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BY DALE “GENO” ROBINSON

PAUL WROTE SECOND CORINTHIANS to mend spiritual fences and restore relationship with the believers at Corinth. He wanted them to reconcile to himself, to one another, and to God. Reconciliation is the beating-heart of this epistle (2 Cor. 5:16–6:2).¹ Second Corinthians would be a dead husk without Paul’s powerful rallying cry and command of “Be reconciled to God” (5:20). Reconciliation had to become reality as the church shared the gospel, souls were saved, and lives were changed.

Paul used a unique Greek word-family which we translate as “reconciled” or “reconciliation.” Originally these rare New Testament words referred to banking and money changing. Money used to pay the temple tax in Jerusalem could be paid only in a particular coinage. Roman money had to be exchanged for that currency. One kind of currency had to be “reconciled”

with another. Each currency had a relative value when compared to another one, so the values had to be reconciled for fairness.²

Paul amplified the idea of reconciliation. He declared that God was both its initiator (through the Person and work of Christ) and its object. He called individuals to “be reconciled to God.” Because believers have experienced reconciliation, God calls them (us) to be ministers of reconciliation (vv. 16–21). Paul had specific reasons for this call for reconciliation.

First, Corinth was a wicked, corrupt center of paganism and sexual perversion. The name of the city became a by-word in the Greco-Roman world for lust and sin. “‘To act like a Corinthian’ meant to practice fornication and ‘a Corinthian girl’ described a prostitute.”³

Paul first collected converts in Corinth around AD 50. He taught them right doctrine and right conduct. They soon discovered the difficulty immature

believers had when trying to act like mature ones. It was doubly difficult since they came from the then corrupt Corinthian culture. Paul instructed them, reprimanded them, and verbally challenged them. Paul's pure motives notwithstanding, his words led to disruption of his fellowship with them. He loved this church at Corinth, but it proved to be a difficult child.

Over the years this church endured internal dissensions and external threats. It experienced the moral failures of some of its members, corporate greed, factions, and wardrobe failures. The new believers there were baby Christians, still easily influenced by their extreme culture and slick-worded false apostles (10:1–12:13). One sees the reason, then, that Paul had to spend excessive amounts of time and energy teaching and disciplining the new Christians there.

Second, their spiritual immaturity led to serious moral and theological failures. We know of at least four pieces of Corinthian disciplinary correspondence that give evidence of these moral and theological failures. Second Corinthians is likely the last of those letters, the written culmination of years of correspondence, visits, and embassies between Paul and the Corinthian

believers. Scripture also speaks of at least four separate points of contact that Paul or one of his associates, Sylvanus (Silas), Timothy, or Titus, made to Corinth (1:19; 8:16–17). He was anticipating a third personal visit (12:14; 13:1).

