The Expectation of Grace:  
Paul on Benefaction and the Corinthians'  
Ingratitude (2 Corinthians 6:1)

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This article contributes to discussions on ancient patron-client relationships with  
a view to God as a benefactor who bestows favors on the early followers of Christ.  
The perspective sheds light on Paul's word to the Corinthians that they should  
not receive God's grace in vain (2 Cor 6:1), a warning that creates tensions for  
interpreters who assume that divine grace is freely given without expecting anything  
in return. This study shows that the system of gift giving and reciprocity, especially in conversation with Seneca, helps alleviate the tensions. It elaborates  
on gratitude as the proper human response to divine gift giving and undesirable  
reprisals as the appropriate consequence for ingratitude.

Key Words: grace, benefaction, reciprocity, gratitude, ingratitude, Seneca,  
2 Corinthians

INTRODUCTION

Paul's letters are typically known for affirming that salvation is an act of  
grace and that grace and righteousness are God's gifts through Jesus Christ  
(e.g., Rom 5:16–17; cf. 3:24–28; 4:2–6; 5:1–2; 8:29–32; Eph 2:8–9; 3:7). Paul  
repeats similar affirmations in 2 Corinthians. Christ's love is demonstrated to  
humanity through his atoning death (2 Cor 5:14), and God has graciously  
taken the initiative to reconcile humans to God's self in Christ (5:18–19).  
The Savior was “made sin” so that humans might become “the righteousness  
of God” (5:21).  

1 The aspects of “sin” and “righteousness” in 5:21 have metonymic force with the abstract  
replacing the concrete. Thus, ἁμαρτία here may stand for “sinner” and δικαιοσύνη for “righteous  
people.” See Jan Lambrecht, “‘Reconcile Yourselves . . .’: A Reading of 2 Corinthians 5,11–21,”  
in Studies on 2 Corinthians (ed. Reimund Bieringer, Jan Lambrecht; BETL 112; Leuven: Leuven  


3 Troels Engberg-Pedersen, “Gift giving and Friendship: Seneca and Paul in Romans 1–8  
rightly disagrees with the validity of this assumption; he traces it back to Immanuel Kant.
The Tension of 2 Corinthians 6:1

Scholars with this assumption, however, face a paradox when reading in 2 Cor 6:1 that Paul implores the Corinthians “not to receive the grace of God in vain” (μὴ εἰς κενὸν τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ δέξασθαι). Here, Paul warns them that they must not place themselves in a position in which God’s gracious activity in their lives becomes ineffective and serves no purpose. The rhetorical situation of 2 Cor 1–7 suggests that they primarily accuse him of being an incompetent minister of God (1:12; 2:16b–17; cf. 10:9–10; 11:6). His sincerity is also called into question because he failed to visit them as promised (1:12, 17–20; 1:23–2:3; 4:2; 7:2). Paul must now defend himself by claiming to be Christ’s ambassador and a co-worker with God (5:20a; 6:1a). He prompts them to recall that God had appointed him as the messenger who first proclaimed the gospel of salvation to them (3:1–3; 6:11–13; 7:2–3; cf. 2 Cor 12:14; 1 Cor 4:14–15).

More specifically, in 6:1 the apostle is warning the Corinthians not that their present condition might show God’s grace was never truly effectual for them in the past but that the grace they presently experience might become ineffectual. We can adduce from various comments Paul makes to them that he considers the Corinthians to be saved and benefitting from this grace already (2 Cor 1:21–24; 5:5; 8:9; 9:14; cf. 1 Cor 1:4–8, 18; 6:11; 12:13). Thus, he warns them against falling away from grace and forfeiting salvation (cf. 1 Cor 10:12). The parallel exhortation in 5:20 makes clear that both this verse and 6:1 address the Corinthians. Paul urges them to be reconciled to God. The second-person plural καταλλάγητε (5:20b) is directed at them rather than generic nonbelievers encountered during Paul’s missionary endeavors. In 6:2, the favorable time of salvation for the Corinthians is “now,” suggesting that they must change their current behavior in 6:1 or risk the forfeiture of spiritual benefits they have received in the new era ushered in by the Christ event.

When we compare 5:10–11 with 5:20–6:2, it becomes evident that the reception of “grace in vain” is another way of saying that the Corinthians


6. Here καταλλάγητε may be understood as a true passive (“let yourselves be reconciled”) or reflexive (“reconcile yourselves”): cf. Reimund Bieringer, “‘Reconcile Yourselves to God’: An Unusual Interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5.20 in Its Context,” in Jesus, Paul, and Early Christianity: Studies in Honour of Henk Jan de Jonge (ed. Rieuwerd Buitenwerf et al.; NovTSup 130; Leiden: Brill, 2008) 11–38. In either case, the imperatival force of the verb makes clear that their response is required to make good the reconciliation.

7. Contrast Murray J. Harris, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 147–49. Although, in 5:20, “you” does not appear before παρακαλέω, it is implied not only by καταλλάγητε but by the parallel παρακαλέω in 6:1 that is accompanied by ἵματι. Moreover, Paul will urge the Corinthians to seek “restoration” in 2 Cor 13:9 (κατάρτισις: LSJ 910) and 13:11 (καταρτίζω, BDAG 526).
are in danger of jeopardizing a salvation that would deliver them from retribution on judgment day. The apostle discloses that he, the Corinthians, and others will appear before the tribunal of Christ to receive reward or punishment for the deeds they performed when living in their earthly bodies. In 5:11, his rhetorical strategy is to elicit the pathos of fear in reference to this judgment, a fear he mentions not merely as an incentive for his ministry to the lost but also with the aim of persuading the Corinthians to be cautious of their own conduct. He prompts them to abandon their wrongful accusations against him out of fear of knowing they will be held accountable for their actions at the tribunal. This is not so much a new tactic in his correspondence as it is a new way of articulating an earlier strategy—in 1 Corinthians, he had appealed to the fear of final condemnation when warning them against having a false confession of faith in Christ (1 Cor 15:2, 14, 17–18; 16:22).

The Pauline churches are accountable to the Creator and Christ; that is to say, in the words of Leander Keck, they are “vulnerable to a verdict by someone authorized to render it,” and they will give an account of their deeds on judgment day (2 Cor 5:10; Rom 14:4b, 12; cf. Heb 4:13). Those who are in Christ could be found blameless on that day (cf. 1 Thess 3:15; 5:23; Phil 1:10). If they are judged unfavorably, however, Paul’s missionary work among them would be “in vain” and serve no purpose because congregation members succumbed to denying Christ on account of persecution (1 Thess 3:5; Phil 2:16), or embraced false teachings that led them astray from Paul’s gospel (Gal 4:10–11; cf. 3:4), or, as in Corinth, rejected Paul as God’s messenger, followed his opponents, and continued to indulge in destructive vices (2 Cor 5:20–6:2; cf. 2:17; 6:11–7:3; 11:2–5, 13–15; 12:20–21).

