



Paul bares his heart

Seven year period from the beginning of 1 Cor (50-52 he lived there) and in (2 Cor 13:2) 55 or 56 he made a second visit to deal with an emergency disciplinary problem in the church and a 3rd time in (2 Cor 13:1) and stayed for 3 months.

Written from Macedonia (north of Greece) after his second visit, to prepare for the church for his third and final visit. Paul was attempting to phase himself out of his ministry to the provinces surrounding the Aegean Sea (Asia, Macedonia, Achaia) to establish a new work in Spain. The 3rd visit was his farewell visit.

They believe a total of four letters were written by Paul to the Corinthian church. Only these two survived.

1 Corinthians = Major problems of behavior (divisions, slack moral standards, lawsuits, unkindness to the poor or less-gifted members) and of doctrine (doubting resurrection of Believers). Believers' questioned Paul's authority and even his abilities. In 1 Corinthians, PAUL WRITES OBJECTIVELY, CONFIDENTLY AND WITH HIS EMOTIONS WELL CONTROLLED THROUGHOUT THE LETTER.

2 Corinthians is less well arranged and reveals a range of emotional extremes in Paul.

Overjoyed and has confidence and pride in the Corinthians (7:4)

Deeply hurt that they are withholding their affection from him (6:12)

That they have to put up with him (11:1)

And they are READY TO BELIEVE a whole range of criticisms about him:

Being worldly and irresolute (1:17)

Moral cowardice in writing instead of coming (1:23)

That he has lack of inner strength (4:16)

Demoralized and theologically deviant (4:2)

Being an imposter (6:8)

Being corrupt and exploitative (7:2)

Not being a true minister of Christ (10:7)

Being weak in speech when present and powerful only by letter when absent (10:1, 10; 11:6, 21)

Being a fool, even mad (11:1, 16, 23)

Breaching convention or of craftiness in declining their financial support (11:7; 12:13-16)

Lacking mystical and miraculous credentials of ministry (12:1, 11-12)

Paul is forced to continually defend: His Doctrine. His Ministry. Character.

He expresses sorrow that the Corinthians do not reciprocate his genuine love for them. (6:11-13)



They do not acknowledge the genuineness of his apostleship and what, under God, has been achieved by him among them(3:1-3; 12:11-13)

The letter ends on a tone of strength and confidence, evidence perhaps of Paul's God given resilience.

WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN THE RECEPTION OF THE LETTER OF 1 CORINTHIANS AND THE REASON TO WRITE 2 CORINTHIANS?

1. Residual Cultural Problems:

1 Corinthians was written about two years earlier than 2 Corinthians.

Those who did not accept Paul's apostolic authority prior to 1 Corinthians appear to have refused the truth of 1 Cor.

Cephas (Peter) was attractive to Jewish members as he was a Palestinian Jew who had been a leading disciple among the original follower of Jesus.

Apollos attracted those of Greek heritage as he was an Alexandrian Jew with the education offered in that culture (Intellectualism and Sophistication).

Note: Sophist = a paid teacher of philosophy and rhetoric in ancient Greece, associated in popular thought with moral skepticism and specious reasoning.

Paul, who worked with his hands (tent maker)(blue collar) could he have had amateurish speaking abilities? He would not accept any financial support from the Corinthians for himself but he did accept \$ support from believers' in Macedonia (rural area). Paul insisted on disciplinary action against wayward members. Admonished against idolatry and immorality.

These problems went unresolved for some...they did not want to repent.

2. The arrival of certain Jewish 'ministers' or 'apostles' (self imposed titles 11:13,23) Their desire was to persuade the Corinthian church that Paul's theology was in error or lacking and that the covenant with Moses was still in force. They used mystical techniques and subscribed to paranormal actions (they said that Paul lacked these and that proves he is not a real Apostle). These false prophets were readily embraced as their rhetoric was superb (10:7-11).

Paul was educated in and wrote Greek with superior flair, but did he speak it that way? Was his physical appearance considered inferior compared to the Grecian love for physical 'godlike' perfection?

In **Acts 21:20-25** Paul is castigated for: Telling Jews to abandon Moses...to abandon the circumcision of their children and their Jewish customs, and he did not impose the Jerusalem decree requiring Gentiles to desist from idol-sacrificed meat and eat only kosher-butchered meat.

Paul was personally and morally deficient.

Paul uses chapter 1-2 setting up the upcoming 3rd and last visit he will make to Corinth.

Paul spend chapters 3-6 dealing with this different gospel.

And chapters 10-13 dealing with their assault on his character.

The assault these false prophets through at Paul, and indirectly the burgeoning Church at Corinth, could have easily resulted in the end of the Corinthian church. It is believed Paul's anointed and raw response was a major contributor to the Church in Corinth surviving.

Paul never names or identifies the wrongdoer, injured party (7:12).

He does not name the unnamed critic (10:7-11). Nor the newly arrived 'apostles' (11:13).

[IVP The Bible Speaks Today by Paul Barnett]

2 Corinthians 6:5-7 English Standard Version (ESV)

⁵ ω beatings, imprisonments, ω riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶ ω by purity, ω knowledge, patience, kindness, ω the Holy Spirit, ω genuine love; ⁷ by ω truthful speech, and ω the power of God; with ω the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left;

Book of 2 Corinthians

Author: 2 Corinthians 1:1 identifies the author of the Book of 2 Corinthians as the apostle Paul, possibly along with Timothy.

Date of Writing: The Book of 2 Corinthians was very likely written approximately A.D. 55–57.

Purpose of Writing: The church in Corinth began in A.D. 52 when Paul visited there on his second missionary journey. It was then that he stayed one and a half years, the first time he was allowed to stay in one place as long as he wished. A record of this visit and the establishment of the church is found in Acts 18:1–18.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul expresses his relief and joy that the Corinthians had received his "severe" letter (now lost) in a positive manner. That letter addressed issues that were tearing the church apart, primarily the arrival of self-styled (false) apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13) who were assaulting Paul's character, sowing discord among the believers, and teaching false doctrine. They appear to have questioned his veracity (2 Corinthians 1:15–17), his speaking ability (2 Corinthians 10:10; 11:6), and his unwillingness to accept support from the church at Corinth (2 Corinthians 11:7–9; 12:13). There were also some people who had not repented of their licentious behavior (2 Corinthians 12:20–21).

Positively, Paul found the Corinthians had well received his "severe" letter. Paul was overjoyed to learn from Titus that the majority of Corinthians repented of their rebellion against Paul (2 Corinthians 2:12–13; 7:5–9). The apostle encourages them for this in an expression of his genuine love (2 Corinthians 7:3–16). Paul also sought to vindicate his apostleship, as some in the church had likely questioned his authority (2 Corinthians 13:3).

Key Verses: 2 Corinthians 3:5: "Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God."

2 Corinthians 3:18: “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

2 Corinthians 5:21: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

2 Corinthians 10:5: “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

2 Corinthians 13:4: “For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God’s power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God’s power we will live with him to serve you.”

Brief Summary: After greeting the believers in the church at Corinth and explaining why he had not visited them as originally planned (vv. 1:3–2:2), Paul explains the nature of his ministry. Triumph through Christ and sincerity in the sight of God were the hallmarks of his ministry to the churches (2:14–17). He compares the glorious ministry of the righteousness of Christ to the “ministry of condemnation” which is the Law (v. 3:9) and declares his faith in the validity of his ministry in spite of intense persecution (4:8–18). Chapter 5 outlines the basis of the Christian faith—the new nature (v. 17) and the exchange of our sin for the righteousness of Christ (v. 21).

Chapters 6 and 7 find Paul defending himself and his ministry, assuring the Corinthians yet again of his sincere love for them and exhorting them to repentance and holy living. In chapters 8 and 9, Paul exhorts the believers at Corinth to follow the examples of the brothers in Macedonia and extend generosity to the saints in need. He teaches them the principles and rewards of gracious giving.

Paul ends his letter by reiterating his authority among them (chapter 10) and concern for their faithfulness to him in the face of fierce opposition from false apostles. He calls himself a “fool” for having to reluctantly boast of his qualifications and his suffering for Christ (chapter 11). He ends his epistle by describing the vision of heaven he was allowed to experience and the “thorn in the flesh” he was given by God to ensure his humility (chapter 12). The last chapter contains his exhortation to the Corinthians to examine themselves to see whether what they profess is reality, and ends with a benediction of love and peace.