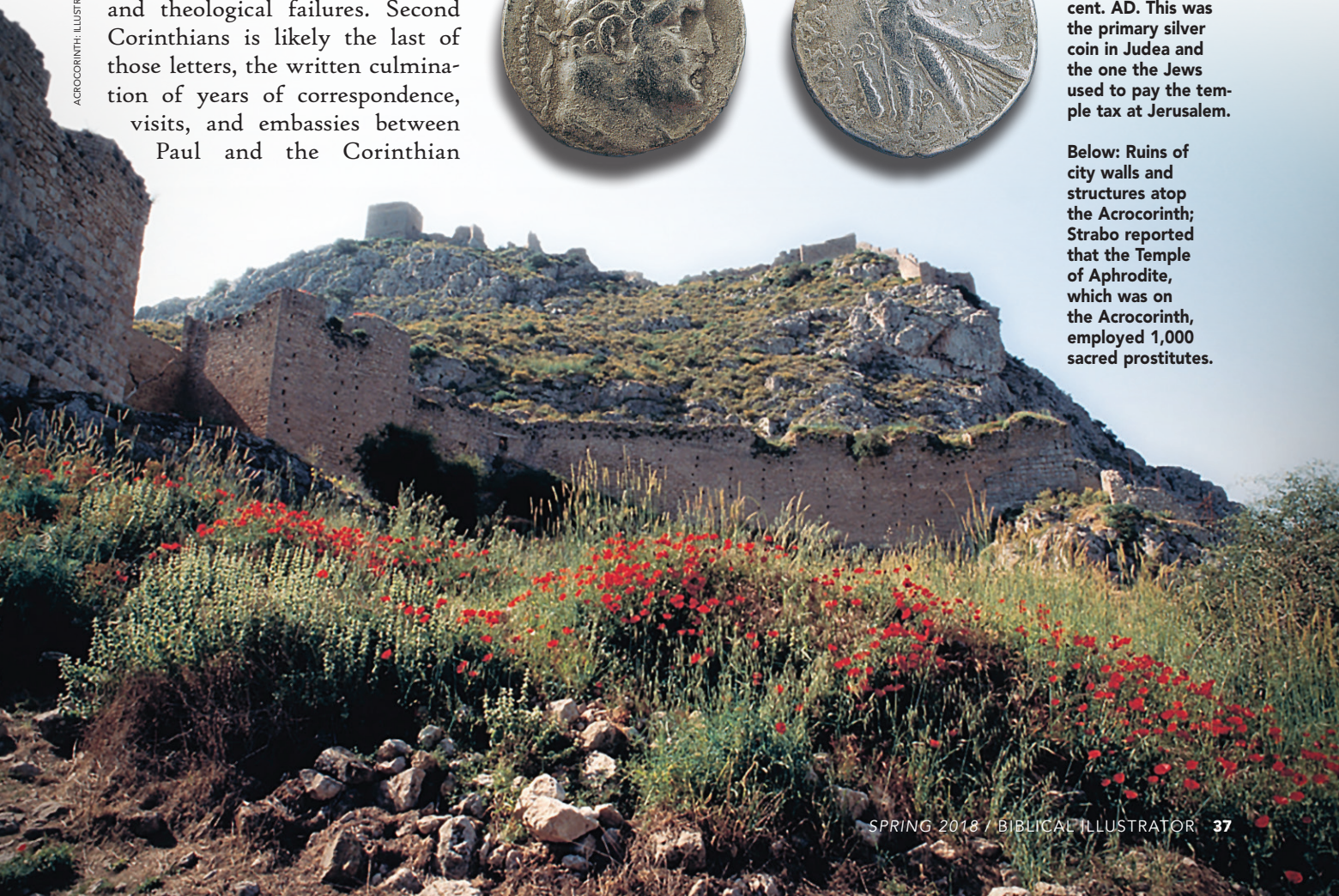
Paul wrote to them to deal with weak doctrine, incorrect religious practice, immorality, and other issues hindering their spiritual growth and witness (12:21). He attempted to provide comfort and moral correction through correspondence and personal visits. More practically, he thanked them for their spiritual growth and improving behavior in the light of the gospel.

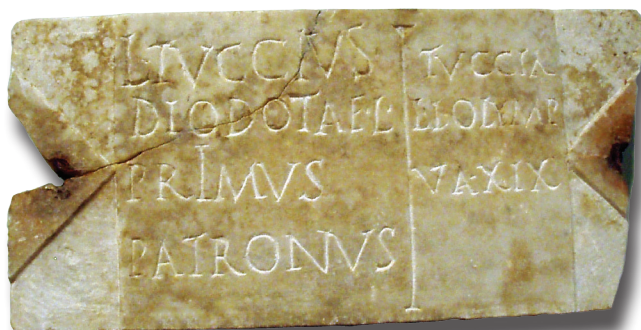
This letter was the attempt of a frazzled pastor to bring his Corinthian flock into the fold. His goal was reconciliation.



Left: Obverse and reverse of a silver Tyrian half shekel dated to the 1st cent. AD. This was the primary silver coin in Judea and the one the Jews used to pay the temple tax at Jerusalem.

Below: Ruins of city walls and structures atop the Acrocorinth; Strabo reported that the Temple of Aphrodite, which was on the Acrocorinth, employed 1,000 sacred prostitutes.





ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BRENT BRUCE/ UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY (32/41/92)

Left: Rectangular funerary inscription; Latin; a rough translation of the separated text says: Lucius Tuccius Primus,

freedman of Diodota (lies here.) The patron (put up this monument) Tuccia Olympias, freedwoman of Lucius (lies here).

She lived 19 years. Part of the imagery of being reconciled to God has to do with being freed from slavery to sin.