**Scholarly Responses to the Tension**

The tension between the congregants receiving grace as unmerited favor on the one hand and apparently losing it to face divine judgment on the other has often been addressed by theological discussions on justification.

8. Rightly connecting these verses with the Corinthians’ decision for or against Paul is Matthias Konradt, *Gericht und Gemeinde: Eine Studie zur Bedeutung und Funktion von Gerichtsaussagen im Rahmen der paulinischen Ekklesiologie und Ethik im 1 Thess und 1 Kor* (BZNW 117; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003) 484.


11. The words stressed in these verses overlap in meaning: κενός (“empty,” “without purpose”: e.g., 2 Cor 6:1; 1 Thess 3:5; Gal 2:2; Phil 2:16), ἐκκαθάρισθαι (“to no avail”: e.g., Gal 3:4; 4:11; 1 Cor 15:2), and ματαιός (“idle,” “empty” “useless”: 1 Cor 15:17); cf. BDAG 281, 539, 621. The term in vain can be used for all the verses. On its relation to the salvific dangers faced by the respective Pauline communities see Oropeza, *Opponents of Paul*, esp. pp. 18–19, 38–41, 106–8, 122–25.
and works. Perhaps a fresher approach may be found through studies related to benefaction in the ancient Mediterranean world. Scholars such as James Harrison, Zeba Crook, and John Barclay have argued that Paul can interpret grace in terms of gift giving or granting a favor that comes from God, and God may be considered by those who receive the gift as their divine Benefactor. Troels Engberg-Pederson argues that this gift giving may not be exclusive of the giver’s own aims and interests. If so, then the divine benefactor might expect a return from those who receive grace.

Societal protocols related to gift giving and the expectation of some sense of reciprocity for them would seem to play a prominent role related to Paul’s understanding of grace. If his Gentile audiences were raised on the Greco-Roman system of gift giving and reciprocity, they would seem to comprehend grace as benefaction. Both Paul and his congregations do not seem to operate with overt distinctions between spiritual and material benefaction. The apostle, for example, appeals to the Corinthians to contribute to the poor in Jerusalem and assures them that their generosity would be reciprocated both spiritually and materially. On the principle of sowing and reaping, if they sow bountifully with financial generosity they can expect to reap God’s blessing “in every way” (2 Cor 9:6–14; cf. 8:14; 1 Cor 9:11; Rom 15:27).

Equally, for Paul the principle of sowing and reaping pertains to moral obligation. Believers may sow to their own “flesh” and receive corruption, or they could sow to the Spirit and receive eternal reward (Gal 6:7–9). If the need for moral obligation pertains to certain situations in his churches—and it certainly appears to do so in Corinth given the congregation’s vices and divisions (e.g., 2 Cor 12:20–21; cf. 6:14–7:1; 1 Cor 3:1–3; 15:33–34)—then we might expect Paul to use certain principles related to benefaction and reciprocity as a means of persuading the congregation to better moral behavior.


15. Paul’s metaphors of sowing and reaping seem derived from Israel’s Scriptures and suggest that his notion of reciprocity is not merely developed from Greco-Roman models. See, e.g., Pss 112[111]:9; 125[126]:5; Prov 11:24; 22:8; Isa 55:10–11; Hos 8:7; 10:12–13.
David deSilva interacts with these thoughts when he writes that gratitude expresses itself in a return of “grace for grace” through acts of obedience such as service and good works to the divine benefactor. These deeds “are not offered to gain favor from God, but nevertheless they must be offered in grateful response to God. To refuse these is to refuse the patron (who gave his all for us) the return he specially requests from us . . . if Jesus gave his life for us, we fall short of a fair return unless we live our lives for him (2 Cor 5:14–15; Gal 2:20).” A recipient’s ingratitude or contempt can turn away the benefactor’s favor and “threatens to make one ‘fall from favor’ (Gal 5:4), resulting in the danger of exclusion from future benefactions.” An important corollary follows from this: the forfeiture of grace might be an outcome for those who fail to respond with gratitude toward the benefactor’s favors.

Our task, then, is to build on these notions by interpreting Paul’s view of grace in light of benefaction and reciprocity, especially in reference to how adverse repercussions can become the expected result of the Corinthian congregation’s ingratitude toward divine favors. Looking at Paul’s warning in 2 Cor 6:1 through the lens of benefaction may help alleviate tensions created by the prospect of Christ-followers who participate in the gift of salvation and yet are in danger forfeiting that gift. We will now examine grace in terms of benefaction and the reciprocity of gratitude, both in Paul and in societal standards of his day, especially in light of Seneca. Then we will consider the thought of ingratitude and its repercussions in relation to the Corinthian correspondence.

Paul’s View of Grace As a Gift of Benefaction

The conceptual background to Paul’s language of grace (χάρις) seems to spring from a blending of terms from Israel’s Scriptures and social norms from Greco-Roman culture. As James Dunn affirms, Paul’s perspective appears to be derived from a combination of the Hebrew words יָ hade (“favor,” “grace”), which is often one-sided, and רָמוּ (“covenant love,” “gracious favor,” “lovingkindness”), which often expects a return in secular use but in religious use conveys an enduring quality. Paul’s χάρις carries both the ideas of “unilateralness” and “lasting commitment”: “God’s purpose for humankind was one of generous initiative and sustained faithfulness.”

17. DeSilva, 149. Differently, when interpreting 1 Corinthians in light of patronage and honor, Jerome H. Neyrey, Render to God: New Testament Understandings of the Divine (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004) 157–58, suggests that God’s justice relates to God’s faithfulness and benefaction for the Christ-followers. Divine justice also relates to divine judgment that can manifest itself for the purpose of reforming the one punished (1 Cor 5:5), preserving the Lawgiver’s honor in a quid-pro-quo lex talionis manner (3:17), and via examples preventing others from committing similar violations (10:6–11).
18. Although deSilva references 2 Cor 6:1 as one of many examples of undesirable reprisals (pp. 149–50), he does not elaborate on the passage but focuses instead on Heb 6:1–10.
To this notion Paul adds the concept of benefaction commonly known in Greco-Roman social contexts of his day. The blending of these ideas is not surprising given his Jewish-Hellenistic upbringing (Gal 1:13–14; Phil 3:5–6; cf. Acts 22:2–3; 23:6; 26:5). No doubt, he would be quite familiar with the type of Hellenistic traditions we find in the Apocrypha and Septuagint, which evince Israel’s God as benefactor and gift giver (εὐεργεσία/εὐεργετέω: e.g., Wis 16:11; 2 Macc 10:38; Ps 12[13]:6 LXX; 77[78]:11). This perspective would not seem to be much different from that of Philo, who uses εὐεργεσία and χάρις interchangeably in relation to the benefaction of God, who created the world as a gift for humankind (Leg. 3.77–78).

