

# ***“The Great Gift & Great Responsibility”***

***2 Corinthians 5:14-17***



**This is one of the main streets of the ancient city of Corinth.**

Paul probably wrote his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthians in AD 56 while doing a final tour of Macedonia and Greece before returning to Antioch. He wants to establish the church in Corinth and collect an offering to be carried on to Jerusalem. Paul had established the Corinthian church in AD 51. In this letter he gives us a clear “ecclesiology” or “meaning of the church”.

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**May 22, 2022**

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In this letter Paul refers to the “Treasure in earthen vessels” in 2 Corinthians 4:7. The implication of chapters 3-6 are that as Christians working together under the lordship of Jesus Christ we are gifted God’s grace that we might be Ambassadors of reconciliation. In this book Paul speaks to the meaning of discipleship in this world as we live out our responsibility as gifted ambassadors in this world.

**May 22, 2022**

The temple of Apollo with the Acropolis fortress of Corinth in the background. This saddle of land just over a mile wide separates the Aegean Sea from the Adriatic Sea. A wooden rail system allowed ships to be transported across this saddle by oxen teams.

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## 2 Corinthians 5:14-17 [ESV]

14 For **the love of Christ controls us**, because **we have concluded this**: that one has died for all, therefore all have died;

15 and **he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves** but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

16 From now on, therefore, we **regard** *[Greek "oida"]* no one according to the flesh. Even though we once **regarded** *[Greek "ginosko"]* Christ according to the flesh, we **regard** *["ginosko"]* him thus no longer.

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**. The old has passed away; behold, the new has **come** *[Greek "ginomai"]*.

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Paul leaves Ephesus in 56 after a city wide riot instigated by Demetrius the head of the silversmith's guild who fears that Christianity will damage the silversmith trade that supplies the silver shrines and offerings bought by tourists visiting the Temple of Artemis [Roman "Diana"] the goddess of animals, fertility, chastity and the moon. Her temple was the largest temple in the ancient world.

The theater at Ephesus where the events of Acts 19:23-41 take place. This theater was one of the largest in the Roman world. It could accommodate 25,000 spectators. The population of Ephesus at the time was between 250,000 to 300,000

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## **Acts 19: [ESV]**

23 About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. 24 For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. 25 These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. 26 And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. 27 And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship." 28 When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

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Diane's temple was considered one of the “7 Wonders of the World”. The tourism trade was worth enormous amounts to the local community. Christianity presented a palpable threat to economy. Ephesus' harbor had been at one time the largest harbor in Asia Minor, but it silted in quickly and dredging could only provide a narrow channel to the sea. Most sea trade at the time bypassed Ephesus.

Statue of Artemis of the Ephesians from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Her cult in Ephesus mixed eastern fertility practices with western moon worship. There is a bit of speculation to the round objects attached to the chest area. Some believe they are “eggs” or “breasts” but most likely are “bull testicles” [these were routinely offered to this goddess].



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After the disturbance settled down Paul decided to go back and visit the Macedonian churches and travel through Corinth and lower Greece and then return to Antioch and from there go to Jerusalem with a gift to assist the Christian community there with a famine due to unrest in Judea. By this time the Zealot movement in Judea was gaining strength politically and agitating against the Roman occupation. The conflict led to shortages of food and resources along with shifting weather patterns.

Statue of Artemis of the Ephesians from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Her cult in Ephesus mixed eastern fertility practices with western moon worship.



## 2 Corinthians 8:9 [ESV]

9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

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One of the most unusual gifts in history was Hanno. He was given as a gift by the King of Portugal to the Pope on his election in 1513. It arrived in Rome in February of 1514. Hanno was from India. He lived for only 7 years and died in 1516 of treatments for constipation [suppositories laced with gold]. He was a favorite of Pope Leo X. His bones were discovered buried in the Vatican grounds in 1962. Satirists at the time mocked Leo and the Cardinals for their attentions to Hanno and his ornate funeral.

