthian cultural values that clashed with Christian values he wanted them to adopt. Savage asks:

What would have prevented the recently converted Corinthians from approaching their new life in Christ with the same set of expectations with which they once approached their pagan worship? They were recent initiates into a religion of surpassing glory and power, the very things which people of their day cherished. How reasonable, then, to expect to share in that glory. How natural to regard Christ as the source of all blessing. How plausible to view his lordship as the fountain of the individual wealth and his exalted position as the source of personal honour and esteem.<sup>29</sup>

The problem was that as Christians they now are to live under the sign of the cross that revolutionizes worldly values and expectations. The Corinthian correspondence reveals that they were not yet comfortable in living out the scandal of the cross, but Paul kept calling

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<sup>29</sup> Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 160.

them back to Christ crucified. First Corinthians was a public rebuke of their worldly aspirations, and some did not welcome his reproof or accept his advice as authoritative. They may have chafed at his adamant refusal to humor their pretensions to glory and refused to accept his challenges to the values and practices of their culture.

Marshall notes that Paul does not use “the language of friendship to describe patronal relationships but instead he refers to his patrons as ‘fellow-workers.’” He surmises that those who thought of themselves as his patrons in Corinth probably understood their relationship with Paul in terms of friendship with its incumbent duties and prescribed protocol. He suggests that “it must have been startling for them to be addressed in servile terms.” Paul refers to “positions of leadership or authority as ‘slaves’ and ‘ministers’ instead of using the regular vocabulary of leadership.”<sup>30</sup> He claims Paul does not use the language of friendship because he is conscious of its connotations of status and discrimination

and that he is deliberately countering them by rejecting status as a distinguishing element. . . . I suggest we find in Paul’s writings the idea of unity based on the notions of servitude and subordination to Christ and to each other. Where Paul is in conflict with those of rank and influence, the idea is expressed more sharply, polemically and personally.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> P. Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions and Paul’s Relations to the Corinthians*, WUNT 2/23 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987), 134–35. See E. A. Judge, “St. Paul as Radical Critic of Society,” *Interchange* 16 (1974): 196–97. Marshall points out that Paul refers to himself and to those with whom he works and has a long relationship using servile language or of the household:

- “slaves,” δούλοι (Rom 16:1; 2 Cor 4:5; Gal 1:10; Phil 1:1; 2:22; Col 4:12); “fellow slaves,” σύνδουλοι (Col 1:7; 4:7); “to slave,” δουλέω (1 Cor 9:19)
- “servants,” διάκονοι (1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 6:4; Eph 3:7; 6:21; Col 1:7, 23, 25; 4:7; see 1 Cor 16:15; 2 Cor 6:3)
- “servants,” ὑπηρέται (1 Cor 4:1)
- “yokefellows,” σύζυγοι (Phil 4:3)
- “steward,” οἰκονόμος (1 Cor 4:1, 2; 9:17); “stewardship,” οἰκονομία (Eph 3:1)
- “necessity,” ἀνάγκη (1 Cor 9:16)
- “unwilling [service],” ἄκων (1 Cor 9:17)
- “laborers,” οἱ κοπιῶντες (Rom 16:12; 1 Cor 16:16; 1 Thess 5:12; see Rom 16:6)
- “labor,” κόπος (2 Cor 6:5; 11:23); “toil and moil,” κόπος καὶ μόχθος (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8).

<sup>31</sup> Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth*, 135.

Paul consistently attempts to reverse the honor/shame value system that corrupts the Corinthians' grasp of the gospel so as to root out arrogance and power mongering.

Today we may revere Paul for his determined hard work for the gospel that endured imprisonments, beatings, shipwrecks, poverty, and fatigue to further its spread in the world. These afflictions did not sap his love for God or his commitment to the cause of Christ. Instead, they only whetted his zeal to do more. Some Corinthians did not share the same appreciation of his selfless suffering. To them Paul cut a shabby figure. Religion, in their mind, is supposed to lift people up, not weigh them down with suffering. They may well have asked how someone so frail, so afflicted, so stumbling in his speech and visibly afflicted with a thorn in the flesh could be a sufficient agent to represent the power of God's glorious gospel. Paul writes an impressive letter, but his physical presence is disappointingly unimpressive. He is too reticent to boast and to act forcefully. His refusal to accept their financial support and demeaning of himself as a poor laborer reflected badly on them. Such unconventional behavior betrays a lack of dignity appropriate for an apostle. He insists, however, that his refusal to accept their support does not mean that he does not love them or that he intends to slight them in some way. Nevertheless, his practice has become a sore spot. His sardonic riposte, "Or did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge?" (11:7) and "Forgive me for this wrong!" (12:13) reflects the tension. Paul's catalog of hardships in 6:8–10 may sum up the Corinthians' complaints about him:

Through glory and dishonor, through slander and good report; regarded as deceivers, yet true; as unknown, yet recognized; as dying, yet see—we live; as being disciplined, yet not killed; as grieving, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet enriching many; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

The Corinthian situation caused Paul intense worry, distress, and frustration. Some Corinthians were primed to accept readily boastful rivals. A less persistent minister might think it prudent to compromise to avoid any further rancor or to concede defeat and wash his hands of the Corinthians completely. Why keep up the battle? Why keep defending yourself against personal insults and slander? In a litigious American culture, many might be tempted to sue the slanderers

for defamation of character. In the biblical context Paul in effect does bring a lawsuit against them before God. The letter is about Paul's ministry, which the Corinthians fail to understand (not about the legitimacy of his apostleship, which is not in question). They understand him only in part (1:14) because they still evaluate things from the perspective of the flesh.

Paul defends his ministry. More importantly, he clarifies the implications of the gospel that they have failed to grasp. He hopes that on reading this letter they not only will become proud of him again (5:12) but that they will revive their interest in the ministry for the poor in Jerusalem, contribute generously, and understand the countercultural nature of the gospel. The Corinthians' disenchantment with Paul stems from their failure to understand this basic paradox that expresses the heart of the gospel of the cross that he has preached to them. If they cannot understand and appreciate his cross-centered life and ministry as demonstrated by weakness and suffering, how can they understand the cross and the weakness and suffering of Christ and apply it to their own lives? Paul tries to show them that God's power exhibits itself in his ministry "in the same way in which it was expressed in Jesus: in cross-shaped humility."<sup>32</sup> The world, especially the world of first-century Corinth, abominates this humility and ridicules it because it so threatens its own self-seeking outlook. His argument throughout the letter is that "only in cruciform sufferings like his" can the Lord "perform his powerful work, introducing glory into an age of darkness, salvation into a world of despair, a new age with the old life and power to more and more people."<sup>33</sup> Those who cannot see God's glory in the cross of Christ because they are blinded by the wisdom of this world will hardly see it in Christ's suffering apostle. If they do see it, however, they will see how exceedingly glorious Paul's ministry is. This letter is not just a personal defense; it is a restatement of the basic doctrine of the cross that Paul preached to them (1 Cor 2:2).

## 5 THE UNITY OF 2 CORINTHIANS

In 1776 the German scholar Johann Salomo Semler first conjectured that 2 Corinthians was composed of different fragments of letters that Paul wrote to Corinth and challenged "the final perfection of

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<sup>32</sup> Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 189.

<sup>33</sup> Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 189.

Scripture” as we have it in the canon.<sup>34</sup> Although no textual evidence exists for 2 Corinthians being anything but a unity, his work opened a floodgate of speculation about the integrity of 2 Corinthians.<sup>35</sup> Scholars have since raised questions about whether 2:14–7:3 (7:4) was originally connected to 1:1–2:13, whether 6:14–7:1 is an interpolation from another letter, whether chaps. 8 and 9 are of a piece and fit in the epistle, and whether chaps. 10–13 belong as part of chaps. 1–7 (8–9). Commentators on 2 Corinthians can no longer assume the unity of the letter but must wrestle with the various arguments that it is a mosaic of different letters joined together.

1. Some argue that 1:1–2:13 and 7:5–16 form a separate letter of reconciliation. As proof, Weiss claims that “2:13 and 7:5 fit onto each other as neatly as the broken piece of a ring.”<sup>36</sup> Murphy-O’Connor summarizes the argument: “Since 7.5 appears to be the logical continuation of 2.13, there must be a break between 7.4 and 7.5.” He concludes: “Just to state the argument in this way explains why it fails to convince; the reasoning is entirely subjective.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> J. S. Semler, *Paraphrasis II. epistulae ad Corinthos. Accessit Latina Vetus translatio et lectionum varietas* (Halle-Magdeburg: C. H. Hemmerde, 1776). His conclusions were advanced by A. Hausrath, *Der Vier-Capitel-Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* (Heidelberg: Bassermann, 1870); and J. H. Kennedy, *The Second and Third Epistles of St. Paul to the Corinthians: With Some Proofs of Their Independence and Mutual Relation* (London: Methuen, 1900). In commentaries on the epistle, A. Halmel, *Der zweite Korintherbrief des Apostels Paulus: geschichtliche und literarkritische Untersuchungen* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1904) detected three letters: Letter A (1:1–2; 1:8–2:13; 7:5–8:24; 13:13); Letter B (10:1–13:10); Letter C (1:3–7; 2:14–7:4; 9:1–15; 13:11–12). More recently, C. J. Roetzel, *2 Corinthians*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), identifies five letters: a letter of appeal for the offering (8:1–24); Paul’s first letter defending his ministry (2:14–7:4); a second letter of defense, “the letter of tears” (10:1–13:10); a reconciling letter (1:1–2:13; 7:5–16; 13:11–13); and a letter to churches in Achaia initiating the offering campaign (9:1–15).