Although a one-size-fits-all definition of grace is too simplistic to explain all of Paul’s uses of this term in his letters, the notions of benefaction and gift giving related to χάρις would be familiar to his Gentile audiences. They regularly noticed various images and inscriptions honoring human benefactors in their cities. We might generally expect that, when communicating to Greek-speaking audiences such as the Corinthians, Paul would use χάρις to imply both that God shows lasting and loving favor to human recipients and that God is their ultimate benefactor whose gifts elicit a response from them. At the same time, the unilateral aspect of grace for Paul would appear to center on God’s gift of the Christ event, which brings salvation to the world. As such, grace would seem to suggest God’s initiative, generosity to the undeserved, and the impossibility of recipients to match the abundance of the favor.

In 2 Cor 6:1, χάρις refers to a small constellation of benefits God initiates and bestows on the Corinthians—reconciliation, forgiveness, atonement, and righteousness and a new creation brought about by the advent, death, and resurrection of Christ (5:14–21). Conzelmann rightly identifies grace here as the “totality of salvation.” This deliverance means an exemption from divine punishment destined for evildoers (cf. 1 Cor 1:18; 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9; Rom 1:18; 3:5; 5:9). Because God bestows grace without payment, it can be understood as a gift (cf. δωρεά: Rom 3:24; cf. 5:15, 17; Eph 3:7; 4:7). Paul associates χάρις in 6:1 with the favorable time of salvation echoed from Isa 49:8, which he interprets as “now” taking place through the message of reconciliation brought about by the Christ event. The acceptable era has arrived and is characterized by faithful believers participating in the new creation “in Christ” (2 Cor 6:2; cf. 5:17–19). The act of God giving Christ brings about salvation and righteousness to an undeserving people through the savior’s advent and atoning death on the cross (5:14–15, 21; cf. 8:9; 9:15; Gal 2:20; Rom 3:24; 5:8, 15–17; 8:32).

This all reinforces the idea that Paul and the Corinthians may understand grace as a gift from the divine Benefactor, and in 6:1 grace is more specifically understood as salvation that has come about through Christ.

22. See similar notions of χάρις/χαρίζω as a gift in 1 Cor 2:12; Rom 8:32; Gal 3:18; Phil 1:29; 2:9; cf. Eph 2:8–9.
Gift Giving and Reciprocity

If it seems impossible for us to fathom that gifts as magnificent as Christ and salvation could be appropriately returned by the recipients, inequality related to the gift-giving system was nothing new for the ancient world. The benefactor’s gifts and favors included property, protection, money, debt release, disaster relief, access to other patrons, and gifts to help build edifices, temples, and theaters (Xenophon, *Oec.* 7.26; Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* 1163B.1–5; Pliny *Ep.* 10.5–10; Seneca *Ep.* 81.27; *POxy* 1.332.1, 15–16). Patrons and benefactors typically had all the resources necessary to outgive their clients. Clients nonetheless would be expected to reciprocate for the benefits they received regardless of their benefactor’s wealth and self-sufficiency. These relationships were voluntary and asymmetrical involving “two parties of unequal status,” who exchange different goods and services.

The system of benefaction in Greco-Roman society went hand-in-hand with the return of recipients’ gratitude for gifts and favors received. Motivation behind a number of ancient inscriptions was that the persons being honored should receive proper forms of gratitude for their beneficence. Many of Aesop’s fables seem built on the premise of returning favors, and the pervasiveness of this tradition is quite evident as we read that children were taught to articulate these fables orally in the days of Quintilian (*Inst.* 1.9.2). Likewise, in the rhetorical handbooks we read, “For just as it is right to punish those who do harm, so it is also fitting to return kindness to those who render kind services (τοὺς εὐεργετήσαντας)” (*Rhet. Alex.* 1.1422a.35; cf. Aristotle *Rhet.* 2.2.8; Theon *Progym.* 64). The exchange of favors, in fact, was said to hold together human society (Seneca *Ben.* 1.4.2).

23. DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage*, 6–7, 101–4, identifies an important distinction between patrons and benefactors as follows: the former knows the client personally and chooses to have that person as client; the latter is more public, open to persons of means, and the recipients need to be clients. See further on patron-client relationships, Neyrey, “God, Benefactor”; Ernst Gellner and John Waterbury, eds., *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* (London: Duckworth, 1977).


How might gratitude in an asymmetrical relationship be exhibited? A client could express it through giving thanks, service, loyalty, and promoting the honor and reputation of the patron. A grateful city-state could give praise and public recognition to the benefactor, whether at social gatherings, sporting events, festivals, or by erecting a statue of the benefactor (e.g., Horace, Sat. 1.1.9–10; Pliny Ep. 10.51).29

Caesar’s benefactions are perhaps the closest rival to the new ideology of benefaction in Christ Jesus. Christ as God’s son who ushers in a new creation and deliverance stood against societal assumptions about the emperor as lord of the world and prime benefactor who brings a peaceful order to society. The Res Gestae inscription rehearses Caesar Augustus’s great deeds. He provided, for example, 400,000,000 sesterces for his soldiers at the end of their service, a beneficence read as an “act of grace” (Res. Ges. 16).30 The senate and Roman people give him a golden shield in recognition of his valor, clemency, justice, and piety (Res. Ges. 34). The emperor’s benefactions could not be matched by his subjects, and so they reciprocated by giving him honor and gifts. They also swore their allegiance to him (Res. Ges. 25). A Cypriot oath names Augustus as “god” and includes an oath to Tiberius: “we swear that we and our descendants shall give heed and obey on land and on sea; that we shall show our good will and shall reverence Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of Augustus, together with all his house, and that we shall consider their friends or enemies our friends or enemies.”31

In a similar way, Paul speaks of God’s being in Christ and bestowing the grace of salvation to the world in terms of peace (καταλλαγή) and justice/righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) in 2 Cor 5:14–6:1 (cf. Rom 3:24; 5:1–2, 17; 1 Cor 1:30). This sort of language seems to challenge imperial rule because Christ is viewed as the representative of deity and ultimate benefactor of the world. The challenge would not go unnoticed by the Corinthian auditors who were deeply entrenched by Roman ideology.32 Paul claims as part of the proposition of 2 Corinthians that God and Christ lead the Christ-followers about in a triumphal procession (2:14–17), which would doubtless conjure up for the auditors images of Caesar’s triumphal entrances in Rome and elsewhere.33 It follows from these comparisons that

31. Translation from Danker, Benefactor, 315.
divine benefactions through Christ might require of beneficiaries similar honor and allegiance that beneficiaries render to Caesar.

