

2Cor 2026-09-27a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace & Truth Bible Church. This is the 27th of September, 2026. We begin a new study this morning in the book of 2 Corinthians, Paul's second extant letter to Corinth.

Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and biblical investigation, and we will begin. Father, how grateful we are for your many blessings, the provisions you make for us, both that we realize and comprehend and those that are invisible and nevertheless, guide our steps on a way that is beneficial and pleasing in your sight. We thank you for the opportunity to spend time together looking at the truth of your Word, and we ask your blessing on us as we do so.

We pray that in all things, the Lord Jesus will be glorified, that we will find fruitful truth that will result in application and reflection of your glory. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

There has been a debate about the apostle Paul from the beginning. Does he have actual apostolic authority? He claimed to have met the Lord Jesus on the Damascus road, but is he an apostle or not? This goes all the way back to Paul's lifetime, and it is one of the subjects that is addressed in 2 Corinthians. We saw allusions to this in 1 Corinthians a few years ago when we studied that book in detail. "I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas, I am of Christ." And those who selected one of the other categories or followings found something to fault with the apostle Paul. This is reflected in the book of Acts. It is reflected in Paul's recounting of his meetings with the apostles found in Galatians, other places in Scripture that we will see.

But interestingly, in recent days, whether you look at the last century and a half or the last five to 10 years, there have been challenges all along the way, decade by decade mounting in frequency and intensity to the authorship of the apostle Paul to some of the letters that we find in our New Testament. But this particular letter is considered to be one of the seven that have generally been unchallenged; that is agreed by scholars who as a group have to be evaluated on their own merits. But generally there are those who will agree that 1 and 2 Corinthians are among the seven "undisputed" letters of Paul.

However, in 2 Corinthians Paul talks about the fact that his apostolic authority is being disputed in his own day and addresses it. So it is timely as we look at this letter, its relevance not only in much of its other content, but especially as it addresses the issue of Paul's calling and function as an apostle from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Himself is squarely put before us here.

I wanted to read something that I found smile-inducing in the Bible Knowledge Commentary's introduction to this book. I like to survey both those commentaries that I rely upon for useful insights and those that are somewhere off the reservation in my view. Bible Knowledge Commentary is a product of Dallas Seminary, Dr. Walvoord and others superintended its creation. The articles within it are written mostly by Dallas Seminary professors who were or are there. This is the introduction to 2 Corinthians in the BKC: "Few portions of the New Testament pose as many problems for translators and interpreters as does 2 Corinthians." We're off to a great start. "Few therefore are the

preachers who undertake a systematic exposition of its contents,” which is what we are about to do together. “For those undaunted by its demands, however, an intimate picture of a pastor's heart may be found as the apostle Paul shepherded the wayward Corinthians and revealed a love which comes only from God.”

We are privileged to have this letter before us. I believe as with the other Scriptures, it is genuinely from the heart of the apostle Paul. The pen is another matter as we have seen in studies of other books. The amanuensis or the one who listens to someone expound and puts their thoughts down on paper can vary in terms of their grasp of good Greek, their vocabulary, whether they are thinking in Semitic or Hebrew terms while they are writing Greek so that their Greek can be a bit stilted or follow Hebrew modes of expression. To that extent, letters have been questioned because they don't seem to reflect the style, the vocabulary, the pattern of presentation that are found in other letters that are thought to be genuine. We've addressed this in the past, but the timeliness of this study for us, I think is worth noting.

There have been recent challenges to Paul's usefulness for teaching Christianity. You may not have encountered this. I'm not going to dwell on it to a great extent, but if you do, you will not be surprised, it won't be the first time you've heard about it.

The undisputed letters of Paul are Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. Colossians and 2 Thessalonians are widely disputed and often rejected by “scholars,” critical scholars.

Ephesians and the Pastorals that we recently covered, 1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy, written in that order, are rejected by a substantial majority of historical critical scholars. And you need that adjective, “historical-critical.” This is the viewpoint that dominates New Testament scholarship in universities, in most seminaries, historical-critical. “We are going to look at history. We are going to take a text-critical approach to the book, and we will decide whether or not it is inspired scripture,” or in some cases, just “scripture.”

Even when they say Paul wrote it, there is a widespread disbelief that there is such a thing as inspiration. “This is simply someone trying to start a movement or expand a movement with an agenda,” and God's not a part of the picture in the minds of many of these. So recently, now this is a minority view, but the fact that it got launched and published is significant. A gal named Nina E. Livesey, L-I-V-E-S-E-Y, has published a book just in 2024 called *The Letters of Paul in Their Roman Literary Context, Reassessing Apostolic Authorship*.

She doesn't just sort between which letters are Pauline and which are thought to not be. She says none of them are Paul. Again, a minority view, but published by Cambridge, which is a respectable publishing house. Coming from that source, having been editorially reviewed, it is significant in the scholarly world.