Connections: Throughout his epistles, Paul frequently refers to the Mosaic law, comparing it with the surpassing greatness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and salvation by grace. In 2 Corinthians 3:4–11, Paul contrasts the Old Testament law with the new covenant of grace, referring to the law as that which “kills” while the Spirit gives life. The law is the “ministry of death, written and engraved on stone” (v. 7; Exodus 24:12) because it brings only the knowledge of sin and its condemnation. The glory the law is that it reflects the glory of God, but the ministry of the Spirit is much more glorious than the ministry of the law, because it reflects His mercy, grace and love in providing Christ as the fulfillment of the law.

Practical Application: This letter is the most biographical and least doctrinal of Paul’s epistles. It tells us more about Paul as a person and as a minister than any of the others. That being said,

there are a few things we can take from this letter and apply to our lives today. One thing is stewardship, not only of money, but of time as well. The Macedonians not only gave generously, but “they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will” (2 Corinthians 8:5). In the same way, we should dedicate not only all we have to the Lord, but all that we are. He really doesn’t need our money. He is omnipotent! He wants the heart, one that longs to serve and please and love. Stewardship and giving to God is more than just money. Yes, God does want us to tithe part of our income, and He promises to bless us when we give to Him. There is more though. God wants 100%. He wants us to give Him our all. Everything we are. We should spend our lives living to serve our Father. We should not only give to God from our paycheck, but our very lives should be a reflection of Him. We should give ourselves first to the Lord, then to the church and the work of the ministry of Jesus Christ.¹

2 Corinthians 2:5

2:5-11 ACCOUNTABILITY

The discipline of a Corinthian believer (2 Cor. 2:6) points to one of the important functions of the body of Christ—to hold its members accountable for how they conduct their lives. In the case mentioned here, the censure of the church caused the offender to repent and change his ways, restoring his spiritual life and bringing joy to the church.

Accountability is easy to talk about but difficult to practice. No one likes to be judged by others. In modern society it’s especially easy to feel that one’s personal life is no one else’s business. But a study of Scripture reveals a number of important principles about accountability:

(1) As believers, we are accountable not only for our actions, but also for our attitudes. In the performance-oriented work world, evaluations tend to measure results alone—higher sales, greater cost control, more clients served. Everything is quantitative. But God is interested in our innermost heart. He looks at the quality of our character. As God told Samuel, “The Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7).

(2) Accountability depends on trust. To hold ourselves accountable to others is to trust their judgment and to believe that they are committed to the same truths and values that we are. It also helps if we can sense that they have our best interests at heart. That’s why Paul pleaded with the Corinthians to forsake their divisions and

¹ Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). [Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered](#). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

“be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10). Without that unity, they would never submit to each other.

(3) Accountability is directly related to the principle of submission. Every person must struggle with the natural tendency toward rebellion against God. Accountability involves allowing others to enter into that struggle with us. But that means that sometimes we must defer to the judgment or counsel of another, especially when they challenge us with clear-cut Scriptural truth or the wisdom of personal experience. Paul told the Ephesians that part of living in the will of the Lord involves “submitting to one another in the fear of God” (Eph. 5:21).

It’s not surprising that participation in the body of Christ would involve accountability, because all of us experience accountability in many other areas of life. For example, the government holds us accountable for obeying the law and paying taxes. Likewise, government officials are accountable to the public for their decisions. Employees are accountable to the boss for their work. Likewise, corporate officers are accountable to stockholders for quarterly financial results. In short, accountability touches us at home, at work, at church, and even at play.

But our attitudes toward accountability in general ultimately reflect our attitude toward accountability to God. If we are rebellious toward the One who created us and loves us most, how able will we be to submit to others? ♦

2 Corinthians 5:10

5:10 THE JUDGMENT SEAT

Have you ever felt wronged and had someone say, “Don’t worry, you’ll have your day in court”? All of us will eventually have our “day in court” before God when we stand before the judgment seat (be-ma) of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).

Paul’s Corinthian readers must have been quite familiar with the *beῦμα*. As in most cities of Greece, a large, richly decorated rostrum called the *beῦμα* stood in the middle of the marketplace at Corinth. It was used by the officials for purposes of public proclamations, commendations, and condemnations.

Paul himself had been brought to the Corinthian *beuma* by Jews who opposed his message. The case was heard by Gallio, the Roman proconsul (governor) of the region, who dismissed the complaint (Acts 18:12–17).

But the *beuma* was used for more than just tribunals. It was at the *beuma* that winners of Corinth's prestigious athletic contests were announced (see "The Games" at 1 Cor. 9:24–27). Thus, Paul's statement that believers will appear before the *beuma* of Christ is as much a cause for joy and hope as it is for fear.

One thing is certain: the judgment rendered at the *beuma* will be fair, for Christ will be the Judge, and He Himself once stood before Pilate's *beuma* (Matt. 27:19; John 19:10). He knows what it feels like to have one's life weighed in the balance.

However, the Lord will not be deciding the eternal fate of believers as He sits on His *beuma*; that was settled at the moment of salvation (5:24). Instead, the *beuma* of Christ will be our chance as believers to look at our lives according to Christ's perfect assessment. It will be the ultimate opportunity to experience honest evaluation and true justice as we stand before Him.

What will Christ say of you? Are you paying attention to your "deeds done in the body" in light of this moment of accountability? Are you striving to earn the Lord's praise in every area of life? ♦

2 Corinthians 9:6

REAPING THE BENEFITS

9:6–8 Paul wanted the Corinthians to give generously toward a fund-raising project to help needy Christians. He linked generosity with spiritual benefits: the more one gives, the more one benefits (2 Cor. 9:6–11).

This principle goes beyond financial giving. At work, for example, you may donate toward the local United Way. But when a coworker asks for some of your time to talk about a problem, what is your response? Do you give your attention generously or grudgingly? When your boss gives you a special assignment, do you give the project just enough attention to get it over with, or do you jump in wholeheartedly with energy and creativity?

What about your time and emotional energy after hours? When your spouse or children need you, do you make yourself available generously or grudgingly? Do you give a fair contribution of yourself to assignments that you've volunteered for, or just a token effort?

We are constant recipients of God's generous grace. He promises that if we will give of ourselves, He'll enable us to have an abundance of resources for the work to which He has called us (9:8).

Giving generously in order to gain spiritual benefits does not mean that God rewards godliness with material blessings. See “The Dangers of Prosperity Theology” at 1 Tim. 6:3–6.

2 Corinthians 10:1

10:1 INTEGRITY IN THE FACE OF COMPETITION

When you face a competitive situation, are you tempted to do whatever it takes to win? Paul faced severe competition at Corinth. In chapters 10–12, he described real danger to his work in Corinth:

- Opposing leaders and teachers were making headway. Paul’s people were tempted to cross over to them (2 Cor. 10:15; 11:3–4, 12–15).
- Paul felt the pain of this loss very deeply (10:2–3; 11:2–3, 29).
- He felt threatened (10:8–11, 13–15; 11:5–6, 16–21).
- He loved the Corinthians and feared losing them so much that he became angry (11:11–15).
- He defended himself as a faithful servant who had suffered for the Corinthians and the gospel (10:13–18; 11:20–30; 12:11).

As Paul wrestled with mixed feelings and sketchy information, he dealt in known principles of godliness and clear communication:

- Paul was passionate about the problem. He wrote to the Corinthians extensively (see the Introduction to 1 and 2 Corinthians).
- He tried to visit Corinth to discuss matters openly (2 Cor. 10:2, 11; 12:14; 13:1).
- He encouraged the Corinthians to test his prior works among them if they questioned his loyalty and integrity (10:13, 15; 11:22–27). It’s interesting that he felt awkward in this self-defense (11:21, 23; 12:7–10).
- He gave a clear statement of the finances involved in his previous work in Corinth (11:7–9; 1 Cor. 16:1–4, 16).
- He appealed for negotiations in a way that would honor Christ and not duplicate the world’s methods (2 Cor. 10:3–4; 13:8–10).
- He urged in-depth analysis of the situation (10:7; 13:1, 5, 8).

Paul faced a real temptation to resort to any means not to lose his converts in Corinth. As readers we can feel the tension in these letters. But Paul waged spiritual warfare within himself first so that he could rise above vicious, underhanded



solutions. He kept the big picture, avoiding short-term gains in order to live with long-term, Christlike values. ♦

2 Corinthians 13:10

SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

13:10 If you exercise leadership among other believers, you'll want to carefully study Paul's comment about his authority (2 Cor. 13:10). Like many of us, Paul liked to be in charge, and he felt frustrated when people failed to follow his lead, as the Corinthians had. As an apostle, he had spiritual authority over them, which at times led him to deal severely with them (1 Cor. 4:21; 5:5; compare Titus 1:13).