**SENeca ON Benefaction**

Book-length treatises on benefaction attest to the subject’s importance in the ancient Mediterranean world, including Seneca the Younger’s *On Benefits*, Cicero’s *On Duties*, Theophrastus’s *On Gratitude*, Epicurus’s *On Gifts and Gratitude*, and Chrysippus’s two works, *On Duties* and *On Favors*. A complete survey of these sources would go beyond the scope of this study, and so we draw our attention to Seneca’s work, which among extant ancient sources of this kind is perhaps the most lengthy.

In Seneca’s work both the benefactor and recipient are expected to follow principles regarding the reception and reciprocation of gifts (*Ben. 1.1.1*). Benefits, however, are not the same thing as bartering and should not be given in order to get something back (4.13.3; 4.14.2). Gift giving has the other person’s interest at heart even though it is not exclusive of the giver’s self-interests. The ideal person gives, receives, and reciprocates benefits, and this voluntary activity is considered a virtue. Some people do not react in positive ways to favors, but their ingratitude should not discourage others from generosity (1.1.9–13). Giving should be voluntary, with benefactors bestowing gifts from the prompting of their own will and recipients being willing to reciprocate (1.6.1; 4.40.1–2). If there is an acceptable return for doing favors, the reward is a good conscience that one has done a benefit. Conversely, if one is not benevolent, there is fear that one loses an opportunity to do good (4.12.4). Seneca captures well the attitude of both giver and receiver when he makes the claim: “In the case of a benefit, this is a binding rule for the two who are concerned—the one should straightway forget that it was given, the other should never forget that it was received” (2.10.4; cf. 2.18.2).

For the benefactor it would be better to lose the benefit than ask for repayment, and he or she also should not constantly remind the recipient of the benefit; otherwise, this would be a reminder that repayment is necessary (1.1.13; 2.11.1–2). Exceptions, however, include the benefactor asking for a return during a crisis or when the recipient is slow to return a favor (5.20.7; 5.22.1–3). For the recipients, the acceptance of a benefit places them under obligation to do everything necessary to return the favor (1.4.3; 2.35.3–5; 6.16.2, 4; 7.16.1–5). Good will and gratitude are the proper responses to benefits, and both benefactors and recipients are required to

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34. On the relevant works of Theophrastus, Epicurus, and Chrysippus, see Diogenes Laertius 5.48; 10.28; SVF 3.674; 2.1081, respectively. Cf. Griffin, “Roman Society,” 92.


36. The primary Latin source used here is John W. Basore, trans., *Seneca: Moral Essays* (vol. 3; LCL 310; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1935) 67, whose English translation is also used in this case. Unless otherwise stated, the translations are mine.

choose the other person wisely. Benefactors should choose someone who is upright, sincere, grateful, and worthy of receiving gifts (1.1.2; 4.10.3–11.1); recipients should choose benefactors to whom they do not object, lest the obligation feel like torture (2.18.3–5). Seneca compares proper benefaction with the daughters of Zeus known as Graces or Charites. He depicts them as three sisters dancing in a ring:

There is one [maiden] for bestowing a benefit, another for receiving it, and a third of returning it. . . . Why do the sisters hand in hand dance in a ring which returns upon itself? For the reason that a benefit passing in its course from hand to hand returns nevertheless to the giver: the beauty of the whole is destroyed if the course is anywhere broken, and it has most beauty if it is continuous and maintains an uninterrupted succession. . . . Their faces are cheerful, as are ordinarily the faces of those who bestow or receive benefits. They are young because the memory of benefits ought not grow old. They are maidens because benefits are pure and undefiled and holy in the eyes of all; and it is fitting that there should be nothing to bind or restrict them, and so the maidens wear flowing robes, and these, too are transparent because benefits desire to be seen.” (1.3.3–5) 38

He also draws our attention to the importance of divine benefaction. The immortal deities hold humans dear and have given them the greatest honor possible (2.29.6). To an interlocutor who claims that the deity gives no benefits, Seneca responds that food provided by nature, living creatures, and creation itself with its lands, trees, plants, rivers, and precious minerals are among the many benefits from the deity. Such things provide humans with countless delights and show that they are loved excessively (4.5.1–3; 4.6.1–3). For Seneca, gratitude in terms of worship and good will are appropriate modes of reciprocation to the gods (4.19.3; 7.15.4–5).

**Paul and Seneca**

Paul’s perception of grace is both similar to and differs with Seneca. Paul seems to reject the benefactor’s choice of a worthy client, at least in reference to the way God has given Christ. God has chosen unworthy humans to receive the benefit of salvation through Christ. While humanity was still at enmity with God, God sent his son to provide humanity’s reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18–19). God loved his creatures, and Christ died for them while they were still sinners (cf. Rom 5:6–10). Seneca, however, speaks of human benefactors rather than God on this point, and he does view deity as bestowing many benefits on humans (Ben. 4.9.1). 39

38. Translated by J. W. Basore.
39. Cf. Neyrey, “God, Benefactor,” 482–83, who interprets such beneficence as “generalized reciprocity,” a kinship-styled model “whereby the interests of the other are primary.” This is distinguished from “balanced reciprocity,” a tit-for-tat exchange among neighbors, and “negative reciprocity” in which enemies or strangers seek self-interest at the expense of others (p. 469).
Both Paul and Seneca consider giving to be left to one’s own choice and not done under compulsion (e.g., 2 Cor 9:6–7; Rom 8:32), and both consider gratitude to be a proper response to a gift (e.g., 2 Cor 1:10–11; 9:15; Phil 4:10, 18–19). In this regard, the cycle of giving, receiving, and returning a favor holds true for both. Paul, however, breaks the cycle on a personal level when refusing to receive money from the Corinthians in return for ministering to them. He wants his gospel to be free of charge, which turns out to be a point of contention with the congregation (1 Cor 9:11–12, 17–18; 2 Cor 11:7–12; 12:13–14). No doubt, besides accusing him of duplicity in the matter (cf. 2 Cor 1:12; 4:2; 12:16–18), the congregants would be irate with him because he violates societal protocols by not permitting them to return a favor. They might even interpret his refusal as a hostile act.  

