

SESSION 4: APOSTLE AND SAINTS

2 Corinthians 1:1-2

April 13, 2025

PREFACE

Read 2 Corinthians 1:1-2.

v1

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

When I wrote my thoughts recently to our brother in Missouri about his present situation, I made clear that I was doing so simply as an unqualified observer. That is, at the beginning of my message I made it clear that my opinion carried little inherent weight.

Paul, the writer of Second Corinthians, does just the opposite. In his greeting he addresses the Corinthians with *impeccable* qualifications—as authoritative as one could get in that time and place. He is “an apostle of Christ Jesus,” not by his own acclimation, but *God’s* acclimation: by “the will of God.” In the greeting in Paul’s first letter to Corinth he emphasizes this further by identifying himself as one “*called* as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.”

This is especially important in this moment with the Corinth church. We have no evidence that the Corinthians questioned his claim to apostleship—as did the Galatians—but they also were not obeying his counsel. In stressing his calling “by the will of God” (as he did in 1 Corinthians 1:1) his claim is that he speaks on God’s authority. If they reject him, they are rejecting God’s word. Along with this, the evidence *does* seem to reveal that in Corinth at this time were so-called apostolic pretenders to which the church was listening.

So what was the accepted definition of an apostle? “Apostles were those eyewitnesses of the crucified and risen Lord who had been called by Jesus Himself to proclamation and witness” (Seifrid). Saul’s “Damascus Road” visitation by Jesus fits this requirement.

Read Acts 9:3-6.

This was followed by more-explicit instructions given through Ananias.

Read Acts 9:15-16.

Even so, Paul held this office with humility, as he explained to the Corinthians in his first letter:

After that, He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, and not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. (1 Corinthians 15:7-10)

Yet Paul will not argue against the pretenders in Corinth on the basis of their claim of being apostles like him, but on the basis of their erroneous *teaching*. “For Paul, apostolic calling expresses itself in fidelity to the gospel” (Seifrid).

For this reason—because of the situation in the Corinth church, and the purpose of this letter to defend his *authentic* ministry against the *inauthentic* ministry of the false apostles—Paul makes a point here of using the full address: “Christ Jesus.” Now, there can be a number of reasons for using just “Jesus” or just “Christ”—or no good reason at all but for writing style. But Paul may have a specific reason here, because the Corinthians were giving ear to “apostles” preaching a different Christ—a different messiah. This is a way for him to emphasize to the church that he teaches and he speaks for the authentic, true Messiah: Christ *Jesus*, the one who was crucified.

...and Timothy our brother,

One more note regarding Paul’s choice of words in his salutation. Turn please to an earlier letter, First Thessalonians.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1.

Here Paul more casually lumps himself together with Sylvanus and Timothy, implying they share the same level of ministry. Look at 2:5-6, where Paul even refers to the three as “apostles.”

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:5-6.

Now, however, Paul has reason to differentiate himself from Timothy. This, of course, is not a demotion for his faithful disciple; throughout his correspondence Paul uses the “apostle” term in a variety of ways, some more formal than others. But to the church in Corinth he must intentionally, formally apply the term only to himself, while affectionately referring to Timothy as “our brother”—which also associates him with the church, which by now knows him well. I take it that this does not designate Timothy as co-author of the letter; he is just with Paul during its writing. 📧

It is possible Timothy acted as his amanuensis, but we have no evidence for that.

To the church of God which is at Corinth...

Just what was “the church of God...at Corinth”? How would Paul’s first-century audience have interpreted the word “church” (*ekklesia*)? Perhaps the best illustration is to begin with that of our church’s small groups; each of these groups has its own separate location, its own makeup, and its own personality—but each is just a subset of the whole. Then once a week each small group joins with the other small groups to form the assembly of the whole. The first-century believer would read the word “church” as an assembly of the whole—that is, as Paul Barnett puts it, “It is presumed that these Corinthian readers would have understood ‘church’ as meaning the plenary assembly of believers—as opposed to the constituent house meetings—in Corinth.”

with all the saints who are throughout Achaia:

Achaia was the ancient name for Greece—that is, it was the Achaians that settled what would become to be known to the world as “Greece”—and the region would include the whole area south of Macedonia. This, Second Corinthians, is not meant to be a circular letter, passed around from church to church (as was the Galatian letter), so why does Paul make mention of the whole region here? And why did he not in his first letter? I think what David Garland offers as a possibility has merit.