But it's important to notice how Paul exercised his authority, especially as he grew older in the faith. He didn't lord it over others or try to use his authority to personal advantage. Nor did he abuse his power by using it to work out his own anger. Instead, he recognized that spiritual authority is given "for edification and not for destruction" (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10), for building others up, not for tearing them down.

Is that how you use your position and authority? Do you exercise leadership in order to accomplish the best interests of those who follow you? As they carry out your directives, are they built up in Christ, or torn down?

Paul's method of leadership reflected a unique style of authority that Jesus encouraged. See "Servant-Leaders" at Matt. 20:25–28.²

The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the CORINTHIANS

Author: Paul

Date: A.D. 55–56

Theme: Powerful Ministry Through Weak Vessels

Key Words: Comfort, Suffering, Ministry, Glory, Power, Weakness

² [*Word in life study Bible*](#). (1996). (electronic ed., 2 Co 2:5–1 Ti 5:3). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

Background and Date. In various ways 2 Corinthians reflects Paul's dealings with the church in Corinth during the period from the founding of the church in about A.D. 50 until the writing of this letter in A.D. 55 or 56. The various episodes in the interactions between Paul and the Corinthians can be summarized as follows:

1. The *founding visit* to Corinth lasted about eighteen months (see Acts 18).
2. Paul wrote an *earlier letter* than 1 Corinthians (see 1 Cor. 5:9).
3. Paul wrote *1 Corinthians* from Ephesus, about A.D. 55.
4. A brief but *painful visit* to Corinth caused "sorrow" for Paul and the church (see 2 Cor. 2:1; 13:2).
5. Following the painful visit, Paul wrote a *severe letter*, delivered by Titus (see 2 Cor. 2:4; 7:6–8).
6. Paul wrote *2 Corinthians* from Macedonia, while on his way to Corinth again, in A.D. 55 or 56.
7. Paul's *final visit* to Corinth (Acts 20) was probably when he wrote Romans, just before returning to Jerusalem. The *painful visit*, which Acts does not record, and the *severe letter* provide immediate background for the writing of 2 Corinthians.

We do not possess the *severe letter*, although some scholars have suggested that 2 Corinthians 10–13 may have been part of that epistle. There is no manuscript evidence to support this view, however.

Occasion and Purpose. First Corinthians was not as effective as Paul had hoped in settling the crisis at Corinth. The party opposing Paul gained strength, and its leader was particularly obnoxious to him (2:5–11; 10:7–12). Paul hurriedly traveled to Corinth from Ephesus in an attempt to meet the situation. Although this visit is not mentioned in Acts, it is implied in 2 Corinthians 12:14. Paul failed to achieve his desired objective (2:1; 12:14, 21; 13:1, 2), and experienced open hostility from the leader of the opposition (2:5–8; 7:12). Paul then returned to Ephesus, where he wrote a severe letter to the Corinthians, putting into it the full weight of his apostolic authority. He sent the letter by Titus, and then made his way to Macedonia, where Titus met him with an encouraging report (2:12, 13; 7:6–16). The majority had been won back to Paul and had taken disciplinary action against the offender (2:5–11). However, there was still a rebellious minority (chs. 10–13). Paul wrote to express a message of conciliation to the loyal majority and to rebuke the rebellious minority. He also gave instructions concerning the offering he was collecting for the impoverished church in Jerusalem.

Characteristics. Second Corinthians is the most autobiographical of Paul's letters, containing numerous references to the hardships he endured in the course of his ministry (see 11:23–33). Paul mentioned these to establish the legitimacy of his ministry and to illustrate the nature of true spirituality.

In defending his ministry, Paul opens his heart, showing his deep emotion. He reveals his strong love for the Corinthians, his ardent zeal for the glory of God, his uncompromising loyalty to the truth of the gospel, and his stern indignation in confronting those who disrupt the fellowship of the church. His life was bound up in the life of his converts, and he was not coldly professional in his ministry (see 1:6; 5:13; 7:3–7; 11:2; 12:14, 15).

Content. Second Corinthians consists of three main parts. The first seven chapters contain Paul's defense of his conduct and his ministry. He explains the change in his plans to visit Corinth and responds to a charge of fickleness. In discussing the Christian ministry, he expounds on its nature, its problems, its motivating principles, and its responsibilities.

The second unit, chapters 8 and 9, deals with the offering being raised by Paul for the poor saints in Judea. Paul urged the Corinthians to be liberal and cheerful in giving so that God might bless them in every way.

Chapters 10 through 13 form the third segment of the letter and contain a message of rebuke to the remaining detractors in the church. Paul responds to the jibes and slanders of his critics and fully vindicates his authority as an apostle.

Personal Application. Second Corinthians is a valuable guide in examining our own motives for serving the Lord, whether as lay people or as ordained pastors and evangelists. As an instrument of the Holy Spirit, this letter can refine our motives until we reflect the kind of selfless giving best exemplified in Christ, but also found in His servant Paul. The instructions concerning the collection for Jerusalem (chs. 8 and 9) emphasize generosity in the area of financial resources, just as Paul emphasized generosity in self-giving throughout the book.

Christ Revealed. Jesus Christ is the focus of our relationship with God. All God's promises to us are Yes in Jesus, and we say "Amen" to God's promises in Jesus (1:19, 20). Jesus is God's Yes to us and our Yes to God. Only in Christ do we see the glory of God, and only in Him are we transformed by that glory (3:14, 18), for Christ is the very image of God (4:4–6). God came to us in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself (5:19). Thus, it is "in Christ" that we have become new creatures (5:17). This change was accomplished through the marvelous act of God's grace in which Christ, "who knew no sin," became "sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (5:21).

Jesus is also the focus of our service to God. We proclaim Jesus as Lord and ourselves as servants for His sake (4:5). We willingly share not only Christ's life and glory but also His dying (4:10–12), His willingness to be weak so that others might experience the power of God (13:3, 4, 9), and His willingness to be impoverished so that others might be enriched (8:9). We experience His weakness but also His strength as we seek to bring "every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (10:5).

Again, Jesus is the focus of our present life in this world, where we simultaneously experience in our mortal bodies both "the dying of the Lord Jesus" and His life (4:10, 11).

Finally, Jesus is the focus of our future life, for we will be raised up with Jesus (4:14), who is the “betrothed ... husband” of the church (11:2) and the judge of all men (5:10).

The Holy Spirit at Work. The Holy Spirit is the power of the New Covenant (3:6), because He makes real to us the present and future provisions of our salvation in Christ. By the gift of “the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee,” we are assured that all God’s promises are Yes in Christ, and that we are anointed and “sealed” as belonging to Him (1:20–22). The present experience of the Spirit is specifically “a guarantee” of the glorified bodies we will one day receive (5:1–5).

We do not merely read about the will of God in the “letter” of Scripture, for “the letter alone kills.” The Spirit who gives life (3:6) changes our way of living by opening our eyes to the living reality of what we read. Thus, we progressively experience and embody the will of God, and we ourselves become epistles of Christ, “known and read by all men” (3:2).

When we submit ourselves to the work of the Spirit, we experience a miracle. We find that “where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty” (3:17). There is liberty to behold the unveiled glory of the Lord and to be changed more and more into the likeness of what we behold. The Holy Spirit gives us freedom to see and freedom to be what God wants us to be (3:16–18).

The work of the Holy Spirit is evident in daily inward renewal (4:16), spiritual warfare (10:3–5), and the “signs and wonders and mighty deeds” of Paul’s ministry in Corinth (12:12). Paul ended his letter with a blessing, which included “the communion (fellowship) of the Holy Spirit” (13:14). This could indicate a sense of the Spirit’s presence or, more likely, an enjoyment of the fellowship the Spirit gives us with Christ and with all people who love Christ.

