

# TYNDALE NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 8

TNTC

2 CORINTHIANS

To my mother  
Dorothy Isobel Kruse  
and to the memory of my father  
Peter William Kruse

# TYNDALE NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 8

GENERAL EDITOR: LEON MORRIS

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## 2 CORINTHIANS

AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY

COLIN G. KRUSE



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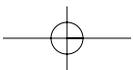
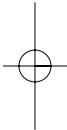
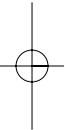
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## GENERAL PREFACE

The original Tyndale Commentaries aimed at providing help for the general reader of the Bible. They concentrated on the meaning of the text without going into scholarly technicalities. They sought to avoid ‘the extremes of being unduly technical or unhelpfully brief’. Most who have used the books agree that there has been a fair measure of success in reaching that aim.

Times, however, change. A series that has served so well for so long is perhaps not quite as relevant as when it was first launched. New knowledge has come to light. The discussion of critical questions has moved on. Bible-reading habits have changed. When the original series was commenced it could be presumed that most readers used the Authorized Version and comments were made accordingly, but this situation no longer obtains.

The decision to revise and update the whole series was not reached lightly, but in the end it was thought that this is what is required in the present situation. There are new needs, and they will be better served by new books or by a thorough updating of the old books. The aims of the original series remain. The new commentaries are neither minuscule nor unduly long. They are exegetical rather than homiletic. They do not discuss all the critical questions, but none is written without an awareness of the problems that engage the attention of New Testament scholars. Where it is felt that formal consideration should be given to such questions, they are discussed in the Introduction and sometimes in Additional notes.

But the main thrust of these commentaries is not critical. These books are written to help the non-technical reader understand his Bible better. They do not presume a knowledge of Greek, and all Greek words discussed are transliterated; but the authors have the Greek text before them and their comments are made on the basis of the originals. The authors are free to choose their own modern translation, but are asked to bear in mind the variety of translations in current use.

The new series of Tyndale Commentaries goes forth, as the former series did, in the hope that God will graciously use these books to help the general reader to understand as fully and clearly as possible the meaning of the New Testament.

Leon Morris

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

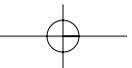
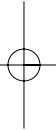
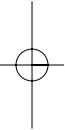
I want to express my thanks to the Inter-Varsity Press and the General Editor of the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries for their invitation to contribute this book to the revised series. I hope it will prove to be a worthy successor to the commentary of the late Professor R. V. G. Tasker which it replaces.

The major part of the work on this book was carried out during my sabbatical leave in 1985. I wish to record my thanks to the Council of Ridley College for leave granted to carry through this project, and also to the St Augustine's Foundation, Canterbury, for financial assistance to help cover the extra costs of living and studying abroad. I am grateful to Dr Murray Harris, the Warden of Tyndale House, Cambridge, and to other researchers who were working there during the latter part of 1985, for their friendship and encouragement. Also I want to thank my three sons who carried on alone at home while their father, mother and sister were in Canterbury, and especially I want to thank my wife for taking on the full responsibility for our family during the two months I spent in Cambridge.

This book is dedicated to my mother and to the memory of my father, in recognition of all that I owe them both.

It is my hope and prayer that this modest work will assist Christian people to better understand Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians and, in so doing, help them to appreciate more the incredible grace of the God whom he served.

Colin G. Kruse



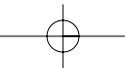
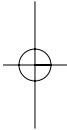
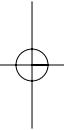
## CHIEF ABBREVIATIONS

Standard abbreviations, including those for journal titles, follow the scheme set out in the *New Bible Dictionary* (²1982), pp. x–xiii.

- Allo E. B. Allo, *Saint Paul: seconde épître aux Corinthiens*, Etudes bibliques (Gabalda, ²1956).
- Alford H. Alford, *The Greek New Testament*, 2 (Longmans, Green and Co., 71895).
- AV Authorized (King James’) Version, 1611.
- BAGD W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, translated and adapted by W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich; second edition revised and augmented by F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker (University of Chicago Press, 1979).
- Barrett C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (A. and C. Black, 1968 and 1973).
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- Bruce F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, New Century Bible (MMS, 1971).
- Bultmann R. Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, ET by R. A. Harrisville (Augsburg, 1985).
- Calvin John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and*