Garland: Paul intends to let the Corinthians know that “they are not the whole church even in Achaia” (Plummer). The Corinthians are given to arrogance and self-sufficiency and may think that the spiritual world revolves around them. An unholy grandiosity may have caused them to look down on neighboring churches in the outlying region. Such an attitude would have been reinforced by the economic and social disparity between the two. Betz writes, “While Achaia as a whole suffered poverty and neglect, Corinth enjoyed prosperity; while Achaia led a quiet life remote from the noise and press of the city and its politics, Corinth teemed with commerce and intrigue. While the Greeks tried as best they could to preserve their traditional culture, the Corinthians indulged new attitudes and ways of life fueled by the new wealth and unbridled by ancestral tradition. Thus, the province and its capital were in many respects worlds apart.”

v2

Paul will have strident, even harsh words for the Corinthians later in this letter, but much of the first chapter is taken up with gracious, “comforting” remarks—unlike the opening of his letter to the Galatians, where immediately after his formal greeting launches brutally into them.

Read Galatians 1:3-8.

The end of the formal salutation, in v2, is identical in both letters (1 and 2 Corinthians), but what follows will be radically different.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace to you and peace...

It is easy to see this as simply boilerplate—I have already pointed out the exact same line in his first letter to the church—and, specifically Paul’s “grace to you and peace” he uses in *all* of his letters, save the so-called pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus. The phrase was used broadly in the early Christian communities, also by Peter and John in their letters.

Yes, we can accurately refer to this as “boilerplate” because of its repeated usage—but this does not render it meaningless pap. Especially for the early church these were meaningful, even precious sentiments.

C. K. Barrett: Grace is the antecedent being and act of God which are the ground of all Christian existence; peace is the outcome of God's redemptive act, the total state of well-being to which men are admitted. When one Christian wishes grace and peace to another he prays that he may apprehend more fully the grace of God in which he already stands, and the peace he already enjoys.

That word "peace" is especially meaningful, on multiple levels. Through the work of Christ Jesus the wall of enmity standing between us and the Father has been broken down.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ... (Romans 5:1)

Those dwelling in Christ know peace with God. But then too, and pertinent especially to the Corinthian Gentiles, in Christ the wall of enmity between Gentile and Jew has been broken down.

Read Ephesians 2:11-14.

We are all one, no matter our lineage and background, in the grace and peace of both Father and Son. We tend to think of "peace" first of all in terms of *feeling*—i.e., we feel peaceful, we are "at peace with our situation," or peace as the absence of human conflict, be it by nations or individuals.

But in God's economy peace is *positional*, and inexorably tied to the individual's *salvation*. We have peace because of Christian *hope*. The Christian's peace is linked to our eternity with Father God and the Son.

...from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Believers of Jewish background would have had to chew on this a bit, for two reasons.

First, it did not come naturally to Jews to refer to Yahweh as "Father." They were comfortable with Him being the Father of their *people*—the Jewish nation (Deuteronomy 32:6), but referring to Yahweh as a *personal* Father was an association new to them.

Second—and even more difficult for them to digest—would be the concept of Jesus being equal to Yahweh. I'm not suggesting that Jewish Christians did not or could not believe this, just that it was a potential stumbling block for them.

Paul here in this phrase shows them as equals—both grace and peace come from each equally—and both collectively.

Modern critics aside, Jesus made it clear more than once that He was not just equal *to* God—He *was* God. Let's close by reading what Christ Jesus had to say about this in John's gospel.

"If you have come to know Me, you will know My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all so long and have you not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves." (John 14:7-11)

The Jewish Christians had some things *they* had to work on, that they had to work over in their minds to believe. Yes, they believed, but they had to work on those. Gentiles too, just as us today; there are some aspects of Christ that we have to chew on a little bit. Jesus said, *I and the Father are One. He is in Me and I in Him. He works through Me and I work in Him. I don't say anything that He doesn't say.*

And so we say, *OK, which is it? Are You God, or are You just equal to God?* All of the above, and that's hard for us to grasp in our minds. It's one of those things that we will never fully realize—until we see our Lord face-to-face.