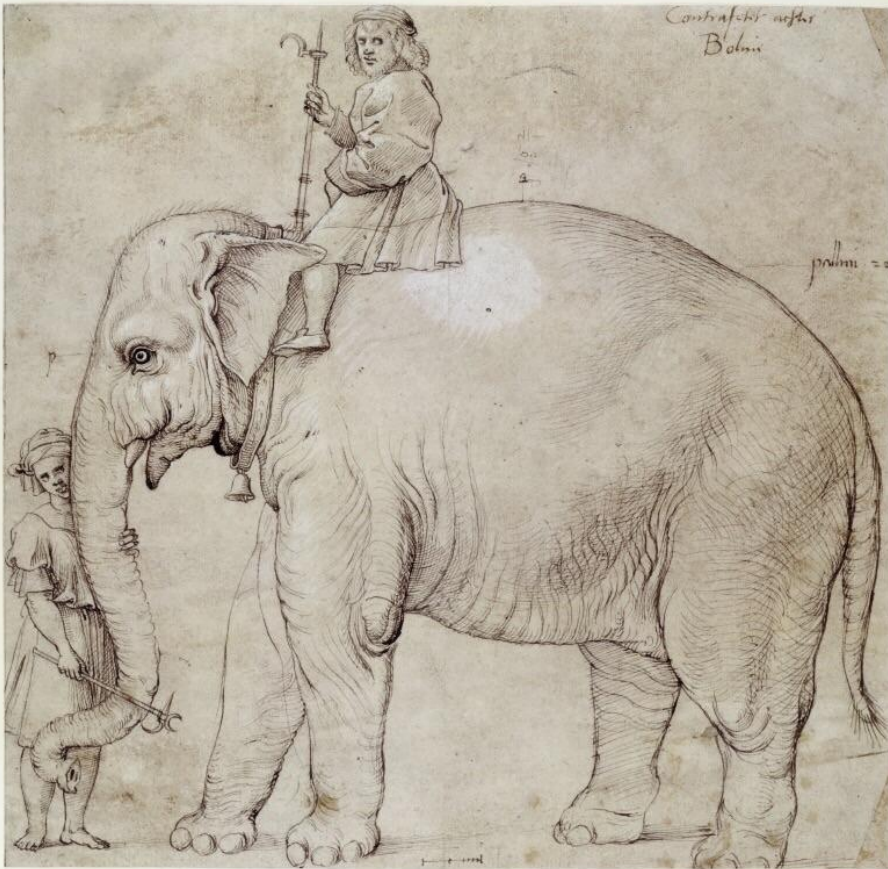
Pen and ink drawing by Rafael in 1516. It is of “Hanno” the miniature white elephant of Pope Leo X [1513-21].

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May 22, 2022

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Gifts require responsibility. God has lavished upon us the gift of salvation. A “white elephant” was considered a sign of divine favor in the Asian world of India and Indo-China. But the gift could bankrupt a minor noble. If the animal was mistreated, died or forced to work it was viewed as a personal affront to the gods and to the king. We get our term “white elephant” from this oriental practice. It is a gift that extravagant in nature is costly to maintain and absorbs more resources than it is worth.

Pen and ink drawing by Rafael in 1516. It is of “Hanno” the miniature white elephant of Pope Leo X [1513-21].

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## 2 Corinthians 5:21-6:1 [ESV]

21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**6:1 Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.**

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Pope Leo's unwillingness to pay attention to the growing agitations for change in the lax morality of the Catholic clergy led to disaster. By his time these calls went back a century. The Renaissance popes had turned a deaf ear to the concerns of the devout. They were more interested in fitting into the culture of the Renaissance. By his death at age 45 of pneumonia in 1521 the Reformation was in full swing across northern Europe.

The selfish and careless manner he displayed in the care of Hanno reflected his self-centered and careless view of his office of Pope.

Portrait of Pope Leo X [1513-21] by Rafael.

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Pope Leo X was 38 when he was elected Pope. He was from the most powerful family in Italy and was not “ordained” as a priest until his election. He was a “deacon” cardinal. He was the head of the Medici family of Florence. He was known for his lavish expenditures and patronage. There were also accusations of lascivious behavior. He treated the Papacy as a piggy bank to indulge his desires. He is the one who began St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome and sold indulgences to pay for the endeavor. These led to Martin Luther in 1517 posting the 95 Thesis that began the Reformation.