- Philemon*, ET by T. A. Smail (St Andrew Press, 1964).
- Chrysostom John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church 12 (Eerdmans, 1969).
- Denney J. Denney, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The Expositor's Bible (Hodder & Stoughton, 1894).
- ET English translation.
- Furnish V. P. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, Anchor Bible 32a (Doubleday, 1984).
- GNB Good News Bible (Today's English Version): Old Testament, 1976; New Testament, 1976.
- Harris M. J. Harris, '2 Corinthians', *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* 10, ed. F. E. Gaebelin (Zondervan, 1976), pp. 299–406.
- Héring J. Héring, *The Second Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, ET by A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock (Epworth, 1967).
- Hughes P. E. Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New London Commentary (MMS, 1962).
- JB The Jerusalem Bible, 1966.
- Kümmel W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, ET by H. C. Kee (SCM, 1975).
- Lietzmann H. Lietzmann, *An die Korinther I/II*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 9, augmented by W. G. Kümmel J. C. Mohr, 1969).
- LSJ *A Greek-English Lexicon*, compiled by H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, new edition revised by H. S. Jones and R. Mackenzie (Oxford, 1940).
- Martin R. P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary 40 (Word Books, 1986).
- MM J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1914–1929).
- Murphy-O'Connor J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Text and Archaeology* (Michael Glazier, 1983).
- NEB The New English Bible: Old Testament, 1970; New Testament, 1970.

- NIV The New International Version: Old Testament, 1978; New Testament, <sup>2</sup>1978.
- Plummer A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, International Critical Commentary 47 (T. & T. Clark, 1915).
- RSV Revised Standard Version: Old Testament, 1952; New Testament, <sup>2</sup>1971.
- RV The Revised Version, 1884.
- Schmithals W. Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians*, ET by J. E. Steely (Abingdon, 1971).
- Strachan R. H. Strachan, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, Moffatt New Testament Commentary (Hodder & Stoughton, 1935).
- Str-B [H. L. Strack and] P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 6 vols. (Beck, 1922–1956).
- Tasker R. V. G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 8 (Tyndale, 1958).
- TDNT* G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ET by G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Eerdmans, 1964–1976).
- Wendland H. D. Wendland, *Die Briefe an die Korinther*, Das Neue Testament Deutsch 7 (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965).
- Weiss J. Weiss, *Earliest Christianity: A History of the Period AD 30–150*, 2 vols. (Harper & Row, 1959).



## INTRODUCTION

### **1. The city of Corinth**

The ancient city of Corinth lay upon the narrow isthmus connecting the Peloponnesus with the Greek mainland. Situated about three and a half miles south-west of present-day Corinth, the ancient city was built on a trapezium-shaped terrace at the foot of a large rocky hill known as Acrocorinth. This hill rises to a height of 1,886 feet above sea-level and dominates the surrounding landscape.

The isthmus upon which Corinth was built separates the waters of the Gulf of Corinth in the north-west from those of the Saronic Gulf in the south-east. On the north-western side of the isthmus, bordering the Gulf of Corinth, was the port-city of Lechaem, and on the south-eastern side, bordering the Saronic Gulf, lay the port of Cenchreae (the port used by Paul when travelling to or from Corinth by ship, cf. Acts 18:18). The overland journey between the two ports was approximately ten miles, while the journey by sea around the southern tip of the Peloponnesus (Cape

Maleae) was about two hundred miles. The Cape Maleae region was notorious for its violent storms and treacherous currents, so that ancient mariners used to quote the proverb, recorded for us by Strabo: 'But when you double Maleae, forget your home'. Instead of undertaking the dangerous journey around Cape Maleae, ancient sea captains would unload their cargo on one side of the isthmus and have it transported overland to the other. If the ship was not too large it could then be strapped on to a wheeled vehicle and hauled across the narrowest part of the isthmus on a stone-paved road known as the Diolkos (from the verb *dielko*, 'to haul across'). The captain would then reload the cargo and continue on his journey.

Because of the danger of the voyage around Cape Maleae, and because of the expense of off-loading and reloading cargo and hauling ships across, plans were made from as early as the time of Periander (d. c. 586 BC) to cut a channel through the isthmus. A serious attempt to do this was begun by the Emperor Nero in AD 67 but was discontinued when he died. Work on the canal was only resumed in 1887 and completed in 1893.