People are taking note of her arguments. She believes that they are instead written under a pseudonym purporting to be Paul, but they are 2nd century, the 100 to 199 timeframe AD, and she compares them with other ancient fictional letter collections and writers such as Seneca and Marcion, Bar-Kokhba Revolt—if you are interested, you could read that.

The fact that this has been broached and taken seriously is of concern. It is pushing the envelope even further to removing the Apostle Paul's writings from serious consideration when understanding the foundations of Christianity. They will use computers to count words and analyze the use of prepositional phrases and other Greek constructions, but this has become to no purpose because there are as many studies that say a book is Paul as it's not Paul, because it depends on your starting point.

What do you consider to be Paul and use as your definition? If you limit what you think Paul is, then you're going to find more things that don't match it. If you accept more of them as authoritatively Pauline, then your statistical counts and your analysis and conclusions change. I just want to give you in broad strokes the state of scholarship. "Scholarship" sounds like it's off in the publishing world. It's not. Scholarship informs professors who teach students who become leaders in churches with their degrees.

So to the extent that someone gets an education, graduate, post-graduate, they will have been influenced, and in many cases convinced, by these scholarly analyses, and from that comes strange doctrine, not the gospel, not the truth. Where does it come from? Why is it influential? These individuals who either teach or have been taught these views then go to YouTube and other venues. They are on Christian television.

And if they don't present the entire scenario, they will reinterpret and draw unstable, unchecked, unbiblical conclusions based on this viewpoint: "When I talk about a topic, I'm only going to look at the words of Jesus because Paul is not reliable. Paul misunderstood or distorted or perverted, changed outright the teachings of Jesus. For our understanding of Christianity, we will use what is called the Jesus hermeneutic."

How does that work? There are a few different ways. And if you expose yourself to things beyond our church—which isn't a bad idea, if you don't have the time or the inclination, God bless you, pray for me. But to be exposed and be able to contend for the faith, if someone who is listening to a different point of view suddenly engages you in conversation because they are family or friend or coworker or fellow student or whatever might bring them into your periphery, to not be surprised and unprepared would be an opportunity to stand for the truth and to reiterate the gospel, which is what the entire New Testament elucidates, foreseen in the Old Testament, brought to light as Paul the apostle reveals the mystery.

What a wonderful study we had in Paul's revelation of the mysteries when we went through our Pastorals study. Let me give you just a few views just for familiarity. You can put things in context that you might run across in Christian conversation.

Number one, there is the position that Jesus is the lens through which all things Christian should be viewed. The primary representative of this is a man named Tony Campolo. You might've heard of him. He's well-known, prominent. And his complaint was that theology, especially in evangelical circles, which is your fundamentalist denominations, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterians, and so on, that evangelical theology has been constructed primarily from Paul and relative neglect of Jesus' teaching.

Jesus ought to be defining Christianity, not Paul. So Jesus is the lens through which Scripture should be interpreted. That's the view.

Traditionally, we understand the Lord Jesus who came at the end of the age of Israel and confronted Israel. He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Jesus did not come to define Christianity. Jesus came to offer the kingdom and present himself as king to Israel to fulfill the Old Testament promises. This is where your dispensational theology is essential to stay on a course that rightly divides the Word of truth. If you believe that Jesus came to invent Christianity, you're going to have problems because the differences between presenting the kingdom to Israel and presenting grace to Gentiles is noticeable.

And to superimpose Jesus on Christianity is just as confusing as trying to superimpose Paul on Judaism or on Old Testament expectation. So Jesus as the lens. And what this means is instead of understanding Jesus who came, and when the kingdom mission was set aside because Israel rejected that opportunity, Jesus then commissions his apostles and sends them, Paul in particular, to present the new and living way, Holy Spirit, Word of God. The law is no longer pertinent as it was for Israel. Now the law is written on the fleshy tables of the heart instead of tables of stone.

We look to the Holy Spirit to guide us rather than the works of the law by which no flesh can be justified. Now this view is, Jesus is the criterion. Nothing passes, nothing counts, nothing should be understood and applied if Jesus doesn't agree, if it isn't something that Jesus formally approves.

So our view, which is the traditional Christian view, is because Jesus commissioned the apostles and gave them authority to give to us inspired New Testament Scripture, that Scripture carries the authority of Jesus himself. This new view is that Jesus is the supreme criterion and Paul, and in some cases the other apostles, are historically conditioned interpreters and they are only authoritative if they faithfully reflect Jesus. If Jesus is kind and indiscriminate to women, and Paul says women can't teach in church, we discard Paul because Jesus never said that, as one example.

