
§1 Opening (2 Cor. 1:1–2)

In an ancient letter, the purpose of an opening, or prescript, is to establish a relationship between the sender and the addressees. Accordingly, in 2 Corinthians Paul and Timothy are named as the senders of the letter; “the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia” represents the recipients; and “grace and peace” is the expression of greeting and good will. Paul deviates somewhat from the established form by adding details about the senders, and by using the word “peace” in a new sense. The prescript here intends to establish Paul’s position of apostolic authority over the Corinthians. In a situation in which the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians is strained to the limit, and Paul’s apostleship has been called into question, the prescript thus becomes an important first step in Paul’s defense.

1:1 / **Paul** introduces himself, according to his regular practice, as an **apostle**, i.e., one who has seen the resurrected Lord and has been commissioned by him to preach the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8–11; Gal. 1:12, 15–16; Rom. 1:1–5). First Corinthians begins in much the same way: “Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God” (1:1). Nevertheless, when Paul states in 2 Corinthians 1:1 that he is an apostle **by the will of God**, the statement takes on special significance in view of the polemical situation that has developed in Corinth since the writing of 1 Corinthians, for, after the arrival of the opponents in Corinth, the legitimacy of Paul’s apostleship itself was called into question within the church. Therefore, Paul wants to stress from the beginning that he does not write as a private person who happened to choose a ministerial “profession,” but rather in his official capacity as an apostle, a position to which God himself has appointed Paul. This shows that the apostle does not speak or act in his own authority, but in the commission and authority of the one who sent him. We may compare Korah’s rebellion, in which the sending of

Moses was called into question, and Moses had to defend it (cf. Num. 16:28; see further on 2 Cor. 1:24; 2:6–7, 15).

In Galatians 1:15–16, Paul describes his call to apostleship as a sovereign act of God’s grace (cf. 1 Cor. 15:9–10; Rom. 12:3; 15:15–16), predestined even before Paul was born. The resurrected Lord appeared to Paul on his way to Damascus, and Paul instantly became a servant of Jesus Christ. In the Corinthian correspondence, Paul bases his apostolic authority on having seen the resurrected Lord, who was revealed to him by God (cf. 1 Cor. 9:1–2; 2 Cor. 4:5–6). Therefore, the prescript of 2 Corinthians cuts to the heart of the controversy over the legitimacy of Paul’s apostleship and prepares the way for his defense in the rest of the letter. Here he implies what he later explicitly states, i.e., that his opponents are not bona fide apostles, but rather “pseudo-apostles,” “deceitful workmen,” and “servants of Satan” (2 Cor. 11:13–15).

Paul names **Timothy** as the co-sender of the letter, which may at first seem surprising. Why would the apostle include Timothy, if he himself is the sole author of the letter, and if much of 2 Corinthians amounts to a defense of Paul’s own apostolic authority? First of all, Timothy was present when the apostle founded the church at Corinth (cf. 2 Cor. 1:19). In a situation that now calls the apostle’s authority into question, Paul subtly wants to remind the Corinthians that he was the one who founded the church at Corinth, a point that he repeats many times in the letter (e.g., 2 Cor. 3:3; 6:13; 12:14). Second, Timothy had recently visited the church at Corinth on Paul’s behalf (cf. 1 Cor. 16:10). Third, Timothy represents a united front with Paul against the prevailing situation at Corinth. If Paul faces attack from a multiplicity of opponents in Corinth, as well as the disaffection of the Corinthians, then it only makes sense to show that he does not stand alone in his position. Furthermore, by generously mentioning Timothy as the co-sender of the letter, Paul is able demonstrate his solidarity with his faithful coworker.

Timothy was a native of Lystra in Lycaonia, the son of a mixed marriage, since his mother was Jewish and his father Greek (Acts 16:1). He was brought up in the Jewish faith but was not circumcised in infancy. During Barnabas’s and Paul’s first visit to his home town (Acts 14:8–20), he became a believer (cf. 16:1). When Paul passed that way again a year or two later, he became better acquainted with Timothy, who was highly regarded by the believers in Lystra and Iconium (cf. Acts 16:2). He decided

to enlist Timothy as an associate in his apostolic ministry but circumcised him first as a practical matter in order to make his dealings with Jews easier (cf. Acts 16:3). Timothy proved himself to be a devoted servant with Paul in the work of the gospel and thus earned the apostle's deepest admiration and affection (cf. Phil. 2:20–22). He was entrusted with important missions, such as those to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:2) and Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17). When Paul was setting out on his last journey to Jerusalem, Timothy was in the party (Acts 20:4), and he was at his side during his Roman imprisonment. Indeed, Paul drew special comfort from his presence and planned to send him on a mission to the Philippian church (Phil. 2:19–24).