Ancient Corinth, then, lay at the crossroads of two important trade routes. The first was the route via the isthmus between Attica and the Peloponnesus; the second was the route across the isthmus between Lechaem and Cenchreae. Ships from the western end of the Mediterranean filled the harbour in Lechaem, while those from Asia and the eastern end of the Mediterranean streamed into the port of Cenchreae. Corinth, being so strategically located, grew wealthy on the taxes levied on the movement of goods which it supervised and controlled.

However, ancient Corinth was renowned not only for its commercial importance, but also because it was responsible for the organization of the biennial Isthmian Games which attracted many visitors to the area. In addition to this, Corinth had gained a certain notoriety because of its worship of Aphrodite. A temple for Aphrodite stood on the highest point of Acrocorinth, the hill at whose foot the city was located. Strabo tells us that so wealthy was the cult of Aphrodite that it boasted a thousand courtesans dedicated to the goddess. Many sea captains, he says, squandered their money paying for the services of these cult prostitutes, so that the

proverb, 'Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth', was in use among them.<sup>1</sup>

In 146 BC the city was overrun by the Romans under the leadership of Leucius Mummius. He had the city razed to the ground. Many of its treasures were carried away to Rome or destroyed. The inhabitants, the old Corinthians, were either killed or sold into slavery. The city lay in ruins and was uninhabited for more than a hundred years until 44 BC, when Julius Caesar ordered that it be rebuilt and freedmen were sent to occupy it.

Pausanias, writing about AD 174, said that 'Corinth is no longer inhabited by any of the old Corinthians, but by colonists sent out by the Romans.' The Corinth of Paul's day should not be envisaged as a Greek city, rather as a Roman colony, probably quite cosmopolitan in character. Even if the original freedmen sent in by Rome were Italians, we must allow that, by Paul's time, the location of Corinth and the opportunities to prosper as a result of the control of the trade routes would have attracted many others of different nationalities to the new city. We know that among these was a community of Jews. Their existence in Corinth, attested by Philo (*Embassy to Gaius*, 281), is confirmed by the discovery of a stone bearing the clear remains of an inscription, '[syn]agogue of Hebr[ews]'. This is usually dated from the period of the later occupation (between 100 BC and AD 200)<sup>2</sup> and may have served as the lintel over the entrance to the Jewish synagogue in Corinth where, according to Acts 18:4, Paul preached on first arriving in Corinth.

From Pausanias' description it is clear that the new Corinth became a centre for the worship of many of the old Graeco-Roman

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1. Strabo (c. 63 BC – c. AD 22) completed his *Geography* c. 7 BC and included in this work a description of early Corinth as it was before its destruction in 146 BC. Recently some questions have been raised concerning the accuracy of his statements about cult-prostitution, cf. H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Fortress, 1975), p. 12; Murphy-O'Connor, pp. 55–56.
  2. It is impossible to ascribe an exact date to the inscription, but it does confirm that fairly early on the Jewish community had a meeting-place in Corinth. Cf. Murphy-O'Connor, pp. 78–79; Barrett, p. 2.

gods. He refers to temples or altars dedicated to Poseidon, Palaemon, Aphrodite, Artemis, Dionysus, Helius, Hermes, Apollo, Zeus, Isis, Eros and others. Strabo records that in his time there was a small temple to Aphrodite on the summit of Acrocorinth, while by the time Pausanias wrote the ascent to Acrocorinth was punctuated by places of worship dedicated to various deities including Isis, Helius, Demeter and Pelagian. On the summit there was still found the temple of Aphrodite with images of Helius, Eros and Aphrodite herself.

Clearly, then, the new Corinth of Paul's day was still a centre for the worship of Aphrodite, as the old city had been prior to its destruction in 146 BC. But it is a mistake to apply to it Strabo's description of the worship of Aphrodite with its thousand cult-prostitutes which relates to the Corinth of the earlier period. We should think of Corinth in Paul's day as similar to any other cosmopolitan Roman trade centre, no worse and no better.

There is no doubt that Corinth was regaining its wealth and prestige in Paul's time. It was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. Responsibility for the organization of the Isthmian Games (which had been assumed by the city of Sicyon when Corinth was destroyed in 146 BC) was restored to Corinth when the city was rebuilt in 44 BC by Julius Caesar. By the second century AD Corinth was probably the leading city in Greece.