That's number one, Jesus is the lens. If it doesn't fit with Jesus, then it doesn't count. It's not Scripture, it's not authoritative for faith and practice.

Number two: this is much more in the deconstructionist realm that we have surveyed from time to time, those who have been put off by traditional Christianity, and they have a case. There is a lot in traditional Christianity that is not biblical and therefore not palatable and needs to be rejected, but there is the baby flying out the window with the bath water in much of deconstruction, reconstruction. If you're deconstructing from "teaching as doctrines the traditions of men" (Matthew 15:9), that's a good thing.

If you are throwing out sound Bible doctrine and fruitful understanding of Scripture as you separate from your traditional Christian experience, that's going to be a problem. "Reject what is evil, keep what is good" (1 Thess 5:21-22). That's a New Testament teaching.

So the deconstructionists say, "Why should Paul overrule Jesus? Paul was never with the Lord Jesus during the time that he trained the Twelve. He didn't accompany Jesus in that ministry. Paul has authority only to the extent that you believe his claim to a revelation on

the Damascus road.” And I could give you the scriptures that are under review for this, but in a nutshell, “Why should the private experience, possibly epileptic fit that Paul had traveling from one town to another, do anything to the witness of the historical Jesus so that we believe Paul and don't just stick with Jesus?”

But we know that this argument isn't actually new. It goes back to Paul's lifetime. You can put these down, 1 Corinthians 9:1, where Paul says, “Am I not an apostle?” There are those who said he wasn't and the Corinthians had heard it.

This will bear on our coverage of 2 Corinthians. Those who are considered to be pillars, the super apostles, 2 Corinthians 11 and 12, we will see this elaborated, comparing Paul to the other apostles. Paul spends two chapters of Galatians defending his apostleship, Galatians 1 and 2. He will do the same in good portions of this upcoming letter of 2 Corinthians.

Questions about his letters. Are they authoritative? Are they right in 2 Corinthians 3? Again, we will soon see it. And accusations about his presentation, his bodily weakness, the strength of his argumentation, his rhetoric in 2 Corinthians 10.

So the modern argument brings back a lot of this. Later Christianity treats Paul's authority as obvious. That's us. But Paul's own letters revealed that even in the first century, there were those who didn't think he was for real. That's the second argument.

The third is Paul never quotes Jesus, is the claim. If he's an apostle, why doesn't he quote Jesus? Paul talks about a lot of things. Here are some of the topics, and you might want to note these down. What are Paul's themes when you look across his letters? The crucifixion of Christ, the resurrection, lordship, Christ is Lord, the “in Christ” topic.

You see this, for example, in Ephesians chapter 1. So far we have the crucifixion, the resurrection, lordship, being in Christ, justification, one of the themes of the book of Romans, the Holy Spirit, central, primary, and ecclesiology. What is the church? How does it function as body of Christ? What is its leadership? And so on.

Saw that in the Pastorals. What Paul does not talk much about, if at all—and this is the complaint—very little about Jesus' ministry, His miracles, His parables. If Paul is an apostle, why isn't he talking more about the historical Jesus, is the argument.

So this becomes formulated, and you will see this if you look around at all. “Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God. Paul proclaimed Jesus.” Jesus proclaimed the kingdom. Paul proclaimed Jesus. Why do you hear so much about the kingdom in modern Christian parlance? Trying to get back to Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom. “We are kingdom people doing kingdom work. Jesus is king.” This emphasis in Christianity is a result of this view. “We need to get away from just talking about Jesus and talk about what Jesus talked about, which was the kingdom.”

You see how your understanding of dispensations helps prevent an erroneous understanding in this area. Jesus did, in fact, proclaim the kingdom of God. That is not Christianity, although it is a part of our understanding and our expectation, but it is not definitional for Christianity. It is one of any number of things that we understand. So in its

strongest form, this idea, “Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God, Paul proclaimed Jesus,” becomes “Paul transformed the religion of Jesus into a religion about Jesus.”

And they want to get back to the former. “Paul transformed the religion of Jesus,” which is kingdom, “to a religion about Jesus,” which is reconciliation, redemption, propitiation, atonement, the Holy Spirit, Christ is head of all things to the body.

All of the wonderful Christology and the church teaching ecclesiology that comes out of that is a mistake because “that's not talking about the kingdom. Got to get back to the kingdom.” If you look at the last few verses of Acts, by the way, Paul did talk about the kingdom. That's just not the only thing he talked about.

So, fourth is what is called the Jesus test, the ethical Jesus, sort of the what-would-Jesus-do idea. Paul is thought to be in conflict with Jesus in these areas: enemies and non-violence, wealth and poverty, hierarchy, women, slavery, sexual ethics, exclusion and inclusion, church discipline, government, law and judgment. That's a pretty wide gap. I'll read them quickly again if you missed any. Enemies and non-violence, wealth and poverty, hierarchy, women, slavery, sexual ethics, exclusion or inclusion, church discipline, government, law and judgment.