Outline of 2 Corinthians

- I. Greeting 1:1, 2
- II. Explanation of Paul’s ministry 1:3–7:16
 - A. Comfort and suffering 1:3–11
 - B. Changes in plans 1:2–2:4
 - C. Forgiving the offender 2:5–11
 - D. Distraction in Troas 2:12, 13
 - E. Nature of Christian ministry 2:4–7:4
 - 1. Life and death issues 2:14–17
 - 2. Living letters of commendation 3:1–3
 - 3. Sufficiency from God 3:4–6
 - 4. Unveiled in the New Covenant 3:7–18
 - 5. Integrity and openness 4:1–6
 - 6. Dying and living with Jesus 4:7–15
 - 7. Eternal perspective 4:6–5:11

- 8. Reconciled and reconciling 5:2–6:2
 - 9. Paying the price to minister 6:3–10
 - 10. Heartfelt appeal for holiness 6:1–7:4
 - F. Rejoicing over the report from Corinth 7:5–16
 - III. Generosity in giving 8:1–9:15
 - A. Macedonians and Jesus as examples 8:1–9
 - B. Fulfilling good intentions 8:10–12
 - C. Sharing resources 8:13–15
 - D. A trustworthy delegation 8:16–24
 - E. Timely preparation of the gift 9:1–5
 - F. Blessings of giving 9:6–15
 - IV. Defense and use of apostolic authority 10:1–13:10
 - A. Rebuke of superficial assessment 10:1–11
 - B. Rebuke of foolish comparisons 10:12–18
 - C. Godly jealousy for the church 11:1–4
 - D. Comparison with false apostles 11:5–15
 - E. Corinthians' misguided tolerance 11:16–21
 - F. Paul's reluctant boasting 11:2–12:13
 - G. Announcement of third visit 12:4–13:10
 - 1. Integrity of Paul's motives 12:14–19
 - 2. Warning to remaining rebels 12:0–13:4
 - 3. Call to self-examination 13:5–10
 - V. Concluding greetings 13:11–14
- 1:4** For some of Paul's troubles, see 11:23-33.
- 1:8** We means Paul himself here and in most contexts of the epistle. **Trouble:** Possibly severe illness or persecution. **Asia:** Not the continent but a province of the Roman Empire, in the western part of modern Turkey. **So great a death:** Such a great danger that, humanly speaking, there was no hope of surviving.
- 1:12** See section 2 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 2 Cor.
- 1:12** Simplicity is the opposite of duplicity or deviousness, with which some of Paul's critics had accused him. **More abundantly:** Especially.
- 1:13** To the end: Fully, in contrast to **in part**.

1:15 Paul defends his change in plans. First, he had planned to visit Macedonia, then Corinth (1 Cor. 16:5). Then he decided to visit Corinth before and after the trip to Macedonia (v. 16), with the hope of blessing the Corinthians twice (v. 15). Apparently his recent painful visit to Corinth had prompted him to return to Ephesus rather than proceeding immediately to Macedonia. Now he has gone to Macedonia and is on his way to Corinth again. (See Introduction to 2 Corinthians: Background and Date.)

1:17 The rhetorical form of Paul's questions expects an answer of "No, of course not." He had not been vacillating and frivolously changing his plans, saying **Yes** and **No**. His words and his ministry have reflected the faithfulness and consistency of God.

1:19 Silvanus: Silas (see Acts 18:5). Christ is the positive and completely consistent living Word from God; likewise, Paul's ministry has been consistent. His travel plans may change, but only because of his constant commitment to the unchanging gospel. Christ is the fulfiller and fulfillment of **all the promises of God** because He is their sum and substance. Through Jesus, believers say **Amen** ("Yes, so be it") in response to God.

1:21 Sealed us: God has marked us as belonging to Him. The Holy **Spirit** Himself serves as **guarantee** (Greek *arrabon*, "pledge," "deposit") of God's commitment to complete His work in us (see 5:5; Eph. 1:13, 14; also Rom. 8:23), thus confirming the Yes that is in Jesus (v. 20).

1:23 Paul delayed his proposed visit to Corinth out of consideration for the church. He cannot be **glad** as long as they remain **sorrowful**.

2:3 Wrote: The previous *severe letter* (or "tearful letter") written as a follow-up to the *painful visit*. Some identify 1 Cor. as the *severe letter*, but it does not seem to fit that description. Others suggest that 2 Cor. 10-13 fits that description, but no manuscript evidence supports the separation of those chapters from the rest of the epistle.

WORD WEALTH

2:4 **abundantly**, *perissoteros* (per-is-sot-er-occe); Strong's #4056: The adverbial form of a comparative adjective, suggesting something done or possessed in a greater degree, excessively, with superfluity.

2:5 The conflict that caused the *painful visit* and the *severe letter* involved a challenge to Paul's authority as an apostle. The *severe letter* achieved a degree of correction. The rebel who **caused grief**, not merely for Paul, but for the entire church **to some extent**, had been repudiated **by the majority** (see 7:6-13). With their cooperation, Paul is ready **to forgive and comfort** the offender. To continue to punish him (after he has repented) would damage not only him but the church and Paul's own work, because it would allow **Satan to take advantage** of the discord in the church. The traditional identification of the offending person with the

incestuous man in 1 Cor. 5:1-5 is possible, but the offense here seems to have been directed particularly at Paul with the charge being grievous, rude conduct, not immorality.

2:9 See section 2 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 2 Cor.

2:12 Troas was a coastal city in Asia Minor (Acts 16:8, 9).

2:14 See section 1 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 2 Cor.

2:14 Paul begins a long digression on the nature of Christian ministry, not returning to the subject of Titus' report until 7:5. Perhaps in response to that good report (7:5-16), Paul abruptly gives praise to God. Although he left Troas in anxiety, he now saw his experience as just one more step in a continuous triumphal procession to the glory of Christ.

The Roman **triumph** was a victory parade for a conquering army and its leader. Both victors and captives were part of the procession, and both groups could smell the fragrance of burning spices which accompanied the parade. The **aroma**, however, meant something different to the two groups. Likewise, the **fragrance of Christ** (the gospel) is to **those who are perishing** an **aroma of death leading to death**, for it signifies and leads to their ultimate judgment. **Those who are being saved** find the **knowledge** of Christ to be an **aroma of life leading to life**, for it signifies life now and leads to life eternal. For Christians to have such significance for the eternal destinies of others is a serious matter, prompting Paul's question in v. 16 (answered in 3:5). **Sufficient:** Worthy, qualified, or capable.

2:17 Peddling the word of God: Teaching it only as a way of making money, without understanding the seriousness of the responsibility.

3:1 You are our epistle: Unlike the intruders trying to discredit Paul and elevate themselves, Paul did not need a letter of introduction and recommendation. His legitimacy as a minister of the gospel was proved by their changed lives.

3:2 See section 5 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 2 Cor.

3:4 Paul's **trust** is not self-confidence but confidence in the **sufficiency** (see 2:16) of God's Spirit, who empowers life and ministry in the reality of the **new covenant**. **The letter kills** means that the external code of the Old Covenant produces spiritual death, because the law shows us our need but is powerless to meet the need (Rom. 7:7). Only **the Spirit gives life**. The advantage of the New Covenant is that it is an inward power bearing the Spirit of God Himself, enabling us to keep God's law. See Jer. 31:33; Rom. 8; Heb. 8:6-13.

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

3:5 The Way God's Word Is to Be Ministered, THE WORD OF GOD. Believing in the truthfulness of God's Word does not guarantee that we will minister that truth in the Spirit of God. Eph. 4:15 describes growth and maturity in the body of Christ as being related to our "speaking the truth in love." In the words of 2 Cor. 3:6, the apostle Paul warns of the danger of God's Word being ministered literally but not life-givingly. We

need not wonder if this is possible, since the Spirit of Truth (1 John 4:6) and the Spirit of Life (Rom. 8:2) are the same—the Holy Spirit! Blending both will always reveal three things: 1) A faithfulness to “keep straight” (2 Tim. 2:15). “Rightly dividing the word of truth” means putting forward the truth, faithfully and forthrightly. (This verse was never intended to refer to “dividing” the Word by segmenting it, but rather to a straightforward dealing with all the truth and all its implications.) 2) A constant presence of love, even in the most demanding declarations of correction or judgment. In the texts above (2 Cor. 3:6; Eph. 4:15) we have already discussed this, but human tendencies need this reminder. Urgency may attend our message and passion infuse our delivery; but anger, impatience, and irritation are not of the life-giving Spirit, however literally accurate the interpretation of the Bible or preaching thereof may be. 3) An expectation of signs to follow the preaching of God’s Word. Jesus promised this, and the early church tasted its beginnings (Mark 16:15-20); Paul described it as normative in his ministry (1 Cor. 2:1-5; 1 Thess. 1:5); and the Book of Hebrews endorsed this as a part of the “so great salvation” we have been provided (Heb. 2:1-4). This last reference shows that the confirmation of God’s Word with signs and wonders not only is to verify Christ’s living presence where His gospel is preached, but also is to warn us against drifting from the new life to which we have all been called.

3:5 See section 6 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 2 Cor.

3:7 The ministry of death refers to the dispensation of the OT, which was based on a covenant **engraved on stones** and not on hearts (v. 3) and which brought **condemnation** (v. 9). Nevertheless the giving of that covenant was accompanied by great **glory** because it was God’s Word. **Moses**, as minister of that covenant, reflected its glory (see Ex. 34:29-35). Only in comparison to the New Covenant can the Old Covenant be said to have **no glory**.

3:12 Confident **hope** in the lasting glory of the New Covenant makes bold speech appropriate. In contrast, **Moses** wore a **veil** to obscure the temporary nature of the glory on his face.