Paul calls Timothy **our brother**. There are two possible ways to interpret this expression. On the one hand, the first person plural (**our**) may include the Corinthians with Paul as brothers of Timothy. As adopted sons of God (cf. Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15), believers are united as “brothers” in Christ, who is the Son of God and “firstborn” brother into whose image all believers will be transformed at the Parousia (cf. Rom. 8:23, 29; 2 Cor. 3:18). In that case, Paul uses the reference to Timothy to point to the unique bond of kinship that all believers share. Despite the disaffection of the Corinthians from their founding apostle, Paul stresses that they remain brothers in Christ with himself and Timothy (cf. 2 Cor. 1:8). On the other hand, the “our” may refer to Paul alone, for he commonly uses the so-called apostolic (or literary) plural to refer to himself alone, especially in 2 Corinthians (see, e.g., 1:3–4; 5:18–21). In that case, Paul may be emphasizing a special sense of brotherhood that exists between Timothy and himself. Insofar as Paul sees himself as a Moses figure who is embroiled in a Korah-like rebellion in Corinth (see on 1:24; 2:6–7, 15, etc.), Paul may view Timothy as an Aaron figure (cf. 1:19; see also 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10–11; Phil. 1:1; 2:19–24; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 3:2, 6; Phlm. 1; 1 and 2 Timothy, esp. 2 Tim. 3:8–9). Aaron was Moses’ “brother” (cf. Exod. 4:14; 6:20; 28:1; Num. 26:59; 27:12–13; Deut. 32:50; 1 Chron. 6:3; 23:13). The phrase “Paul and Timothy,” which occurs often in Paul’s letters (cf. 2 Cor. 1:19; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; Phlm. 1:1), may imitate the word pair “Moses and Aaron,” which occurs over sixty-five times in the OT.

With the mention of the addressees of the letter, we catch a glimpse of how Paul envisions his missionary enterprise geographically and ethnographically. **Corinth** is the capital of the Roman province of **Achaia** and also the place where Paul gained

his first converts in Achaia (cf. 1 Cor. 16:15; 1:16). As we discussed in the Introduction, Paul, the “apostle to the nations” (Rom. 11:13), thinks in terms of the original nations, which, from a contemporary Jewish perspective, are approximately coextensive with the current Roman provinces. Once he has evangelized a representative number of people in a particular locality, Paul’s job as evangelist is over, and he is eager to proceed to unreached territories (cf. Rom. 15:19–20, 23). He expects the gospel to radiate out from the established center(s) to the rest of the nation/province. Hence, although 2 Corinthians is particularly relevant to the church at Corinth, Paul addresses the letter also to the rest of the nation/province in which Corinth is included. In the apostle’s endeavor to reach Spain with the gospel (cf. Rom. 15:24, 28), Corinth occupies a strategic position about halfway to the goal (see further on 2 Cor. 10:13–16; also Rom. 15:19).

By referring to the Corinthians as **the church of God**, Paul draws a direct comparison between his apostleship and the church at Corinth as works of God, for just as Paul is an apostle “by the will of God” (cf. v. 1), so also the church that he founded through God’s competence (cf. 3:1–6) is “the church of God.” In this way, the prescript doubly puts the Corinthians under the authority of God. Paul presents himself as God’s apostle addressing God’s church, for, as he goes on to say later in the letter, God makes his appeal to the world through him (5:20). Paul and his message are integrally linked; to reject one is to reject the other.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that, as **saints** (*hagioi*, lit., “holy ones”), they are the people of God called to be separate from the world and separated unto God. The OT roots of *hagios* lie in such passages as Exodus 19:3–6; 29:45; Leviticus 11:44–45; 19:2; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19; 28:9. As 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 makes clear, Isaiah 52:11 (“Therefore come out from [them] and be separate”) is especially significant in this regard. The reality of the Corinthians’ faith is demonstrated in their putting into practice the implications of the new covenant situation, which includes personal “sanctification” (*hagiōsynē*, 2 Cor. 7:1) and, in the current situation, separating themselves from the false apostles (cf. 5:12; 6:14–16; Num. 16:26). If the Corinthians are truly the holy people of God, then their faith will manifest itself in obedience from the heart to the Pauline gospel. If not, then the warnings of judgment found in 13:1–10 will come upon them. Ultimately, it is allegiance to Paul himself that

will determine whether the Corinthians' faith is genuine or not (cf. 6:1; 13:5).