<sup>35</sup> For a history of partitioning theories, see R. Bieringer, “Teilungshypothesen zum 2. Korintherbrief. Ein Forschungsüberblick,” in *Studies on 2 Corinthians*, ed. R. Bieringer and J. Lambrecht, BETL 112 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 67–105; and I. Vegge, *2 Corinthians—a Letter about Reconciliation: A Psychagogical, Epistolographical Rhetorical Analysis*, WUNT 2/239 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 7–37.

<sup>36</sup> J. Weiss, *The History of Primitive Christianity*, ed. F. C. Grant (New York: Wilson-Erickson, 1937), 1:349. Dieter Georgi claimed: “The seams in 2:13–14 and 7:4–5 are the best examples in the entire New Testament of one fragment secondarily inserted into another text. The splits are so basic, and the connections so obvious, that the burden of proof now lies with those who defend the integrity of the canonical text” (*The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986], 335). See also A. Loisy, “Les épîtres de Paul,” *Revue d’histoire et de littérature religieuse* 7 (1921): 213; and L. L. Welborn, “Like Broken Pieces of a Ring: 2 Cor 1:1–2:13; 7:5–16 and Ancient Theories of Literary Unity,” *NTS* 42 (1996): 559–84.

<sup>37</sup> J. Murphy-O’Connor, “Paul and Macedonia: The Connection between 2 Corinthians 2.13 and 2.14,” *JSNT* 25 (1985): 99. F. W. Hughes claims to find an exordium (1:1–11), partitio

Not only is the reasoning fallaciously subjective, but 2:13 and 7:5 do not splice together seamlessly. In 2:12–13 we have the first-person singular. In 7:5 we have the first-person plural. The passage in 2:12–13 refers to Paul's spirit having no rest. In 7:5 it refers to his flesh having no rest. Furthermore, a close connection can also be discerned between 7:4 and 7:5. Barnett claims that 7:4 serves as an "overlap verse" that provides a bridge from one section to the remainder of the letter.<sup>38</sup> Thrall disdains the argument from some that a redactor composed 7:4 to achieve a smooth transition from one letter to another as "a counsel of desperation."<sup>39</sup> The supposed editor has only deleted sections and not created bridging passages elsewhere. Why would he do it only here? The argument is circular. When a smoother transition appears between hypothetically joined letters, the hand of a redactor is cited as the explanation. If the transition is not smooth, it is taken as evidence that a redactor has joined two separate letters.

Clear connections do emerge between 1:15–2:12 and 7:4–16. Paul is restless in Troas (2:12–13) and restless in Macedonia (7:5). He leaves for Macedonia to look for Titus (2:12–13), and when in Macedonia, he experiences more afflictions yet also receives comfort from Titus's safe return and good report. But these connections are not evidence of a splice. Instead, they point to Paul's familiar A B A' construction in his letters. The reference to the painful letter and the dispatch of Titus in 1:15–2:13 and his return with a report of the letter's effect in 7:4–16 brackets the discussion of the grounds for his frank criticism in 2:14–7:3. Otherwise, 2:14–7:3 becomes a kind of orphan as an independent letter. What was its purpose? Why would a redactor insert it between two parts of the so-called letter of reconciliation? Failure to offer reasonable answers to such questions should make such speculative partition theories suspect.<sup>40</sup>

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(1:12–14), narratio and probatio (1:15–2:13; 7:5–13a), peroratio (7:13b–16) and exhortation (8:1–24) making 1:1–2:23 and 7:5–8:24 a deliberative letter ("The Rhetoric of Reconciliation: 2 Corinthians 1.1–2.13 and 7.5–8.24," in *Persuasive Artistry: Studies in New Testament Rhetoric in Honor of George A. Kennedy*, ed. D. F. Watson, JSNTSup 50 [Sheffield: JSOT, 1991], 246–61). The identification of rhetorical phenomena in the text is purely subjective and open to different verdicts.

<sup>38</sup> P. Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 362–63, 365.

<sup>39</sup> See M. Thrall, "A Second Thanksgiving Period in II Corinthians," *JSNT* 16 (1982): 109–10.

<sup>40</sup> Possibly in the exchange of letters among the churches, only the most important parts were copied and kept together. Would Paul have authorized the circulation of bowdlerized versions of his letters? In Col 4:16 he expects that they will read the entire letters and not some mutation.