Moreover, Paul accepts financial support from the Philippians but not the Corinthians (Phil 4:10–19). Did the Corinthians understand that dependency and obligation belongs to God first and that the true giver of salvation via the gospel is God rather than humans such as Paul and Apollos (1 Cor 3:5–9; cf. 1 Thess 2:13)? The Philippians apparently understood such things (2 Cor 8:1–5; cf. Phil 1:3–9; 2:12–13, 27–30), and perhaps the Corinthians did not. They prized instead the abilities of human orators and their outward appearances (1 Cor 1:11–13; 2:1–5; 3:1–4; 2 Cor 5:12; 10:7, 10, 12), and they were being influenced by the “super-apostles” who exploited them financially (2 Cor 2:17; 11:7–12, 20). Paul needed to distinguish his ministry from that of his rivals. Hence, due to this factor and also because the Corinthians’ spiritual immaturity prevented them from fully appreciating the gospel’s divine origin, he may have refused to receive their financial support.  

The apostle’s ministry, then, is not really opposed to Seneca’s cycle of giving, receiving, and returning favors. As long as a congregation is mature enough to recognize God as the ultimate gift giver, Paul appears to accept the church’s personal gifts. For Paul, it seems that the role of the Corinthian’s patron-benefactor is reserved for God, and the apostle’s role is to be God’s broker.

41. And yet even though Paul accepts money from the Philippians, his uneasiness about it may be implied by his stressing his material dependence on God and independence from the Philippians (Phil 4:11–13), as pointed out by John Reumann, *Philippians* (AB 33B; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008) 704.
42. See David E. Briones, *Paul’s Financial Policy: A Socio-Theological Approach* (Ph.D. diss., University of Durham, 2011). Briones argues against the idea that Paul refuses support from the Corinthians because of their attempt to be his patron. Contrast, e.g., John Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (JSNTSup 75; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992). For Briones (*Paul’s Financial Policy*, 327–29), Paul has a consistent two-step approach toward financial support from congregations. At stage one, when first evangelizing a city, he refuses to receive money from the new congregation; at stage two, after he leaves the city, having established a mature-thinking church, he can receive money from them.
43. Similarly, Briones (ibid., 326) views Paul as “a mutual broker of divine commodity.”
This leads to another point that Paul and Seneca have in common: they both view God in the role of benefactor toward creation. Similar to Seneca, the apostle claims that the Creator provides humans with the gift of creation that itself attests to the power and divinity of its Maker. Despite this benefit, they fail to recognize God or express gratitude by honoring the Creator (Rom 1:19–21; cf. 2 Esdr 8:60). Paul, however, adds the benefit of God’s new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), which leads to eternal salvation for those who walk in faith and gratitude toward God.

Differently from Paul, Seneca as a Stoic philosopher understood God as a fiery substance that pervades the world. As the active reason behind nature, the deity acts on the passive principle of matter. Seneca considers God a father figure, and yet he could speak about God and the gods interchangeably. Stoics could identify Zeus as God without denying the value of other deities who work in nature, and perhaps Seneca’s view is similar. In harmony with the Stoic idea of living rationally and in accordance with nature, Seneca believed that virtuous living becomes a primary good to be sought. Ideal humans are to follow and obey God, and if God is beneficent to God’s creatures, humans also ought to be beneficent and exhibit the virtue of gratitude. This type of ethical pursuit is not entirely philosophical but social, serving as a compass for relational cohesion on several levels of society, especially with the upper echelons Seneca targeted.

Paul presents God as the model of generosity for sending Christ. God is also the one who bestows χάρις to the Corinthians, and the Corinthians are to respond with χάρις to God in the form of thanksgiving (2 Cor 1:9–11; 2:14; 8:16; 9:15). Christ is viewed as the exemplary giver: he became “poor” through his incarnation and death so that he might make many of the Corinthians spiritually “rich” (2 Cor 8:9; cf. 9:15). Through this teaching, the Corinthians are prompted to act with generosity and complete their contributions for the Jerusalem saints.

Examples of Gratitude

Apart from believers giving thanks, Paul and other NT writers seem to agree that receiving benefits requires obligations to reciprocate in practical ways. Believers show this gratitude to God by giving generously to others (1 Thess 3:12; 5:15; Matt 5:43–48; 1 Pet 2:15), pursuing a life of good deeds

44. See J. N. Sevenster, Paul and Seneca (NovTSup 4; Leiden: Brill, 1961) 35–38.
48. See Griffin, “Roman Society,” 92–113. For obligation on various social levels, see Ben. 2.91; 3.28.1; 3.29–37.
49. Neyrey, “God, Benefactor,” 487–88, distinguishes “thank you” from the Greek way of expressing gratitude through praise and commitment.
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(2 Cor 9:11–12; Matt 5:16; 1 Pet 2:11–12), using spiritual gifts for the benefit of the church (1 Cor 12:4–11; Eph 4:7–16; 1 Pet 4:10–11), bearing witness to the honor of the Divine Benefactor (Eph 1:6; 1 Pet 2:10), and rendering their loyalty, trust, and obedience to the Benefactor (1 Cor 6:12–20; Gal 2:20–21; Phil 1:29–30). On the other hand, disloyalty, found in philosophical patronage, Hellenistic Judaism, and the early Christ-followers, suggests unfaithfulness to a former patron and loyalty to a new patron.

What we are noticing, then, is that gratitude as a response to divine benefaction is exemplified in a number of ways, not the least of which includes loyalty to the gift giver. This issue becomes all the more pointed when we consider that God’s saving grace in 2 Corinthians was never intended to be void of all self-interest and the expectation of a positive response. God expects those who are being saved in Christ to honor God and remain loyal and faithful subjects. Paul exemplifies this gratitude not only by thanking God but by returning Christ’s love by living in faithfulness to Christ, and motivated by love he proclaims the gospel message about Christ to others (2 Cor 5:14–15; 1 Cor 9:16–17).

This type of reciprocation seems comparable to Seneca’s idea of love as the proper response to divine benefactors (*Ben.* 4.19.1). Unlike Seneca, however, who contrasts love of the gods with fear of the gods in this context, Paul considers both the fear of Christ related to judgment day (2 Cor 5:10–11) and the love of Christ related to his atoning death (5:14–15) as motivations for his own ministry. In any case, the apostle stands in agreement with Seneca by viewing gratitude to deity in a manner that exceeds merely giving thanks.

Paul expresses his gratitude by proclaiming the gospel about Christ, which resembles the weaker party’s appreciation for a favor received by a powerful benefactor in Seneca’s response, “I will never be able to repay to you my gratitude, but definitely I will not cease from declaring everywhere that I am unable to repay it” (*Ben.* 2.24.4). Our apostle engages in the common response of the beneficiary who is expected to honor his benefactor by promoting the benefactor’s reputation (cf. 4.3.2; Plutarch, *Mor.* 379D; Philo, *Plant.* 125–31; Lucius, *Metam.* 13, 15). Although the gift of Christ and salvation cannot be repaid to God, this benefit is still viewed as placing believers under certain obligations. An ultimate sense of honor, allegiance, love for Christ, and living one’s life for his sake would pose the natural counterpart to the oaths clients make to benefactors.