Another matter of interest related to Paul's contacts with Corinth is the discovery during excavations of the remains of a large speaker's platform or rostrum. This is believed to be the tribunal (*bēma*) at which Paul was arraigned before Gallio (Acts 18:12–17). It was built around AD 44 from blue and white marble and consisted of a high, broad rectangular platform, originally carrying a superstructure and provided with benches at the back and along the two sides. However, in more recent times the identification of this structure with the tribunal at which Paul was arraigned before Gallio has been questioned. It is argued that the *bēma* was reserved for major official occasions, and that minor matters, such as the Jewish complaints against Paul, were more likely to have been heard in one of the basilicas which were used for administrative purposes. No matter at which exact spot Paul was arraigned, the whole episode seems to have provided him with the imagery for his statement in

2 Corinthians 5:10 that ‘we must all appear before the judgment seat (*ton bēmatos*) of Christ’.

About five hundred yards north of the centre of ancient Corinth the remains of a shrine of Asklepios have been excavated. Asklepios, according to Greek mythology, was the son of the god Apollo and a human mother. He became a renowned healer. Shrines to this divine healer were to be found in many places, including Rome, Pergamum, Cyrene, Athens and Corinth. Cures were effected when, after bathing in the sea, the patients underwent token ablutions at the shrine, and then made offerings of honey cakes at the altar. Further ablutions followed before the patients entered the main hall of the shrine, where they were urged to sleep. While they slept the god would appear to them in a dream and practise his medical art upon them. When they woke worshippers found themselves cured. Votive thank offerings in the form of life-size terracotta models of the patients’ affected parts were then presented to the god at the shrine. Many such terracotta models have been found at the Asklepieion in Corinth (e.g. hands, feet, legs, arms, eyes, ears, breasts, genitals), and are on display in a special room at the museum at ancient Corinth.<sup>3</sup>

If such cures were being claimed in the shrine of Asklepios in ancient Corinth, we can appreciate the Corinthians’ tendency to be greatly impressed by anyone who came to them claiming to be able to perform cures. Paul’s opponents in Corinth claimed such powers and implied that Paul was lacking in this area. In response the apostle had to remind his readers that ‘The signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works’ (2 Cor. 12:12).

In 1858 the city of Corinth was destroyed by a major earthquake; as a result, the site at the foot of Acrocorinth was abandoned and the modern city built about three and a half miles to the north-east.

## 2. Paul and the Corinthians

Paul’s relationship with the Corinthian Christians, which stretched

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3. M. Lang, *Cure and Cult in Ancient Corinth: A Guide to the Asklepieion* (American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1977).

over a period of several years (c. AD 50–57), was a very complex affair. The apostle made three visits to Corinth. Emissaries of Paul made visits to Corinth, and members of the Corinthian congregation visited Paul when he was ministering in Ephesus. In addition, Paul sent several letters to the Corinthians during this period, and received at least one from them.

Due to the fragmentary nature of the information available to us, it is very difficult to reconstruct the details of the historical relationship between Paul and the Corinthians with any degree of certainty. Both our primary sources (extant letters of Paul) and the major secondary document (the Acts of the Apostles) provide only partial information. To add to the difficulty, our main primary sources (1 and 2 Corinthians) present us with some puzzling literary problems which need to be resolved before a compelling historical reconstruction can be made, but the literary problems themselves can be resolved properly only by recourse to an adequate historical reconstruction.

In order to provide a framework for understanding 2 Corinthians, a suggested reconstruction of the sequence of events in Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church is provided below. This reconstruction assumes certain decisions regarding the literary and historical problems involved. However, in the interests of a clear statement of the suggested sequence of events, the discussion of these critical issues is omitted from the reconstruction, and taken up later (see pp. 27–54), where reasons for the decisions taken are provided.

#### ***a. Paul's first contact with Corinth***

According to the Acts of the Apostles, Paul's first visit to Corinth was made in the last phase of his second missionary journey. After leaving Athens he came to Corinth, where he met up with a Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla, recently arrived in the city after being evicted from Rome. They, along with all other Jews, had been commanded to leave the imperial city under an edict of Claudius (generally believed to have been promulgated in AD 49). Paul plied the same trade of tentmaking (or leatherworking) as this couple, so he worked with them during the week, and every sabbath argued and persuaded Jews and Greeks in the synagogue (Acts 18:1–4).

After some time the Jews in Corinth rejected Paul's message, opposed and reviled him. Paul thereupon turned his full attention to the Gentiles of the city, many of whom believed and were baptized. The apostle apparently felt vulnerable and afraid, for we are told, "The Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you; for I have many people in this city." Following this he stayed eighteen months longer, teaching in Corinth (Acts 18:9–11).