3:14 Moses’ literal veil illustrates the spiritual **veil** which prevents some who read the OT from seeing the true glory of God’s Word, which is **Christ** (see 4:6).

3:16 Whenever Moses left the people to go into the presence of the **Lord**, he removed his **veil** (see Ex. 34:34). Likewise, under the New Covenant to turn to the Lord is to be open to the **Spirit**, who gives the **liberty** of unveiled access to God in Christ (see v. 14).

3:17 See section 5 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 2 Cor.

3:18 Beholding as in a mirror connotes “reflecting” as well as “looking into.” As we behold **the glory of the Lord**, we are continually **transformed into the same image** by **the Spirit of the Lord**. We then, with ever-increasing glory, reflect what we behold.

4:1 See section 6 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 2 Cor.

4:1 Therefore: An important connecting word. The transcendent glory of the ministry of the New Covenant (ch. 3) provides a basis for courage to be completely honest.

4:2 Commending: Honest behavior is Paul's "letter of recommendation," along with the reality of the Corinthians' faith (see 3:1-3).

4:4 Satan, **the god of this age** (see John 12:31), blinds the **minds** of people, but they choose not to **believe**, resulting in their inability to see **the glory of Christ**.

WORD WEALTH

4:7 **excellence**, *hyperbole* (hoop-er-bol-ay); Strong's #5236: From *hyper*, "beyond," and *ballo*, "to throw"; hence, a throwing beyond. The primary idea is that of excellence, superiority, excess, preeminence.

4:7 See section 6 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 2 Cor.

4:7 Treasure: The knowledge of God in the face of Christ. **Earthen vessels** are weak and fragile. This verse is virtually thematic for the entire letter, expressing the paradox of how weak human beings can be the instruments of the **power** of God (see 12:9, 10).

4:8 The providential hand of God was controlling Paul's persecutions, keeping them within manageable proportions.

4:10 Paul enlarges the theme of power through weakness (v. 7) to include life through death. Paul's missionary career was dangerous, and at any time he might suffer martyrdom. As he endured hardships and surrendered himself to the possibility of death, he was following the pattern of Jesus (see 1 Cor. 15:31; Gal. 6:17). However, in the midst of his perils he could experience **the life of Jesus**, strengthening and sustaining him in his present weakness and assuring him of future resurrection.

4:12 Paul was willing to suffer hardship or martyrdom so that the Corinthians could know the power of God.

4:16 See section 3 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 2 Cor.

4:16 Not lose heart: Because of faith in the future resurrection (v. 14) and because of the present experience of God's renewing power, Paul continues to preach with courage and determination (see v. 1).

4:17 Paul's hardships can be termed **light affliction** (see 11:23-29) only in comparison with the future **eternal weight of glory** (see Rom. 8:18).

4:18 Do not look does not mean "ignore," but "do not keep looking at, or gazing at." Paul recognizes that the outward man is perishing (v. 16), but by faith he sees more than the

outward and more than the present. We must clearly see **temporary** things in light of the **eternal** (see v. 17; Heb. 11:1).

5:1 The present **earthly** body is like a fragile **tent** in contrast to the future body, which is called **a building**.

5:2 Groan: A sigh of frustration with bodily limitations that simultaneously expresses hope. See 4:16; Rom. 8:22, 23. **Clothed**: With the new body. Paul changes imagery from a building (v. 1) to clothing (see 1 Cor. 15:53, 54).

5:3 Naked: A spirit or soul without a body. Ancient Greeks often spoke of the body as a *tomb*; Paul said it is a “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19). Thus, he did not desire an escape from the body at death, but rather desired its renewal (1 Cor. 15:35-55).

5:5 This very thing: The renewed body for which we long. Our present experience of renewed life by God’s **Spirit** is **a guarantee** (Greek *arrabon*, “pledge,” “deposit”) that He will perfect what He has begun. See note on 1:21, 22; see also Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14.

5:6 Absent from the Lord: Christ is with us spiritually, but His physical absence means we do not perceive Him as clearly or as fully as we will in the future. See Phil. 1:23; Col. 3:3, 4; 1 John 3:2.

5:7 See section 3 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 2 Cor.

5:8 To be present with the Lord is better than our present condition, even if it means to be **absent from the body** between death and the day of our resurrection (see note on v. 6). This text conclusively disproves any notion that the believer experiences any lapse between death and his presence with Christ.

5:9 Therefore: Paul’s conclusion is that in view of the confident expectation of seeing Christ (v. 8) and our hope for the resurrection (vv. 5, 6) he desires **to be well pleasing to Him**. This holds true whether he is **present or absent**, that is, in the body or out (v. 6).

5:10 See section 1 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 2 Cor.

5:10 For: Knowledge of a future accountability for our service is another reason to seek “to be well pleasing to Him” (v. 9).

5:11 The terror of the Lord (the appropriate reverential awe or fear of our Creator and Judge) strengthens our resolve to please Christ ourselves (vv. 9, 10) and motivates our attempts to **persuade** others to trust in Christ.

5:12 Opportunity to boast: Paul explains his motives to the Corinthians to give them an answer for his detractors, who are preoccupied with superficial judgment.

5:13 If his critics call him irrational (**beside ourselves**), Paul knows he is only trying to serve God. If, on the other hand, Paul is **of sound mind**, that also is for the benefit of others, specifically the Corinthians.

WORD WEALTH

5:14 compels, *sunecho* (soon-ekh-oh); Strong's #4912: From *sun*, "together," and *echo*, "to hold"; hence, "to hold together," or "to grip tightly." The word describes people who are afflicted with various diseases and pains (Luke 4:38) or paralyzed by fear (Luke 8:37), crowds hemming Christ in (Luke 8:45), an army surrounding Jerusalem (Luke 19:43), soldiers arresting Jesus and holding Him fast (Luke 22:63). In every use of the word, there is a sense of constraint, a tight grip that prevents an escape. The love of Christ leaves us no choice except to live our lives for Him.

5:14 The love of Christ: His love for us, which motivated Him to die for us. **Compels:** Constrains, confines, leaves no option. Christ died as the *substitute for all*; therefore, He died as the *representative* of all, and **all died** in Him. Although the pain of death was Christ's alone, the benefit of His death is given to those who trust Him. See Rom. 6:2-10; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:3.

5:15 See section 1 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 2 Cor.

5:16 According to the flesh suggests external evaluation viewed from an earthly perspective. Since his conversion, Paul no longer estimates a person according to worldly standards of judgment.

WORD WEALTH

5:17 new, *kainos* (kahee-noss); Strong's #2537: New, unused, fresh, novel. The word means new in regard to form or quality, rather than new in reference to time, a thought conveyed by *neos*.

5:17 In Christ: Paul's most characteristic expression of what it means to be a Christian. Christ's death and resurrection for us, and our identification with Him by faith, make existence as a **new creation** possible. At present this new creation is only partially experienced, but it is to be our focus as the completion of the re-creation is assured (see 4:16-5:5). Our relationship with Christ affects every aspect of life.

5:18 The ministry of reconciliation is to announce the message of what **God**, who **was in Christ**, has done to provide atonement for sin. Those already reconciled (v. 17) have the commission to bring that message to others. **Imputing:** In His grace, God has refused to reckon our **trespasses** against us.

5:21 This statement is the positive counterpart to the statement in v. 19 that God does not impute our trespasses to us. He imputed them instead to Christ, who was sinless in every

respect (see Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5). He bore our sins on the Cross and endured the penalty that we deserved, **that we might become the righteousness of God in Him**. See also Rom. 8:3, 4; 1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 3:13, 14.

6:1 In vain: It is possible to refuse or to miss the benefits of **the grace of God**.

6:2 Time: The Greek word *kairos* denotes an appointed time or “season,” rather than a certain length of time. The “right time” to receive God’s grace is **now** (see also Heb. 3:7-4:11).

6:3 Offense: Stumbling block. Paul sought diligently to be beyond reproach (see 4:2).

6:4 Paul’s “letter of recommendation” (see notes on 3:1-3; 4:2) is the price he has paid to be a minister of the gospel, what he has experienced (both good and bad), and the qualities he has demonstrated (regardless of what others have said about him). See also 11:23-33.

6:4 Some hardships are imposed by others; some are the results of disciplines freely chosen for the sake of the ministry.

6:7 Armor can also be translated “weapons” (see 10:4, where the same Greek word is used). See Eph. 6:13-17; 1 Thess. 5:8.

6:8 Not everyone in the church had a positive opinion of Paul. The faithful minister must not let either praise or unfair criticisms affect him too greatly.

