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Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians



BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY
NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

**Richard D. Draper
and
Michael D. Rhodes**

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About the Brigham Young University New Testament Commentary Series

Welcome to the BYU New Testament Commentary, a project by a group of Latter-day Saint specialists offering to readers a careful, new look at the biblical records that witness the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and the first generation of his church. The commentary series seeks to make the New Testament more accessible to Latter-day Saint general readers and scholars by employing much of current biblical scholarship while reflecting important LDS insights. At the same time, this effort may also be helpful to interested readers of other faiths who want to learn how a group of Latter-day Saint scholars understands the Bible. A fundamental article of faith for Latter-day Saints (Mormons) affirms the Bible “to be the word of God” while adding, understandably, that it needs to be “translated correctly” in order for it to be accurately comprehensible to modern language speakers.

These objectives have helped shape the purposes and parameters of this commentary series. Serious LDS readers of the Bible search the scriptures, looking for depth and breadth in passages whose meanings and mandates may ultimately be plain but not shallow. Such readers and interpreters are served by treatments that unite faith and research, reason and revelation, in prayerfully confronting profound and difficult issues that arise in the texts and affect one’s path of progression. The New Testament has served as an influential guide to western civilization for centuries. As such, its records have long been studied by lay people and scholars alike, resulting in a rich reservoir of information that illuminates the New Testament era culturally, historically, and linguistically. Selectively, the BYUNTC builds upon this vast body of knowledge, resting on the Greek texts of the New Testament and connecting helpful elements of linguistic, literary, historical, and cultural research and traditional scholarship together with LDS scriptures and doctrinal perspectives. The combination of all these features distinguishes the BYUNTC from other commentaries, which are readily

available elsewhere and which readers may also want to consult for more encyclopedic or specialized discussions.

The tone of the BYUNTC aims to be informative rather than hortatory, and suggestive rather than definitive in its interpretation. The opinions expressed in this series are the views of its contributors and should not necessarily be attributed to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Brigham Young University, where many of those involved here are headquartered; or anyone else, though these works have benefitted from input and guidance from a number of colleagues, advisors, editors, and peer reviewers.

Each volume in this series sets in two parallel columns the King James Version (KJV) and a new working translation of the New Testament. Calling this a new “rendition” clarifies that it does not seek to replace the authorized KJV adopted by the Church of Jesus Christ as its official English text. Rather, it aims to enhance readers’ understanding conceptually and spiritually by rendering the Greek texts into modern English with LDS sensitivities in mind. Comparing and explaining the New Rendition in light of the KJV then serves as one important purpose for each volume’s notes, comments, analyses, and summaries. This effort responds in modest ways to the desire President J. Reuben Clark Jr. expressed in his diary in 1956 that someday “qualified scholars [would provide] . . . a translation of the New Testament that will give us an accurate translation that shall be pregnant with the great principles of the Restored Gospel.”

Depending on their personal skills and interests, the authors of these volumes approach their scholarly sources and LDS materials differently but always with careful exposition and engaging perspectives. In several ways, they employ various interpretive tools, including semantic considerations of Greek vocabulary; cultural, historical, critical, literary, and structural analyses; and intertextual comparisons with other biblical passages, the Book of Mormon, and other scriptural works including the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. Observations are also proffered about the doctrinal and spiritual reception of New Testament teachings and practices in the broad LDS religious tradition.

The format also varies moderately from volume to volume regarding introductory materials and the style of commentary. Throughout, Greek and Hebrew terms appear in transliterated form in conformity with standards adopted by the Society of Biblical Literature. In some cases, a volume reproduces the Greek New Testament text based on the Greek text published by the Society of Biblical Literature (2010) or draws upon the twenty-eighth edition of the Nestle-Aland text in *Novum Testamentum Graece* (2012).

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WHY PAUL POSTPONED HIS VISIT (1:23–24)

In these last two verses of this chapter, Paul clearly picks up his defense and explains precisely why he did not come directly to Corinth from Ephesus. His argument continues through 2:4.