Eventually the Jews did mount an attack against Paul and brought him before the tribunal (*bēma*), to Gallio the proconsul of Achaia, accusing him of teaching people to worship God in ways contrary to the law. But Gallio drove the Jews from his tribunal, refusing to judge in matters related to Jewish law. Paul continued to minister in Corinth for 'many days longer', then set sail for Syria, thus concluding his first visit to Corinth. He called in at Ephesus on the way and spoke in the synagogue there, but declined a request to stay longer, promising to return if God willed (Acts 18:19–21). When he arrived back in Syria his second missionary journey had been completed.

### ***b. Contacts with Corinth during the Ephesian ministry***

After spending some time in (Syrian) Antioch, Paul began his third missionary journey, travelling 'from place to place through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples' (Acts 18:23). Paul then made his way across to Ephesus, arriving just after Apollos, an outstanding Alexandrian Jew, had crossed from there to Corinth (Acts 18:24–19:1).

When Paul arrived in Ephesus he entered the synagogue and 'spoke boldly, arguing and pleading about the kingdom of God' (Acts 19:8). Once again he was opposed by Jews and so withdrew from them, taking the disciples with him. Then for two years he argued daily in the hall of Tyrannus and 'all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks' (Acts 19:10). During this time extraordinary miracles were wrought through Paul (healings and exorcisms), leading to many conversions and a mass burning of magical books. These conversions disturbed the guild of silversmiths in Ephesus who earned their living making shrines of

Artemis, the god of the Ephesians; and led by one Demetrius they precipitated a great riot (Acts 19:8–41). Paul's ministry in Ephesus, then, was marked by great success and much opposition. It was during this tumultuous period that many of Paul's contacts with the Corinthian church which form the historical background to 2 Corinthians took place. The various contacts during this period are listed below.

*i. Paul's 'previous' letter*

We learn of a letter sent by Paul to the Corinthians in which he urged them 'not to associate with immoral men'. What Paul wrote in this letter was misunderstood by the Corinthians to mean that they should cut themselves off from social contact with the non-Christian world (1 Cor. 5:9).

*ii. Visitors from Corinth*

While at Ephesus, Paul was visited by Stephanus, Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:15–18), and also by those referred to as 'Chloe's people', who reported to Paul the quarrelling and division which had occurred in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 1:11–12).

*iii. The Corinthians' letter to Paul*

Also during his Ephesian ministry, Paul received a letter, sent by the Corinthians themselves, which raised a number of issues about which they sought advice (marriage, 1 Cor. 7:1, 25; food offered to idols, 1 Cor. 8:1; spiritual gifts, 1 Cor. 12:1; the collection, 1 Cor. 16:1, 12).

*iv. Tension between Paul and the Corinthians*

A close reading of 1 Corinthians reveals that the acute tension in the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians which is reflected in 2 Corinthians 10–13 was already beginning to mount during the early stages of Paul's Ephesian ministry. Hints of this are found throughout 1 Corinthians. Three statements will serve as examples: 'Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power' (1 Cor. 4:18–19); 'This is my defence to those who would examine me. Do we not have the

right to our food and drink?’ (1 Cor. 9:3–4); ‘If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. If any one does not recognise this, he is not recognised’ (1 Cor. 14:37–38).

*v. The writing of 1 Corinthians*

It was, then, to clarify the intention of his ‘previous’ letter, to respond to news brought by (Stephanus and) Chloe’s people, to answer the enquiries made in the Corinthians’ letter, and to head off some emerging criticisms of his own person and ministry that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians during his time in Ephesus. He took the opportunity also to give instructions about the ‘contribution for the saints’ (a collection that was being taken up among the Gentile congregations to assist poor Christians in Jerusalem), and to advise the Corinthians of his intended visit. Paul planned to travel via Macedonia to Corinth, and after spending some considerable time there, to journey on to Jerusalem, accompanying the bearers of the collection, if that seemed desirable (1 Cor. 16:1–9; cf. Acts 19:21–22).

*vi. Timothy’s visit to Corinth*

Paul sent Timothy to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10–11), though we have no explicit information concerning what transpired when he was there. However, it is clear that Paul eagerly awaited his return (1 Cor. 16:11). By the time Paul began writing 2 Corinthians, Timothy had already returned (2 Cor. 1:1) and the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians had passed through a very difficult period.