*Love and Moral Obligation in Light of Romans*

Paul does not flesh out what it means to love and live for Christ in 2 Cor 5:14–15, but such notions are further developed in his letter to the Romans. God’s

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52. *Pace* Engberg-Pedersen (“Gift giving,” 22), who claims that both Paul and Seneca contrast the two.
love is communicated through the gift of the Spirit related to the believer’s conversion (Rom 5:5). Love is also owed to others as an ethical obligation on the basis of the great commandment to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Rom 13:8–10). Unlike human benefactors, the divine Benefactor’s love is demonstrated by the divine choice to reveal this love, bestow the gift of the Spirit, and make unworthy recipients righteous through the death of Christ (5:5–8, 15–17). Barclay rightly says that those who are in Christ are now “under grace” in obedience and service to God, which manifests itself in sanctification and has as its goal eternal life (6:14–23). When that goal is completed, then what was once an “unfitting” gift on account of the unworthy recipients will become a fitting gift. We might add that this positive end will take place so long as the gift of the Christ is not repudiated by these recipients either willfully or through a lifestyle that contradicts the core of what it means to be Christ’s followers.

Now that they are “under grace,” the faithful in Christ are under obligation, “to which Paul calls for willing assent to serve the purposes of grace by yielding their bodies as [spiritual] weapons employed by the God and Father of Jesus Christ, serving their fellows in righteousness.” This obligation includes their yielding to and being led by God’s Spirit. It is through yielding to the Spirit that they will resist works of the “flesh” that lead to eternal death (8:12–14). In this manner, the concept of obligation is no longer limited to whatever society deems the case regarding human benefactors and patrons. Rather, believers must relocate the concept of obligation in terms of living for Christ’s sake, and they are to interpret it in light of being controlled by God’s Spirit. It is through this reconfiguration that they can learn how to walk in obedience before God and perform works of love. The extent of this obligation to the Benefactor spans the entire length of the believers’ life until the future resurrection of their bodies takes place and the new creation is fully realized (8:15–27).

Although more implicit in the Corinthian correspondence this type of obligation is no less present. Now that God has granted them Christ and salvation, believers must assent to the Spirit’s work in their bodies both collectively and individually (1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19–20; 7:34; 2 Cor 3:6, 18;

55. C. E. B. Cranfield, Romans 1–8 [ICC; rev. ed. London: T. & T. Clark, 2001] 394) writes regarding Rom 8:12 that “The position of negative [ἐν ὀφειλέται ἔσμεν οὐ τῇ σαρκὶ τοῦ κατὰ σάρκα ζῆν] strongly suggests that Paul intended to continue with something like ἄλλα τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ κατὰ πνεῦμα ζῆν, but broke off in order to insert the warning of v. 13a, and then, after adding a natural complement to v. 13a, failed to complete the sentence begun in v. 12.” On Paul and obligation, see further ὀφειλέτας (Rom 1:14; 15:27), ὀφείλω (Rom 15:1, 27; 2 Thess 1:3; 2:13), and ὀφειλέτης (Rom 4:4). The latter is contrasted with the unearned gift of righteousness bestowed on Abraham and pertaining to redemption that has come about through Christ. On this thought, Neyrey (“God, Benefactor,” 492) writes, “it would [be] utterly dishonorable for a mortal to make a claim on God or to consider God in one’s debt, which is what happens when mortals interpret their interaction with God in terms of balanced reciprocity.” This is different than the converse in which humans are the ones in debt to God’s Spirit (8:12).
7:1), and they must live morally and perform deeds of love (1 Cor 13:1–14:1; 2 Cor 2:8; 6:6; 8:7–8, 24) until the new creation is fully present when the future glorification of their bodies takes place (2 Cor 4:14, 17; 5:1, 5–9, 17).

The Benefactor’s Grace and Self-Interest

DeSilva suggests from Seneca two differentiated sets of considerations are expected depending on whether a person is benefactor or recipient. The benefactors are to exercise generosity and give for the sake of giving to others rather than for personal advantage (Ben. 1.1.3, 9; 2.11.2; 3.15); the recipients are to show gratitude to the giver and never forget what was received (1.1.3; 2.24.4).56 If Paul follows this pattern, then he assumes this issue from “below,” from the recipients’ point of view as being obligated to show gratitude to God as Benefactor. A better explanation, however, is that the giver maintains some self-interest. Seneca admits to using hiperbole earlier in his discussion regarding the attitude of the ideal benefactor: “Certain things we teach in an exaggerated form so that they result in due measure. When we say ‘He (the donor) ought not to remember (giving a benefit),’ we really mean ‘He ought not to trumpet it, nor to boast, nor to give offence’ . . . . It is to quell excessive and reproachful memory of it that we have told the man who gives to forget” (7.22.1–2).57 The benefactor can seek to be satisfied by the recipient’s gratitude and effort at attempting to reciprocate the benefit after all (7.14.4–5).

Gift giving for Seneca can serve the interests of the giver. For Paul, the divine Benefactor’s gift giving, as we have already noticed, does not contradict this. The gift of Christ and love for the creatures are graciously initiated by God and undeserved, but as Engberg-Pedersen agrees, the Christ-event “shows that God staged his relationship with human beings precisely in the form of a gift in order to achieve his own aims.”58 As God’s dealings with humanity in Rom 1:18–32, 2:23–24, and 8:3–4 suggest, these include an interest in God’s creatures honoring God and conforming to the divine will. Divine gift giving serves aims such as these; human responses of faithfulness (πίστις) and love are means of reciprocating the gift and thus fulfilling the divine will. The magnificent love and grace of God in the giving of Christ expects a response, so much that no one “acts rightly, then, if he does not respond to that act in kind. . . . Any other response will amount to annulling God’s gift.”59 If grace in 2 Cor 6:1 refers to the gift of salvation initiated by God, grounded in Christ’s death, and given to the Corinthians who are now in Christ, Paul’s expectation would seem to be that the Corinthians are now under obligation to respond to their Benefactor with gratitude in the form

57. Citation from Griffin, “Roman Society,” 94.
59. Ibid., 41.
of love, loyalty, and faithfulness comparable with Paul’s own gratitude (5:14–15). Their grateful attitude should be evident by their willingness to honor God in this manner. Authentic gratitude would also seem to include positive responses to Paul who operates as God’s mouthpiece to the Corinthians and ambassador sent on Christ’s behalf (5:20a). Moreover, they are to honor God, who empowers them with the Spirit and requires their sanctification; they must give account of their deeds performed in their earthly bodies at the tribunal of Christ (5:10; cf. 1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19–20). As such, their conduct of vice-doing and disobedience must be fully abandoned (2 Cor 10:6; 12:20–21; 1 Cor 15:34; cf. 2 Cor 6:14–7:1). Paul requires of the Corinthians what he expects from all his churches: they should walk in a manner pleasing before God and be controlled by God’s Spirit in order to live in obedience and holiness (1 Thess 2:12; 4:1–3; Gal 5:16–6:2; Rom 1:5; 8:2–16; Phil 1:27; Col 2:6; cf. Col 2:6; Eph 4:1–4; 5:1–2).