Portrait of Pope Leo X [1513-21] by Rafael.

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## 2 Peter 4:8-11 [ESV]

8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

9 Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies — in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

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Pen and ink drawing by Rafael in 1516. It is of “Hanno” the miniature white elephant of Pope Leo X [1513-21].

Generally, a gift’s value is measured by either its necessity or its generosity. When we receive a gift, it is generally a humbling experience, especially if it is unexpected or undeserved. One of the gifts that stands out in my mind is a gift I received from a friend shortly before he died. It was a gift he knew I would cherish. Even though I did not know it at the time, I, now, suspect that he knew he had serious health problems. We had met almost weekly for coffee. I deeply valued his friendship.

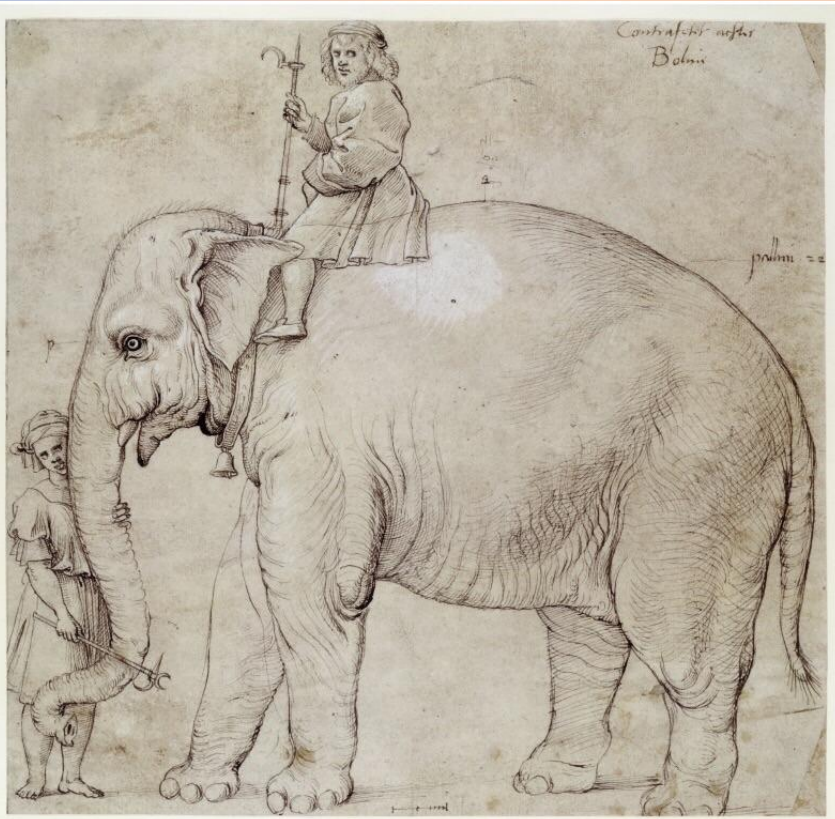
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Just, prior to his death I had deeply disappointed him in a decision that I had made *[I would still likely have made the same decision but I would have handled the process differently]*. His gift was a way of letting me know he understood the reason for my decision and his had accepted it. The events that flowed from our friendship and the gift of his time and the memento have called me to be a better person and more aware of the consequences of my decisions.



Pen and ink drawing by Rafael in 1516. It is of “Hanno” the miniature white elephant of Pope Leo X [1513-21].

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2 Corinthians 5:18-19 [ESV]

**18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;**

**19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.**

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This is the view from the top most part of the Corinthian fortress Acropolis, which for nearly 3000 years protected this vital pathway. Within its walls was a spring viewed as the “gift of Apollo” to protect the city below.

The gift that Christ gave each of us through his death on the cross is a wonderful gift, but it demands from us a change of heart and attitude toward others. In 2 Corinthians 5:14-17, Paul tells us there are 2 things that this gift of salvation accomplishes in us. The first is that we can no longer view people the same as we have in the past. The second is that we embrace our new identity in Christ, allowing our old nature to fade as the character of Jesus Christ infuses us.

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