1:2 / After establishing his authority over the Corinthian church, Paul greets the Corinthians in a rather formulaic manner adapted from the ancient oriental letter form. He uses exactly the same greeting in other letters (cf. 1 Cor. 1:3; Rom. 1:7); therefore, we should probably not read too much into the wording for the particular situation in Corinth. In one brief wish of **grace and peace**, Paul is able not only to demonstrate his goodwill toward the Corinthians but also to capture the essence of the gospel and its effect. At the beginning of the greeting, Paul innovatively uses the term "grace," one of the fundamental tenets of his theology, which summarizes the whole salvific act of God accomplished in Christ for believers. Yet, as Paul warns in 2 Corinthians 6:1, the Corinthians are in danger of forfeiting the grace of God because of their stance toward him as their founding apostle.

Peace here refers not merely to inner contentment and serenity, but rather to wholeness and well-being that encompass the whole person, the whole household, or even the whole nation. In the OT, it is considered a gift of God (cf. Lev. 26:6; 1 Kgs. 2:33; Pss. 29:11; 85:8; Isa. 26:12).

Both grace and peace come from **God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. As we shall see, one of the central features of Paul's theology is the concept that God and Christ act together (cf., e.g., 2 Cor. 5:19). God has exalted the crucified and resurrected Christ to his right hand (cf. 1 Cor. 15:25; Rom. 8:34) and given him the name that is above every name (Phil. 2:9). Hence, both God and Christ are now co-occupants of the divine throne and perform activities either together or interchangeably (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10). God is the Father not only of the Son but also of all believers in Christ (see above on "our brother" in v. 1).

Additional Notes §1

1:1 / Ancient epistolography is a subject on which much has been written in recent times. See the overview of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greco-Roman letters in *ABD* vol. 4, pp. 282–93; also James M. Lindenberg, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994).

Elsewhere, too, Paul introduces himself as an **apostle** (cf. Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Eph. 1:1). This is his regular practice, although he sometimes deviates from it (cf. Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon). On Paul's use of the term, see P. W. Barnett, "Apostle," *DPL*, pp. 45–51. Strangely enough, this is the only occasion in the entire letter when Paul refers to himself as "apostle" (cf., however, 12:12), even though much of the letter is concerned with defending his apostolic claim and authority. Otherwise, he attributes the term only ironically or polemically to his opponents (cf. 11:5, 13; 12:11).

By characterizing himself as an apostle of **Christ Jesus**, Paul evidently emphasizes his position of service under the messianic kingship of Jesus, as the forward position of the term "Christ" possibly shows (cf. Martin Hengel, "'Christos' in Paul," in *Between Jesus and Paul* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], pp. 65–77). In 2 Cor. 5:20, the apostle calls himself an ambassador for Christ.

When Paul considers himself called to be an apostle by the **will of God**, he seems to have the concept of the OT prophet in mind. Like a true prophet, Paul did not have anything to do with his commission; this was the sovereign will of God, foreordained before Paul's birth (Gal. 1:15; cf. Isa. 49:1; Jer. 1:5). According to Paul's own testimony, he was pressed into service by divine necessity (1 Cor. 9:16).

On **the church of God** in Paul, see further Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, vol. 1, pp. 89–93.

If we are correct that Paul portrays his opponents in Corinth as rebels like Korah and his followers, who challenged Moses' authority in the wilderness (Num. 16–17; see, e.g., on 2 Cor. 1:24; 2:6–7), then Paul's use of **saints** (*hagioi*) may have special significance in this polemical situation, for Korah revolted against Moses' authority on the ground that the whole congregation were *hagioi* (Num. 16:3; cf. Exod. 19:6).

By the time of the writing of the Corinthian correspondence, **Achaia** had converts not only in Corinth, but also in Cenchræ (Rom. 16:1) and Athens (Acts 17:34).

1:2 / In Ezekiel, to which Paul alludes several times in 2 Corinthians (cf. 3:3; 6:16), the eternal "covenant of peace" is a future blessing that involves the reestablishment of the relationship between God and his people, the restoration of the Davidic kingship, and the reinstatement of God's sanctuary among them (cf. Ezek. 34:25; 37:26). This is precisely what 2 Cor. 6:16–18 has in view (cf. also 3:1ff. on the restoration of God's glory among his people)! Furthermore, 2 Cor. 5:18–19 envisions peace or reconciliation for the whole world.