Paul's view of gift giving as retaining some self-interest appears to be quite compatible within the framework of Greco-Roman social norms that obligate the reciprocation of gratitude to the benefactor for gifts received.

**Ingratitude toward Benefactors and Its Repercussions**

If gratitude is the proper response to benefactors, Seneca considers ingratitude to be the same as committing a crime. It is viewed in terms of dishonor, insult, wrongdoing, and the most common of all vices (Ben. 1.1.2; 1.2.1; 1.4.3; 2.25.3; 3.6.1; 7.16.1–41.10.4). Indeed, he considers it the worst vice: “There will always be murderers, tyrants, thieves, adulterers, abductors, temple robbers, and traitors, but lower in rank than all these is the ungrateful (infra omnia ista ingratus est), unless it be that all these come from the ungrateful, without which hardly any great misdeed has grown” (1.10.4). Among various types of ingrates are those who deny receiving a benefit, those who pretend not to receive a benefit, those who fail to reciprocate a benefit, and worst of all, those who have forgotten a benefit. The others at least have opportunity to change, but not someone who has forgotten receiving a benefit (3.1.3–4).

Seneca claims that the causes of ingratitude are as follows: (1) too high an opinion of ourselves, which results in thinking we deserve the good things we get; (2) greed or wanting more (ambition), which often leads to grumbling and complaints instead of giving thanks; and (3) jealousy, the comparison that someone received more than I did (2.26.1–29.1).

Ingratitude involves not only human-human relationships but also human-divine relationships. Seneca affirms that people show ingratitude when they do not recognize the benefits the deity gives them via creation, and those who grumble (queror) about natural gifts given to them by the gods are considered unjust (2.28.4–29.1; 4.8.2–3; cf. 2.28.4; 2.29.3–4; 2.30.1). Also, the gods are angered by humans who do not repay their earthly

60. Regardless of whether or not Paul wrote 2 Cor 6:14–7:1, the passage rhetorically discourages the auditors from assimilation and committing vices.
benefactors (6.30.1; 6.40.2). Recipients who show a lack of gratitude to either human or divine benefactors commit injustice and sacrilege against the three Graces (1.4.4). Ingratitude breaks their circular link of bestowing, receiving, and reciprocating gifts, and this dishonors the heavenly beings. Although, unlike other crimes, ingratitude escapes human punishment, the ungrateful will still be accountable to the gods (3.6.2). They suffer the punishment of losing all perception of delightful experiences associated with benefaction and reciprocity, they are tortured by their conscience for thwarting a benefit, and they remain fearful of the gods, who witness all ingratitude (3.17.2–3).

Seneca relates a story in which a powerful benefactor, Philip of Macedon, punished a client when the client’s wickedness was exposed (4.37.1–4). The story exemplifies how circumstances might prompt a benefactor to take back a gift. Philip, originally showing favor to one of his most distinguished soldiers, ends up punishing him and refuses to give the unworthy man what he might give to a worthy person (4.35.3). The story teaches that, in some cases, and despite what Seneca says elsewhere (1.10.5; 7.31–32), the promise of bestowing favors can be justifiably broken when they are given to ungrateful individuals who commit evil deeds (cf. 4.34.3–35.5).

Various ancient sources confirm that Seneca is not alone in his expectations regarding the obligation of reciprocity for benefactions and negative consequences for ingratitude (e.g., Aeschylus, Prom. 975; Epicurus, Sent. Vit. 69; Ps.-Heraclitus, Ep. 3; Lucian, Pisc. 5; Judg 8:35 LXX; 1 Sam 25:2–14, 21, 39; 1 Kgs 9:10–14). Pseudo-Libanius teaches that those who do not repay their benefactors become the subject of letters of blame, reproach, and maligning (Ep. 53, 64, 80). Cicero advises that in order to win favor with an audience in court, orators should draw attention both to their defendant’s good character and the opponent’s unworthy character, including the latter’s ingratitude (De Or. 2.79.321–22). For Cicero, returning generosity is not an option for morally good persons but an obligation; in fact, there is nothing more imperative than for these people to demonstrate their gratitude (De Off. 1.xv.47–48; cf. 1.xiv.42).

Regarding ingratitude to deities, when discussing human arrogance in Greco-Roman poetry, H. V. Canter references a number of sources to suggest that a lack of proper regard for the gods includes “want of appreciation for the blessings, gifts, plans, or will of the gods.” Moreover, some type of punishment would be expected for the ungrateful. Plutarch writes that Fortune will chastise ingrates (Plutarch, Mor. 470C-D; 610E; Phoc. 1.3; C. Gracch. 16.5), and Dio Chrysostom says that those who show ingratitude will be excluded from future favors (Or. 31.37–38, 65).

We can adduce from Seneca and these sources that both divine and human benefactors were to be repaid by those who received their gifts. To

be sure, reciprocity in these cases did not amount to the beneficiary paying back the benefactor tit-for-tat as though the latter were of equal status with the former. Expressions of gratitude in the form of praise, honor, loyalty, and service were expected instead, and to neglect such things branded the recipient an ingrate whose unjust behavior in this regard would not escape punishment.

**INGRATITUDE AMONG THE CORINTHIANS**

Because Paul operates within a gift-giving system that is generally compatible with that of Seneca and the social world of his time, we might expect that he, too, condemns ingratitude. This appears to be the case in 2 Cor 6:1. A failure to respond to God’s benevolent salvation with tangible expressions of gratitude such as honor, loyalty, and love would be tantamount to the Corinthians’ receiving the gift of saving grace in vain.