6:9 Unknown perhaps refers to the disparagement of those who questioned Paul’s apostolic authority. The contrasts between **dying** and living, **chastened** and **not killed**, are based on Ps. 118:17, 18 (see 4:10-12).

6:10 The ministry sometimes gives cause to be **sorrowful** (as in Paul’s dealings with the Corinthians). Paul was, at least at times, quite literally **poor** (11:7-9, 27; 1 Cor. 4:11, 12; Phil. 4:11, 12). Yet his ministry enriched his hearers, as he followed the example of the Lord Himself (8:9). See 1 Cor. 3:21-23.

6:11 Restricted: The Corinthians have been less than completely forthright with Paul (see note on 6:14-7:1), while he has been very **open** in his words to them (see 2:17; 4:2; 5:11).

6:14 Paul appears to change subjects abruptly; but, in fact, he is simply repeating and emphasizing previous instructions to avoid all associations with idolatry and any compromising union with unbelievers (1 Cor. 10:1-11:1).

6:14 See section 2 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 2 Cor.

6:14 Unequally yoked refers both to Christians joining pagans in idolatrous practices (v. 16) and so closely yoking themselves (in any close relationship) with **unbelievers** that they compromise integrity of faith. His allusion is to Deut. 22:10. A warning against marriage to an unbeliever is obviously an appropriate application.

6:15 Belial, one of the many names for Satan, transliterates a Hebrew word meaning “worthlessness” or perhaps “lawlessness.”

6:16 To indulge in idolatrous practices is to defile God’s **temple** in a direct way, since Christians, collectively (1 Cor. 3:16, 17) and individually (1 Cor. 6:19), are temples of the Holy Spirit. **The living God**: A frequent OT description of God in comparison with dead idols.

6:17 Paul combines words from Is. 52:11 and 2 Sam. 7:14, which affirm God's desire for an exclusive, loving relationship with His people.

7:1 These promises that God will dwell among us, receive us, and be our Father (6:16-18) should motivate us to **holiness**, as should the proper **fear of God**. See 5:10, 11; 1 John 3:1-3.

7:2 Resuming the appeal begun in 6:13, Paul notes that **no one** in the Corinthian church has a just accusation against him.

7:5 After a long digression (since 2:13), Paul resumes the description of his travels and the acute anxiety he experienced while waiting to hear news from Corinth through Titus.

WORD WEALTH

7:6 downcast, *tapeinos* (tap-eye-noss); Strong's #5011: Literally "low to the ground." Metaphorically, the word signifies low estate, lowly in position and power, humble.

7:6 Titus brought the good news that the Corinthians had reconciled themselves to Paul and had responded to his *severe letter* with repentance and obedience, which brought him comfort (or encouragement) and joy.

7:8 I did regret it: Paul briefly felt pain in causing them **sorrow**, but the resulting **repentance**, with its lasting benefits, made the pain worthwhile. **Suffer loss from us**: Paul's letter had not hurt them but helped them.

7:10 Godly sorrow: Their response of turning toward God and **repentance** brought **salvation**, which would not be **regretted**.

7:11 The Corinthians' energetic response was gratifying to Paul. Its depth was characterized by **indignation** toward the offender and the offense, alarm over the problem (**fear**), longing or affection toward Paul (**vehement desire**), and readiness to see justice done (**vindication**). The church also took a stand against the rebel (see 2:9).

7:14 Not ashamed: That is, "You did not let me down."

7:15 Fear and trembling: They demonstrated respect and deference to the apostle's representative. See the same expression in 1 Cor. 2:3; Eph. 6:5; Phil. 2:12.

8:1 Paul turns to a project begun earlier to raise an offering from the churches he had founded to take to the church in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4; see also Rom. 15:25-27). **Macedonia** (northern Greece) and Achaia (where Corinth is located; 1:1; 9:2) were natural rivals. Paul mentions the Macedonians a number of times in these two chapters, knowing that the Corinthians would be spurred to action by the comparison. He appeals to this natural motivation but provides other reasons for giving as well (see 8:9, 14; 9:6-12).

8:2 Trial: The Macedonian churches had been persecuted since their founding. See Acts 16; 17; Phil. 1:28-30; 1 Thess. 1:6. They were also financially poor, yet they had great **joy** and **liberality** in giving.

8:3 Beyond **their ability**: Sacrificially.

8:4 Fellowship: They desired to share in financially **ministering** with the other contributing churches to **the saints** in Jerusalem.

8:5 First . . . to the Lord: A model for all Christian giving.

8:6 Paul was sending **Titus** back to Corinth, this time to deliver 2 Cor. and to resume supervision of the collection, which was to be completed before Paul's arrival (see 9:5).

8:7 To **abound in this grace** of giving is as important as the other areas in which the Corinthians had shown such zeal (see 1 Cor. 1:4-7).

8:8 Not by commandment: The gift must be voluntary (9:5-7).

WORD WEALTH

8:9 **became poor**, *ptochēuo* (pto-khyoo-oh); Strong's #4433: To be destitute, poor as a beggar, reduced to extreme poverty. The word suggests the bottom rung of poverty, a situation in which one is totally lacking in this world's goods.

8:9 The greatest and most inspiring example of generosity is **the grace of Jesus. He was rich**: Not a reference to Jesus' material wealth while on Earth, but a recognition of His eternal status as Lord of heaven and Earth. **He became poor** through the total giving of Himself in the Incarnation and the Crucifixion (see Phil. 2:5-8). **Through His poverty** refers to His self-giving.

8:10 Paul gives **advice** (or opinion) rather than a commandment (v. 8), to avoid any appearance of coercion. **A year ago**: The troubles between Paul and the Corinthian church had perhaps delayed this project.

8:12 A willing mind, a desire to give, is the key issue, not the amount given (see Luke 21:1-4).

8:14 Equality: The Corinthians had, at the present time, more resources than the Christians in Jerusalem and, Paul implies, more than the Macedonians who had already given so generously.

8:15 The manna in the wilderness (Ex. 16:18) had provided enough for everyone, a fact illustrating God's will for His people. Equal distribution of the supply, however, depends on giving by those with an abundance (v. 14).

8:16 Several unnamed people accompany Titus to Corinth and Paul gives his personal endorsement of them.

8:17 This refers to the present visit of Titus with 2 Cor., not to the previous visit with the *severe letter*.

8:18 Some have suggested that **the brother** was Luke, famous for his great knowledge of the **gospel**. Whoever he was, he was included in the delegation to provide additional assurance that the money collected would be handled properly (v. 20).

8:20 Again Paul shows his concern for **avoiding** unnecessary criticism (**blame**). **Providing honorable things**, that is, “taking into consideration what is right,” meant Paul’s sharing the administrative responsibilities for the collection with other trusted individuals. What **the Lord** knows is most important, but what **men** think cannot be recklessly ignored without endangering the effectiveness of the ministry (see 4:2; 6:3).

8:21 See section 1 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 2 Cor.

8:22 Paul mentions another unnamed **brother**, who would have been personally present at the first reading of this epistle.

9:3 The brethren are the delegation (8:16-24) sent to prepare the offering before Paul arrives.

9:6 Giving **bountifully** (literally “with blessings”) blesses both the recipients and those who give.

WORD WEALTH

9:7 cheerful, *hilaros* (hil-ar-oss); Strong’s #2431: Willing, good-natured, joyfully ready. The word describes a spirit of enjoyment in giving that sweeps away all restraints. The English word “hilarious” is a transliteration.

9:7 Of necessity: Under constraint, against one’s will.

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

9:8 Give What You Have in Your Hand to Give, SEED FAITH. Note especially these three things as you study this passage: First, God is the One who makes all grace abound toward you and provides you sufficiency in all things. All things beneficial for our lives come from God’s hands. Second, we are given sufficiency—even “bounty” so that we might do good works. We are blessed in order to be a blessing to others! (see Gen. 12:2). The word “sufficiency” means “self-satisfaction,” “contentedness,” or “competence”—earmarks of the believer whose life is truly blessed by these characteristics as God increases him (also see Gen. 12:2). And third, the God who gave you seed in the first place is the One who meets your basic needs, multiplies your seeds

sown into an abundance you can share with others, and increases you spiritually with love, joy, peace, and all of the other fruit of the Holy Spirit flowing freely in your life (“the fruits of your righteousness”).

How great is our God! We have no lack in Him—only potential!

9:8 All, always, and **every** are the emphases in this verse. God can meet their own needs (financial, spiritual, and so on) and increase their resources to meet the various needs of others.

9:9 Righteousness, an “act of righteousness or piety,” refers to the lasting results of generosity. See Ps. 112:9 in its context; also Matt. 6:1, where the same Greek word is translated “charitable deeds.”