*vii. Paul’s ‘painful’ visit*

Apparently when Timothy arrived back in Ephesus he brought disturbing news of the state of affairs in Corinth. This made Paul change the plans for travel he had outlined in 1 Corinthians 16:5–9. Instead of journeying through Macedonia to Corinth and then on to Jerusalem, he sailed directly across to Corinth. It was now his intention, after visiting the church there, to journey north into Macedonia and then return again to Corinth on his way to Jerusalem. By so doing he hoped to give the Corinthians ‘a double pleasure’ (2 Cor. 1:15–16). However, when Paul arrived in Corinth from Ephesus he found himself the object of a hurtful attack (2 Cor. 2:5; 7:12)

made by an individual, while no attempt was made by the congregation as a whole to support Paul (2 Cor. 2:3). It proved to be a very painful visit, and one which the apostle did not wish to repeat. Once again he changed his travel plans; instead of returning to Corinth after the projected journey into Macedonia, he made his way straight back to Ephesus (2 Cor. 1:23; 2:1).

#### *viii. Paul's 'severe' letter*

Once back in Ephesus, Paul wrote his so-called 'severe' letter to the Corinthians. This letter is probably no longer extant, though some have suggested that it is preserved in whole or in part in 2 Corinthians 10–13 (see pp. 29–31). It called upon the Corinthian church to take action against the one who had caused Paul such hurt, and so to demonstrate their innocence in the matter and their affection for Paul (2 Cor. 2:3–4; 7:8, 12). It is not clear who carried the 'severe' letter to Corinth. It may have been Titus. In any case it was from Titus, returning from a visit to Corinth, that Paul expected news of the Corinthians' response to this letter. Paul was apparently fairly confident of a positive response. He expressed his confidence in them to Titus before the latter left for Corinth (2 Cor. 7:14–16), and may have even asked Titus to take up with the Corinthians the matter of the collection (2 Cor. 8:6). Plans had been made for the two to meet in Troas. So Paul left Ephesus and made his way to Troas. He found there a wide-open door for evangelism, but because Titus had not yet come, and because he was so anxious to meet him, he left Troas and crossed over into Macedonia hoping to intercept him on his way through that province to Troas (2 Cor. 2:12–13).

#### *c. Contacts with Corinth while in Macedonia*

When Paul reached Macedonia he found himself embroiled in the bitter persecution which the churches of Macedonia themselves were experiencing (2 Cor. 7:5; 8:1–2) and this only compounded his anxiety.

#### *i. Titus' arrival in Macedonia and Paul's letter of relief*

When Titus finally arrived, Paul found great consolation (2 Cor. 7:6–7), the more so when he heard from him of the Corinthians' zeal to demonstrate their affection and loyalty to their apostle by punishing

the one who had caused him such hurt. Paul responded to this good news by writing another letter, 2 Corinthians 1 – 9 (see pp. 31–35). He said how glad he was that their response to the ‘severe’ letter and Titus’ visit had justified his pride in them, especially seeing that he had boasted about them to Titus before sending him to Corinth (7:4, 14, 16). He also went to great lengths to explain the changes to his travel plans (1:15 – 2:1) and why, and in what frame of mind, he had written them previously such a ‘severe’ letter (2:3–4; 7:8–12). Although Paul was overjoyed because the Corinthians had acted so vigorously to clear themselves, nevertheless he urged them now to forgive and restore the one who had caused the pain, ‘to keep Satan from gaining the advantage’ (2:5–11).

This letter of relief deals with two other subjects at some length. First, there is a long explanation of the way in which Paul’s apostolic ministry was upheld and empowered in the midst of the many afflictions and anxieties which he experienced both in Asia (Ephesus) and in Macedonia (1:3–11; 2:12 – 7:4). Second, we find detailed instructions and exhortations about the contribution for the saints (2 Cor. 8 – 9). The Corinthians had made a beginning ‘a year ago’ (8:10) when they wrote to Paul, and he had replied giving basic directions about this matter (1 Cor. 16:1–4). In fact Paul had actually boasted to the Macedonians about the Corinthians’ readiness to contribute to the collection, and was now becoming anxious lest they fail to vindicate his boasting (9:1–4).

### *ii. Titus returns to Corinth*

Paul wanted to ensure that neither he nor the Corinthians would be embarrassed because of their unreadiness in the matter of the collection. So he sent Titus and two others to Corinth to make sure certain matters were finalized before Paul himself arrived, possibly accompanied by some of the very Macedonians to whom he had boasted of the Corinthians’ readiness (8:16 – 9:5).