Greek Text

23 Ἐγὼ δὲ μάρτυρα τὸν θεὸν ἐπικαλοῦμαι ἐπὶ τὴν ἐμὴν ψυχὴν, ὅτι φειδόμενος ὑμῶν οὐκέτι ἦλθον εἰς Κόρινθον. 24 οὐχ ὅτι κυριεύομεν ὑμῶν τῆς πίστεως, ἀλλὰ συνεργοὶ ἐσμεν τῆς χαρᾶς ὑμῶν, τῇ γὰρ πίστει ἐστήκατε. [SBLGNT]

King James Version

23 Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth. 24 Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.

New Rendition

23 Now I call upon God as a witness upon my soul that it was to spare you that I did not come again to Corinth. 24 Not that we would lord it over your faith, but rather we are workers with you for your joy, because you stand firm in the faith.

Translation Notes and Comments

1:23 *Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul / Now I call upon God as a witness upon my soul:* Having illustrated his rightness with God as one whom the Father has established for, sealed upon, and guaranteed eternal life, Paul returns to his defense. The verb ἐπικαλέω (*epikaleō*), “to call upon,” carries the nuance of appealing to a higher power to settle an issue (see Acts 25:11–12, 21). Since the ultimate power is that of the Divine, the word carries heavy religious overtones and is thus often found, as here, as a means of invoking an oath.²⁵³ Paul’s invocation shows just how serious he is. The noun μάρτυς (*martyrs*), “witness,” carries legal connotations referring to one who testifies to or affirms the truth of something.²⁵⁴ Since God is all knowing, he is the ultimate witness.

253. BDAG, 373; Paul uses the same language in Rom. 1:9; Philip. 1:8; and 1 Thes. 2:5, 10.

254. BDAG, 619–20.

The pronoun ἐπί (*epi*), “for,” has a wide range of meanings, including making reference in behalf of or against something.²⁵⁵ The noun ψυχή (*psychē*), “soul,” in the present context refers to the very center or essence of a person, the seat of his or her emotions, desires, affections, and aversions.²⁵⁶ Thus, the whole phrase, τὴν ἐμὴν ψυχὴν (*tēn emēn psychēn*), could be rendered as “upon my life” or “against my life.” The nuance is that Paul is willing to put his life on the line to show that he is not lying.²⁵⁷

that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth / that it was to spare you that I did not come again to Corinth: The noun φείδομαι (*phaidomai*), “to spare,” means to save someone from pain or hurt.²⁵⁸ Paul gives this as the main reason why he did not stop at Corinth after leaving Ephesus.

1:24 Not for that we have dominion over your faith, / Not that we would lord it over your faith: The verb κυριεύω (*kyrieuō*), “rule, have dominion, lord over,” denotes the act of exercising authority,²⁵⁹ and though it often refers to rulership and governance, it carries a strong negative nuance that includes ruling harshly as well as exercising unrighteous dominion by the unjust use of power. In this context, it carries the tinge of a showy displaying of airs and the oppressive use of authority, specifically dominance over the faith of the Corinthian Saints.²⁶⁰

but are helpers of your joy / but rather we are workers with you for your joy: The noun συνεργός (*synergos*) pertains to two or more parties working together for a common goal. In that context, it denotes a helper or fellow worker.²⁶¹ The noun χαρά (*chara*), “joy,” refers to what brings sustained pleasure and more specifically rejoicing.²⁶² It suggests a deep-rooted, even rapturous, emotion.

for by faith ye stand / because you stand firm in the faith: The conjunction γάρ (*gar*), “for, because,” in the present context points to the reason why Paul and his companions act toward the Saints the way they do. The verb ἵστημι (*histēmi*), “to stand,” carries the nuance of being firm in one’s

255. BDAG, 366.

256. BDAG, 1098–1100. The word has a wide range of meanings including life itself as well as the immortal portion of a person. In some respects, it is that portion of a person that can be most attuned to the Divine. For a study, see *NID*, 4:725–34.

257. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 121.