9:12 Generous giving meets the material needs of others but also produces a spiritual result: **many thanksgivings to God.**

9:13 Proof of this ministry: The Corinthians’ **obedience** in contributing to the collection will be tangible evidence of the reality behind their **confession to the gospel of Christ.**

10:1 Paul’s tone changes dramatically as he returns to the subject of the challenges to his authority in Corinth. He answers a number of criticisms made against him and rebukes the impure motives of those who seek to undermine his ministry in order to win personal followings. Paul felt joy and encouragement over the response of the majority of the church (7:6-16), but he has stern words of warning to the minority which may still be in rebellion and under the sway of the intruding “false apostles” (11:13).

10:1 Paul’s critics accuse him of being too **lowly** (timid) to be a real apostle, although they admit that he writes **bold** letters (v. 10).

10:3 See section 5 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 2 Cor.

10:3 Walk in the flesh: Paul admits he is a mortal, living in the realities of the present world, but he does not **war** (fight) with mere human weapons.

10:4 Our warfare is not “against flesh and blood” (Eph. 6:12); therefore, **carnal** (weak, worldly) **weapons** will not do. We need weapons that are God-empowered (**mighty in God**). Their purpose is **for pulling down** (demolishing) **strongholds** (anything opposing God’s will). Here Paul refers specifically to warfare in the mind, against arrogant, rebellious ideas and attitudes (which he terms **arguments**), and against **every high thing** (pride) opposed to the true **knowledge of God**. The aim is to bring **every** disobedient **thought into . . . obedience** to Christ.

WORD WEALTH

10:5 **obedience**, *hupakoe* (hoop-ak-oh-ay); Strong’s #5218: From *hupo*, “under,” and *akouo*, “to hear.” The word signifies attentive hearing, to listen with compliant



submission, assent, and agreement. It is used for obedience in general, for obedience to God's commands, and for Christ's obedience.

10:6 Paul is **ready to punish** the rebels who continue to refuse to repent. First he must be assured of the **obedience** of the congregation as a whole.

10:8 Paul reluctantly boasts of his apostolic **authority** because it has been questioned by his detractors.

10:10 Weighty: Severe, burdensome. **His bodily presence is weak:** His personal presence is unimposing (see v. 2). **Contemptible:** Paul's speaking ability was ridiculed by those who prided themselves on eloquence according to the standards of Greek rhetorical style (see 1 Cor. 2:1-5).

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

10:15 The Continuing Call "Beyond," WORLD EVANGELISM. Paul's words of "having hope . . . to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you" reveal he was never content to keep the message within the Christian community. As John Wesley said, "The world is my parish." This text models the church's mandate to reach "beyond you." Christ's orders are clear: "Make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19); "preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15); "(preach) repentance and remission of sins" (Luke 24:47); and go "as the Father has sent Me" (John 20:21) "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). When the full command is obeyed, the full promise will be fulfilled.

10:17 See section 4 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 2 Cor.

11:1 Folly: Since self-commendation is pointless (10:18), Paul sees boasting about himself as foolish, yet necessary, in the present situation.

WORD WEALTH

11:2 jealousy, *zelos* (dzay-loss); Strong's #2205: The root of the English word "zeal." It signifies eagerness, enthusiasm, intense desire, passionate commitment. The word carries both the idea of zeal (7:11; 9:2; Phil. 3:6) and jealousy (Acts 5:17; 13:45; Rom. 13:13).

11:3 See section 3 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 2 Cor.

11:5 The most eminent apostles could refer to the Twelve, in which case Paul claims to be their equal in apostolic authority (see Gal. 2:6-9). More likely he is sarcastically referring to the intruders, who are in fact “false apostles” (v. 13).

11:7 See notes on 1 Cor. 9:1-27.

11:7 Humbling myself: Paul’s craft of tentmaking (Acts 18:3) was held in low social esteem by Greeks. His financial independence was not intended to embarrass the Corinthians. Rather, he desired that they be **exalted** (lifted up) by his preaching the **gospel . . . free of charge**.

11:8 Robbed other churches: The Macedonians were poorer than the Corinthians (8:2).

11:12 Cut off the opportunity: Those who falsely **boast** of their superiority to Paul will not want to imitate his financial independence. He is determined to continue his policy in order to distinguish himself from those with selfish motives.

11:16 Christ would not boast in this manner, but Paul feels constrained by the rivals’ boasting and its effect on the Corinthians (see note on v. 1).

11:21 In ironic echo of the charge made against him (10:10), Paul admits he was **too weak** to mistreat them.

11:22 Paul matches the claims of the false apostles, who were apparently Jews from Palestine (**Hebrews**; see Acts 6:1; Phil. 3:5).

11:23 Very reluctantly, and after several protests concerning the foolishness of it, Paul begins to boast of his experiences as a servant of Christ. Ironically, he focuses attention on experiences that many (then and now) would consider signs of weakness rather than strength. Some of the events here can be found in Acts; many cannot, since Acts is not an exhaustive account. Note also that the hardships endured in Acts 20:3-28:31 all occurred after the writing of 2 Cor. (see 4:17).

11:24 Forty **stripes minus one**: To avoid breaking the Law’s limitation (Deut. 25:3), the Jews stopped short of the maximum permitted.

11:25 Beaten with rods: A Roman form of punishment (Acts 16:22). **Stoned**: A Jewish form of execution inflicted on Paul at Jewish instigation (Acts 14:19). **Shipwrecked**: Acts 27:13-44 is later and thus not included here. **In the deep**: Adrift at sea.

11:27 Hunger and thirst: Imposed by the circumstances (see Phil. 4:12), as contrasted with voluntary **fastings**. **Nakedness**: Without adequate clothing for the weather.

11:28 Besides the other things: The events he has not mentioned. **Deep concern**: His continuing responsibility for **all the churches**, not just Corinth.

11:29 Rather than boasting of his strength and looking with contempt on those who are **weak** or who **stumble**, Paul identifies with them in their hurt (see 1 Cor. 12:26).

11:32 Aretas IV, king of the Nabatean Arabs, and perhaps in control of Damascus at the time of this event, apparently was in collusion with the Jews who were lying in wait (Acts 9:23-25).

12:2 I know a man in Christ: Obviously Paul himself, but he speaks with reserve to avoid boasting about himself rather than the Lord who granted such a privilege. **Fourteen years ago:** About A.D. 42, in the period of his Christian life not described in Acts. **Third heaven:** The highest heaven, the presence of God, in contrast to the sky and the starry heavens visible from earth.

12:4 Paradise: Identified here with “the third heaven” (v. 2); the place of blissful fellowship with God (Luke 23:43; Rev. 2:7). Paul was neither able nor permitted to repeat what he had heard.

12:7 See section 4 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 2 Cor.

12:7 Because of some ambiguities, it seems very unwise to form dogmatic conclusions about certain particulars of this section. What is clear, however, is a **thorn in the flesh** (an intense, wearying difficulty or affliction) had come by means of a **messenger of Satan** (probably a demonically instigated assault). God’s providence clearly allowed this (grammatically, a “divine passive,” indicating God as the unseen Agent overseeing the entire process) that Paul might avoid being **exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations**.

Though it is futile to try to identify the “thorn,” it caused Paul great consternation and ultimately served a good purpose, becoming the occasion for a revelation to him of the overcoming **grace** of God, which proved **sufficient** in the midst of Paul’s **weakness** (v. 9).

We must also note that though God does not respond to Paul’s repeated pleading **that it might depart from** him by removing it, there is no indication God is upset with Paul for so pleading. In fact, Jesus’ answer (v. 9) indicates God’s concern to respond, howbeit differently than Paul had prayed.

Finally, it is important to note that Jesus’ answer was not seen by Paul as punitive; nor did it cause him to resign himself to buffeting with a defeatist attitude. Rather, it affirmed in Paul that whenever Satan buffets him (either directly as the destructive adversary or indirectly as God’s controlled agent to bring about character development) he can **boast in his infirmities** because Jesus’ **grace** and **strength** will be **sufficient** to enable him to continue in his apostolic ministry. Neither the thorn, any messenger of Satan, nor any character-refining test from God will cause him to cease serving God. He can therefore **take pleasure . . . for when** he is personally **weak**, **then** he can be **strong** in Jesus.

WORD WEALTH

12:9 **grace**, *charis* (*khar-ece*); Strong’s #5485: From the same root as *chara*, “joy,” and *chairo*, “to rejoice.” *Charis* causes rejoicing. It is the word for God’s grace as extended to sinful man. It signifies unmerited favor, undeserved blessing, a free gift.



12:11 The Corinthian Christians **compelled** Paul to boast by being impressed with the boasts of the false apostles.