However, when Titus and the others arrived in Corinth they found a situation which had seriously deteriorated. Men whom Paul called ‘false apostles’ were levelling all sorts of accusations against Paul and his emissaries. Apparently the Corinthian church had been deeply influenced by these men, had accepted their ‘gospel’ (11:1–4) and submitted to their overbearing demands (11:16–20). Titus

brought back news of the terrible situation in Corinth to Paul, who was still in Macedonia.

*iii. Paul's final letter to Corinth*

In response to this major crisis situation, Paul wrote his most severe and apparently final letter to the Corinthians, our 2 Corinthians 10 – 13 (see pp. 35–36). It was written to answer the accusations of the 'false apostles' and to dispel the suspicions they had raised in the minds of the Corinthians. It reads like a last desperate attempt to bring the church to its senses, to secure again their pure devotion to Christ and to revive once more their loyalty to their spiritual father. In it Paul warns them of his planned third visit when he would demonstrate his authority, if need be, though clearly he hoped the Corinthians' response to this final letter would make that unnecessary (12:14; 13:1–4, 10).

*d. Paul's third visit to Corinth*

According to Acts 20:2–3, Paul did travel to Greece after the time in Macedonia, and spent three months there. We may assume that at this time he made his promised third visit to Corinth. Apparently, either as a result of his letter or because of his own coming to Corinth for the third time, the problems in the Corinthian church were settled for the time being. This can be inferred from Paul's letter to the Romans, which was written from Corinth during these three months. In that letter he wrote: 'At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem with aid for the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem' (Rom. 15:25–26). If the Achaians (who must for the most part have consisted of the Corinthians) had now contributed to the collection, obviously their misgivings reflected in 2 Corinthians 11:7–11 and 12:13–18 had been overcome. And if Paul spent three months in Greece, in a frame of mind which allowed him to write Romans, then the situation in Corinth must have improved markedly.

It would be gratifying to be able to say that after all these things the Corinthian church went from strength to strength. Unfortunately this was not the case. Evidence from the First Epistle of Clement (written c. AD 95) indicates that disharmony had become a problem once more.

### 3. Literary problems

At the beginning of the preceding section, in which an attempt was made to reconstruct the course of Paul's relationship with the Corinthians, it was noted that such an enterprise can be carried out only when certain decisions about literary problems have been taken. Clearly, then, the reconstruction offered above rests on certain assumptions concerning the literary make-up of 1 and 2 Corinthians. It is now time to state those assumptions and give reasons why they have been made, for they not only underline the historical reconstruction of events suggested above, but also influence the commentary provided below.

#### *a. Paul's Corinthian correspondence: how many letters?*

One of the most perplexing problems related to Paul's relationship with the Corinthians concerns the number of letters he wrote and whether or not all those letters have been preserved (in whole or in part). Views vary widely. The viewpoint underlying the reconstruction of events adopted in this commentary is that Paul wrote five letters to the church in Corinth. The first was the 'previous' letter (now lost) mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9, then followed our 1 Corinthians. The third was the 'severe' letter spoken of in 2 Corinthians 2:3–4; 7:8, 12, while the fourth letter was our 2 Corinthians 1–9. The fifth and final letter is that preserved substantially in 2 Corinthians 10–13.<sup>4</sup>

However, there are a number of other views. Some argue that there were only three letters: the 'previous' letter (now lost), then 1 Corinthians (which is to be identified as the 'severe' letter of 2 Cor. 2:3–4; 7:8, 12) and finally 2 Corinthians.<sup>5</sup> Others assume four letters

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4. There appears to be an emerging consensus of opinion in support of this view among more recent commentators. Cf. e.g. Bruce, pp. 23–25; 164–170; Barrett, pp. 3–11; Furnish, pp. 26–46; Martin, p. xl.
  5. Cf. Allo, pp. lii–liii; Lietzmann, pp. 139–140; Tasker, pp. 30–35; Hughes, pp. xxiii–xxv; Kümmel, pp. 287–293; W. H. Bates, 'The Integrity of II Corinthians', *NTS* 12 (1965–66), pp. 56–59; A. M. G. Stephenson, 'A Defence of the Integrity of 2 Corinthians', *The Authorship and Integrity of the New Testament* (SPCK, 1965), pp. 82–97.