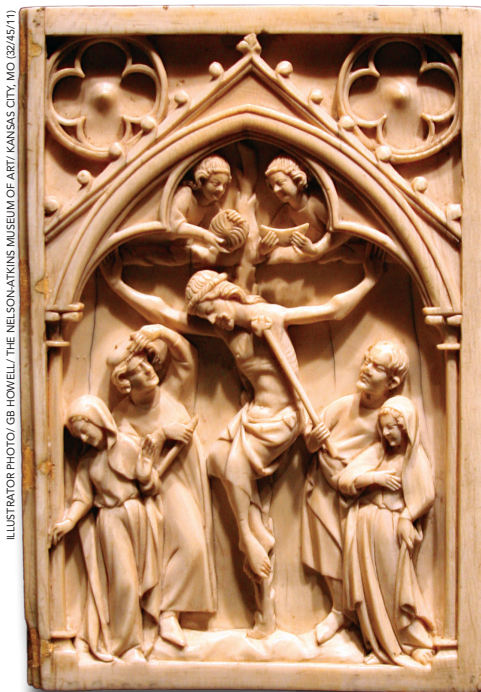
Third, no child likes parental correction. The Corinthians seemingly did not appreciate Paul's advice and correction. The fact they asked for that advice in the first place did not matter (1 Cor. 7:1). Second Corinthians referenced several instances of unpleasant contact between Paul the pastor and his erring Corinthian flock. The same issues expressed in First Corinthians continued throughout Paul's ragged relationship with this church. It occasioned the first letter; the "painful visit" (2 Cor. 2:1); a second letter, now lost, but possibly written before our Second Corinthians; visits from Paul's associates; and a planned, but not desired, quick personal visit sometime in between the correspondence. The situation presented numerous opportunities for hurt feelings, damaged pride, and broken relationships.

Fourth, Paul needed to defend himself and the church from "false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ," claiming to be "super-apostles" (11:5,13; CSB). They were deceivers, intent on leading the Corinthians astray. Paul wanted the church to reject them and send them on their way. Numerous factors caused a breach of relationships. Paul sought reconciliation.

Paul wanted to be on the best of terms with individuals and the entire church when he made his anticipated third visit. He wanted a reconciliation that would produce peace, harmony, and a common sense of purpose. He wanted them to be joyfully generous in sending the benevolence offering to Jerusalem.

Despite its stream-of-consciousness, sometimes prickly style, this epistle's main tone is conciliatory. Its goal is the restoration of relationship.

Paul skillfully used relation-enhancing vocabulary. He invited them to be his prayer partners (1:11). They were the reason for his pride through Christ (v. 14). He called them "Christ's letter," written on "tablets of human hearts" (3:3, CSB). He declared his confidence and pride in them, which gave him a great joy (7:4). He rejoiced that even though his strong words of discipline caused them grief and discomfort,



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ GB HOWELL/ THE NELSON-ATKINS MUSEUM OF ART/ KANSAS CITY, MO (22/45/11)

Left: The 13th and 14th centuries brought an increased demand for objects to adorn private places of worship, such as consecrated chapels in both domestic and public buildings. This intricately carved ivory panel

depicts Christ's crucifixion in a framework of Gothic architectural elements, including trefoil and pointed arches. Finely formed details emphasize the figures' mournful expressions and ornately draped robes.



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ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO (35/89/57)

Lower left: Restoration specialist in Corinth's archaeological museum pieces together pottery fragments.

Above: Ruins at Thagaste (in modern Algeria, north Africa), where Augustine was born in AD 354. The carvings identify this as

a house of prostitution. Because of Corinth's reputation, the phrase "a Corinthian girl" referred to a prostitute.

they also produced grief that led to repentance and salvation (vv. 9-10). He commended and bragged about their generosity and used that generosity as a tool to motivate others to contribute to the offering for Jerusalem (9:1-2).

Scholars have long noticed this letter is stylistically different from Paul's other correspondence. It leaps from subject to subject and mood to mood. Some have suggested the sections speaking to distinct topics are fragments of other correspondence that came to be connected with this letter. A more logical idea is that after Paul composed chapters 1-7 in one setting, he set the letter aside for a while. As he had time and opportunity, Paul wrote diverse topical sections in chapters 8-13. Each section reflected a concern he knew impacted the Corinthians. As God directed his thoughts about that concern, he added it to the letter.

Thus, Paul's words to the Corinthian church seem agitated, yet focused. As evidenced in his words, he was tired of conflict and turmoil. This letter was the attempt of a frazzled pastor to bring his Corinthian flock into the fold. His goal was reconciliation. He wanted to reconcile himself with the Corinthians individually and as a church. He proclaimed the need for them to be reconciled to each other. Most of all, however, at the heart of all his admonitions and this letter was his desire that they be reconciled to God in faith. Then they could proclaim the reconciling gospel to the world! 6

1. Craig L. Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos: An Introduction to Acts Through Revelation* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 211, 218; especially helpful is the diagram of the content of 2 Corinthians 1-7 on page 211.

2. "κατ-αλλάσσω" (katallasso, to reconcile) in Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 333.

3. Helen Doohan, *The Corinthian Correspondence: Ministering in the Best and Worst of Times* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 16; see also Craig L. Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos*, 163-64.

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