This is where our faith gets practiced, in these areas, to a large extent. So if you see some daylight between Paul and the Lord Jesus in these areas, we've got to go with Jesus and Paul is out. That's the view.

So what it boils down to is sort of an interpretive rule when an apparent Pauline teaching seems unlike the character of Jesus or the explicit teaching of Jesus, reinterpret it, regard it as culturally limited, question its authenticity, or reject it. If you're looking at Paul and you can find reason to argue with Paul based on something from Jesus, just your understanding of Jesus' character, the way he treated people, Paul doesn't seem to match that. Well, you throw out Paul, Jesus takes priority.

So an example passage is 1 Timothy 2, verses 11 through 15. And so it can be dismissed in increasing levels of dispute. Number one, 1 Timothy 2:11-15, women should be silent in church basically. It appears contrary to Jesus' treatment of women. That's the first level. “It's probably not Paul anyway, we don't think Paul even wrote the pastoral epistles. Therefore, it's not Christian practice, throw it out.” It becomes a means by which anything you don't particularly like, you can find a reason to pitch it.

Same thing happens with what goes on in households in Ephesians and Colossians, at which, as you know, overlaps substantially. They've traveled in the same pouch or written at the same time. This has led inevitably to an extreme form of rejection of Paul, where Paul is viewed as someone who corrupted Christianity or invented it out of whole cloth and it doesn't have anything to do with Jesus.

So these folks, they are a minority at this point, but they're influential and their ideas creep into more mainstream channels. They believe that Jesus was a Jewish teacher who focused on the kingdom of God, the Torah, ethical transformation, and encouraged imitation and following of his ways. So once again, Jewish emphasis on the kingdom of God and the law,

the proper understanding of the law, ethical transformation, think Sermon on the Mount, and imitation and following.

“If anyone would come after Me, let him take up his cross and follow” (Luke 9:23). Paul is seen to be a contrast in that he has a Gentile emphasis rather than Jewish. His theme is faith in Christ rather than the kingdom of God. His atoning death is central and definitional rather than the ethics of the law. Paul teaches freedom from Torah, freedom from the law. You're not under law, but under grace.

Divine Christology: what will the Word of God and the Spirit of God do within us to give us transformation? “Be transformed by the renewing of your minds” (Romans 12:2), where Jesus is interested in ethical transformation by the principles reflected in Torah. And finally, where Jesus encouraged imitation and following, making disciples, Paul emphasizes, in their minds, ecclesiastical religion. It's related to the church, the group, the body, gifts that benefit the body, interactions with the body, the one another's and so on.

So they think that what happened in history is that Paul's religion about Jesus replaced Jesus' own religion. Paul shifted the emphasis away.

This is background for our study of 2 Corinthians because as new, radical and non-traditional as this sounds, it is as old as resistance to Paul in his own lifetime.

A lot of this is what 2 Corinthians addresses. The cure for these modern and postmodern attacks on the apostle Paul and the inspired Scripture that we have as our guide for faith and practice, the antidote to those attacks comes from Paul himself in both Galatians and in 2 Corinthians. So all of this goes to the purpose of the book.

God has ensured that we have the message, the good news, the *euangelion*, the gospel, through the apostle of the mysteries, the one to whom it was given to reveal these things. You can review that study in our Pastorals trip just shortly, not that long ago. The mysteries, and we will review those next time, were not given by the Lord Jesus, because he wasn't talking about church.

The Lord Jesus was well and truly presenting the kingdom to Israel when it was rejected. When it was rejected, as His final phase He equipped and called and authorized the apostles. Pentecost happens, the Holy Spirit comes, and a new age with a new emphasis and new truth begins.

It isn't in conflict or contradictory with Old Testament truth, but it has a different focus. It has a different purpose, and it speaks of a different people of God. The church is not latter-day Israel. The church is unique. It is a called-out group that belongs explicitly and exclusively to the Lord Jesus. It is not national Israel. It does not fulfill the Old Testament promises to Abraham, or through Moses, or to David. And those covenant promises are fulfilled in the millennial kingdom. They are separate and distinct. They are earthly promises. We are heirs of heavenly promises. We have a new covenant founded on new and better promises, Paul tells us (Hebrews 8:6).

So understanding this misunderstanding is a great foundation for traveling through 2 Corinthians, just as it is for the book of Galatians. This is two sides of the same coin, the

different opponents with different arguments in the two areas. This is not just Corinth, but also all of Achaia, as we will see.

But this lays our setting, our context, the historical and theological context for the content of this book. It is especially interesting when we see how Paul begins the book, and that's what we'll look at when we come back from the break.