The causes of ingratitude mentioned earlier by Seneca include high opinions of oneself, greed, grumbling, and jealousy. Paul makes these same issues explicit when addressing the congregation’s shortcomings. He reprimands their high-mindedness (1 Cor 4:6–10, 18–19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4; 2 Cor 5:12; 10:5; 12:20), greed (1 Cor 5:10–11; 6:1–10; 2 Cor 2:17), and jealousy (1 Cor 3:1–3; 2 Cor 10:10; 12:20). The concept of grumbling, which stems from a complaint against Paul’s leadership, is likewise a typical expression of ingratitude, and Paul interprets this as vice (1 Cor 10:10). As a result, the Corinthians exemplify the most common characteristics associated with ingratitude according to Seneca. It is rather likely, then, that Paul interprets their conduct as ingratitude even though he does not actually use the term ἀχάριστος in the Corinthian correspondence.63

Among major relational setbacks is that certain members have the propensity to assimilate to the social values and elitism of outsiders.64 This problem seems to have contributed to the high-minded and haughty attitude of some of the members as they gravitate toward social prominence and eloquent, sophist-like speakers whose outward appearance is commendable according to worldly standards (e.g., 1 Cor 2:1–5; 4:6–21; 2 Cor 5:12; 10:10, 17–18). Paul’s opponents, whom he tackles more directly in 2 Cor 10–13, seem to have exploited this Corinthian tendency, and they are influencing the congregation against him. Their identity as ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι (11:5) who establish their authenticity as ministers with letters of recommendation and eloquent speeches, is quite evident in these latter chapters (e.g., 2 Cor 10:6–16; 11:2–15). We also find glimpses of their character and activities in earlier portions of the canonical letter (e.g., 2:17, 3:1; 5:12).65 Their influence helps stimulate the Corinthians’ complaints and negative perception of Paul.

63. The term appears only in the disputed Pauline letter of 2 Tim 3:2. But see also Rom 1:21.
64. See Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, on the societal pressures the congregation faced.
65. Jerry L. Sumney (‘Servants of Satan’, ‘False Brothers’, and Other Opponents of Paul [JSNT-Sup 188; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999] 130–33) argues convincingly that the opponents in 2 Cor 1–9 and 10–13 are the same.
The Corinthians may have considered themselves to be faithful followers of Christ and rendered thanks to God for their salvation, but Paul sees things differently. God worked through Paul as God’s chosen instrument to proclaim to them the gospel that saves them (e.g., 1 Cor 4:15; 2 Cor 12:14; cf. Acts 18:1–18a). The apostle might assume that an implicit favor of conformity to his message is owed to him as their rescuer (cf. Philm 19–20; Sir 29:17). As Christ’s ambassador to the Gentiles and Corinthians, Paul also suffers numerous hardships in obedience to his calling to proclaim the gospel to them (2 Cor 1:8–11; 4:7–12; 6:3–10; 11:22–12:10). In return, the Corinthians make accusations against his apostleship (1:12; 2:17), fail to walk in holiness (1 Cor 6:9–20; 2 Cor 12:20–21), and are now beginning to adhere to the gospel of his opponents (5:12; 11:2–15). They are not properly reciprocating grace for grace; they lack a sense of obligation in response to the indescribable gift God has granted them. In essence, they are showing ingratitude by being disloyal to Paul’s teachings, and they are dishonoring God by their misdeeds. Thus, Paul has to urge them to be reconciled to God and not to receive grace in vain (5:20; 6:1).

INGRATITUDE’S POTENTIAL OUTCOME

What might be the final result of the Corinthians’ ingratitude? Despite the salvation they originally embraced from the divine Benefactor through Paul’s message about Christ, they are in danger of forfeiting this gift and falling into apostasy in 2 Cor 6:1. The apostle never explains, however, how this forfeiture might take place in their situation.

One option is that he has in mind the eventual outcome of their vice-doing (2 Cor 12:20–21), which might exclude them from God’s kingdom (cf. 1 Cor 6:9–10; 10:1–12; Gal 5:19–21; Rom 8:13). If so, then it seems that through persistent vices the congregants might repudiate salvation even if they never verbally renounce Christ. This view takes seriously the idea that, if one makes verbal confessions of faith in Christ, one must also surrender one’s life to Christ’s lordship and operate in love and obedience to the divine will (e.g., Gal 5:14–23; Rom 1:5; 13:8–10; cf. Matt 7:21–23; 22:37–40; Luke 6:46). If Paul is consistent with Seneca on this point, ingratitude would be among the vices the Corinthians are committing.

A second possibility is that Paul intends to “clean house,” as it were, during his third visit to Corinth, and similar to the fornicator whom he ostracizes from the congregation in 1 Cor 5, he will not “spare” the instigators who are railing accusations against him (2 Cor 13:1–5). Once expelled, Paul believes the wrongdoers are handed over to Satan and presumably excluded from being “in Christ” (1 Cor 5:5).

A third possibility of failed grace in 6:1 is that the apostle fears what he makes more explicit in the later chapters. If the Corinthians refuse to reciprocate gratitude for the gift of salvation in Christ by honoring God and

66. Although he praises their compliance to discipline an individual who had offended him (cf. 2 Cor 2:5–11; 7:4–16), their conduct in other portions of the canonical letter is far from commendable.
Paul, and they continue listening to the apostle’s opponents, they will be led astray into following another Jesus and a different gospel (2 Cor 11:2–4). The apostle will claim that these rivals are ministers of Satan, whose final end will be according to their deceptive deeds (11:13–15). At the tribunal of Christ, these individuals and their followers, it seems, will receive retribution as their reward for deception and wrongful deeds (5:10).  

A combination of these options is also possible. Whatever the case may be, there are dire consequences the Corinthians would face if they did not reciprocate God’s grace in positive, tangible ways.

**Conclusion**

Our study of 2 Corinthians has led to some important conclusions about Paul’s perception of grace and ingratitude. First, it has been argued that Paul and the Corinthians understand grace within the framework of the gift-giving system prevalent throughout their social setting. This conditioning is reflected in their perception of God as divine Benefactor.

Second, they assume that grace as a gift ought to be reciprocated. The gift of salvation, that is, saving grace, is initiated by God through the Christ event. This gift is given to unworthy recipients. However, this grace is not completely void of self-interest but has divine aims in mind. God expects the unfit recipients to be transformed through sanctification and continue to the full realization of eternal life. The recipients of salvation are now under obligation to show gratitude, which is expressed by honoring God in word and deed, loyalty, faithfulness to God and the gospel message about Christ, and yielding to the promptings of God’s Spirit to walk in holiness and perform works of love. Saving grace expects no less than the complete surrender of their way of living to follow Christ (2 Cor 5:14–21).

Third, ingratitude invites the return of dire consequences. Without the return of gratitude, the Corinthian recipients are in danger of forfeiting saving grace (6:1–2). Ingratitude is associated with vice, dishonors God, and makes the Corinthians more vulnerable to following the false gospel of Paul’s opponents and ultimately showing themselves to be disloyal to the gospel proclaimed by Paul. With the benefaction model intact, the notion of saving and losing grace is not so paradoxical after all. The thought of a divine benefactor expecting a return for grace would not ring foreign to the Corinthians’ ears.

67. To be sure, many apostates will be exposed prior to Judgment Day, but certain rebellions, it seems, will not be exposed until that event (1 Cor 4:3–5; cf. 1 Tim 5:24–25).