258. BDAG, 1051.

259. BDAG, 576; Louw-Nida, §37.50.

260. Barnett, *Second Epistle*, 114–16; Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 122–23.

261. BDAG, 969; Louw-Nida, §42.44.

262. BDAG, 1077; *NID*, 4:644–49.

faith.²⁶³ It is found here in the perfect tense, suggesting that these people were and still are firm in their trust in the Savior. It is for this reason that Paul and his associates can work with them toward the same end—namely, joy. The noun πίστις (*pistis*), in the present context, refers to the whole of the gospel in both principle and doctrine.²⁶⁴

Analysis and Summary

Working to drive home the reason why he changed his travel plans, Paul makes what amounts to a solemn oath invoking God as his witness (1:23). The verb he uses, “to call” (ἐπικαλέω, *epikaleō*), carries strong civil and religious overtones. It connotes calling upon a higher authority to verify a fact or position. Paul’s calling upon God to do so shows his absolute sureness of his position, for as the scriptures make clear, God knows the “reins and the heart” (Jer. 20:12; see also Jer. 17:10 and Rev. 2:13)—that is, everything about the person, including his or her most inner secrets. So certain is Paul of his position that, in taking the oath, he also puts his own life on the line. By means of such a solemn declaration, the Apostle assures his readers of the truthfulness of what he is about to say.²⁶⁵ He likely designed this rather bold act to have a considerable sobering effect upon his target audience.

Having made his declaration, Paul gives the major reason why he adjusted his travel plans (1:23). He had already caused some of these people quite a bit of grief due to both his harsh letter and their initial support of one of his major antagonists. Further, whenever he came, he would have to confront and likely discipline any he felt were out of the correct way.²⁶⁶ He was hoping that by biding his time, he would give them a chance to repent if necessary and determine where they stood in relationship to him. The

263. BDAG, 482–83. The imagery Paul uses looks to both court and the battlefield where both testing and trial take place. Standing means victory while falling means defeat. The verb therefore carries a reminder that the Christians are at war with this world and must not only endure through faith but push forward the cause of Christ. Seifrid, *Second Letter*, 72.

264. Louw-Nida, §§31, 43, 102, 104.

265. Martin, *Second Corinthians*, 171.

266. A mandate set upon the Apostles was to keep the Church in order through Church discipline. For a study, see G. W. H. Lampe, “Church Discipline and the Interpretation of the Epistles to the Corinthians,” in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox*, ed. W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule, and R. R. Niebuhr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 337–61.

question was, then, not one of the purpose or appropriateness of his visit, but of its timing.²⁶⁷ In the next verse he explains further why he changed his itinerary.

Paul's words do raise a question: How can he say that he wants to spare the Saints pain but deny any intent to lord it over them? The answer is likely because what he wants to spare them from is specifically the need for apostolic reproof and correction (13:2), albeit even here he would use "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (10:1–2). His objective is not, however, to dictate, demand, or impose faithfulness and trust in Christ.²⁶⁸ Indeed, Paul fully understands that true faith in the Lord can be neither coerced nor result from fear. "Instead, it has right relationship as its source and 'joy' as its outcome."²⁶⁹ It is the latter to which the Apostle joins with the Saints to produce, for it is the ultimate aim of Christian living.²⁷⁰

In sum, the Apostle wants his readers to encourage and gladden his heart, but that could not happen if Paul's actions among them only resulted in further hurt and alienation. By waiting, he believes they will get their house fully in order such that when he does come, they will all share in a common joy because they now stand firm in the covenant (1:24). In sum, his choice to not visit them "was not an act of refraining from love," of which some may have accused him, "but an act of love."²⁷¹

267. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 121.

268. Barnett, *Second Epistle*, 115–16.

269. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 123.

270. As 2 Ne. 2:25 teaches, the purpose of life is that people might obtain joy. This is a major thrust of the gospel. See Matt. 25:21, 23; John 15:11; 16:24; 17:13; Rom. 14:17; 15:13; 1 Pet. 1:8; 4:13; 1 John 1:4; 2 Ne. 27:30; Alma 33:23; 3 Ne. 28:10; and D&C 11:13; 42:61; 51:19; 70:18.

271. Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 364 with n. 13.

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