12:12 What many would list first in an assertion of spiritual authority, Paul mentioned last and did not elaborate, since the Corinthians had witnessed them.

12:14 Third time: See Introduction to 2 Corinthians: Background and Date.

12:16 I caught you: Paul echoes an accusation that he had tricked the Corinthians by sending others (**Titus** and the unnamed **brother**) to get their money (supposedly for Jerusalem), which Paul was keeping for himself. He refutes the charge by citing the character of his envoys, whom the Corinthians know to be honest (see 8:6, 16-24).

12:21 Some had resisted Paul's authority because they were unwilling to abandon ungodly behavior, which Paul had already rebuked (see 1 Cor. 5:9-11; 6:18-20).

13:1 Paul wants this **third** visit (12:14) to settle the persistent troubles. Thus he warns that disciplinary action is certain, just as judgment was made sure by the agreement of **two or three witnesses** (see Deut. 19:15).

WORD WEALTH

13:3 mighty, *dunateo* (doo-nat-eh-oh); Strong's #1414: To be able, powerful, mighty. The power at work in believers is that of the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead.

13:3 Those who think Paul is **weak** (see 10:10) will find that he really does speak with the authority of Christ, who was able to be weak enough to be **crucified** and yet be the ultimate example of **the power of God**. Likewise, Paul can be **weak in Him** and at the same time powerful in acting and speaking as Christ's apostle in dealing with the Corinthians.

13:5 Those who seek "proof" from Paul (v. 3) should **examine** and **test** themselves rather than him. If they **know** that they are genuine Christians, they should know that Paul is a genuine apostle (see 3:1-3). If they are not **disqualified** (counterfeit, unapproved, failing the test), neither is Paul. Whether he is **approved** (qualified, genuine, passing the test) or thought to be **disqualified**, Paul's main concern is their right behavior, not their opinion of him.

13:5 See section 4 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 2 Cor.

WORD WEALTH



13:9 complete, *katartisis* (kat-ar-tis-is); Strong’s #2676: An improving, equipping, training, disciplining. It includes making the necessary adjustments and repairs. The related verb, *katartizo*, is used for the disciples’ mending their nets (Matt. 4:21).

13:10 Sharpness: Severity or harshness, such as was used in the previous *severe letter* and in chs. 10-13 of this epistle.

13:12 Holy kiss: A sign of unity.

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

13:14 2. What Does the Bible Say About the Trinity?, SPIRITUAL ANSWERS. For the answer to this and other probing questions about God and the power life in His kingdom, see the study article “Spiritual Answers to Hard Questions,” which begins on page 1996.

13:14 A Trinitarian benediction. By **the grace** experienced through **Jesus** we know **the love of God** (John 3:16), and our **communion** (fellowship) with God and God’s people is given by **the Holy Spirit** (see 1 John 1:3; 4:13).

TRUTH-IN-ACTION through 2 CORINTHIANS

Letting the LIFE of the Holy Spirit Bring Faith’s Works Alive in You!

Truth 2 Corinthians Teaches

Action 2 Corinthians Invites

Guidelines for Growing in Godliness Godly living may result in disfavor with others because it warns of judgment for the ungodly. Godly individuals live by the ethic of love, selflessly asking, “How can I live for the benefit of others?” They are not lawless or sloppy in the way they live; rather, they seek to do right in everything.

2:14–17 *Conduct* yourself with a clear conscience so that you will not be easily shaken by people’s reactions. *Realize* that righteousness also sometimes triggers negative reactions.
5:10 *Know* and *understand* that you will give an account to Jesus as Judge for every thought, word, and deed. *Let this influence* your conduct.

5:15–17 *Appropriate* the fact that God has called you to live for Him. *Avoid* any selfishness or personal ambition,

8:21 *Practice* diligence in everything. Do what is right. *Make sure* your ethics reflect Jesus Christ in all your conduct.

Steps to Holiness

Holiness requires that we live according to God’s standard, not that of the world.

Holiness recognizes the serious nature of partnerships and will not enter into them with those who are not believers. Planning a marriage to an unbeliever will produce an unequal alliance that is to be avoided. To experience a happy union, the believer should align with one whose ideals and visions center in Jesus Christ.

1:12 *Conduct* yourself in the sincerity and holiness that come by God’s grace. *Turn from* any worldly wisdom toward which you may naturally incline.

6:14–18 *Refuse to enter* any covenant or partnership with unbelievers. *Live* as a holy person.

2:9 *Know* and *observe* the necessity of obedience in Christian living.

Key Lessons in the Faith

Faith chooses to believe God’s word above the evidence of the senses, knowing natural circumstances are to be kept subject to the Word of God. Faith is not in denying the circumstances; rather, it is in believing God’s testimony and living in agreement with it.

4:16–18 *Focus* on the unseen and eternal. *Consider* and *dwell upon* the glory that follows this life. *Know* the inward man is being renewed.

5:7 *Live* according to the truth of God’s Word and the testimony of His Spirit.

11:3, 4 *Identify as evil* any who would pervert the Word of God. *Do not accept* distortions of the gospel’s truth.

Steps in Developing Humility

Humility looks to God for what it needs.

Humility is not shocked to discover its own weaknesses, having learned to trust God’s strength. Nor do the humble take faith for granted, always drawing near to God, distrusting self.

10:17, 18 *Give God the glory*, and let any commendation be from Him.

12:7–10 *Allow* Jesus’ strength to be exhibited and exalted through your weakness. *Know* that His grace is large enough to meet you in your problems.

13:5, 6 *Practice* regular, diligent self-examination.

Guidelines for Growth in the Spirit We must be determined to grow spiritually. Such growth is painful because one undergoes stretching, molding, and refining by the Holy

3:2, 3 *Be shaped* by the Holy Spirit so that people can come to know Jesus through what they see.



Spirit. Spiritual people deal ruthlessly with any carnal thoughts in their own minds.

3:17, 18 *Spend time* in “God’s presence.” *Expect* the Spirit to transform you into the image of His glorious Son.

10:3–5 *Recognize* the spiritual war in your mind. *Take captive* every thought that is hostile to God. *Memorize* Scripture and meditate as a “military discipline.”

Lessons for Leaders

God’s leaders depend entirely on Him for their direction and empowering in the ministry. They never exalt or glorify themselves, acknowledging their lack of power and ability to fulfill any mission alone.

3:5, 6 Leaders, *depend* on the Spirit as your only true source of ability. *Beware* building your ministry on mere human training or ability alone.

4:1–6 Leaders, *handle* God’s Word diligently and with great care. *Be careful* not to read your own ideas into God’s Word. *Ask* God to enlighten His Word.

4:7–15 Leaders, *never lose sight* of your weakness. *Give room* for the power of Jesus’ dying to work in you so that His life-power can result in others.

3

Graeco-Roman Corinth

The city of Corinth is located in modern day Greece on the northeast corner of the Peloponnesian Peninsula. It is about 90 kilometers (48 miles) west of Athens. Its location on the narrow isthmus between the Peloponnesian Peninsula and mainland Greece made it a great place for commerce. Corinth controlled the land route between Italy and Asia and also between two ports: Lechaemum just to the north and Cenchrea to the east.

Near Corinth was a road called the *diolkos*. This road was made in the sixth century BC with large paving stones and was 6 kilometers long (3.7 miles), running from the Saronic Gulf in the east to the Gulf of Corinth in the west. Due to the dangers of sailing around the Peloponnesian Peninsula, ships would unload at Corinth, then haul the cargo in carts along this road to the

³ Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). [*Spirit filled life study Bible*](#) (electronic ed., 2 Co 1:1–13:14). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

other side. Many ships used the *diolkos*, and the nearby city of Corinth became a thriving metropolis from charging tariffs on cargo. In Paul's day, there may have been as many as 800,000 inhabitants in Corinth. Ships today use the Corinth canal, which was dug in the 19th century to take the place of the ancient road.

The Corinth that Paul knew was not only wealthy but thoroughly influenced by Graeco-Roman culture. While the history of the city can be dated to the eighth century BC and prospered as a Greek-city state, Rome destroyed it in 146 BC. Julius Caesar then established Corinth as a Roman colony in 44 BC. He also settled his veteran Roman soldiers and their families in the city. Entrepreneurs, traders, freedmen, and slaves swelled the population. Though located in Greece, Corinth was also thoroughly Roman.

Corinth also contained a significant Jewish community. Archaeologists have found a lintel inscribed with the words "Synagogue of the Hebrews" (Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 79). The city of Corinth has also been listed as one of the cities of the Jewish Diaspora (Philo, *On the Embassy to Gaius*, 281–82) (Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 23).

In ancient Corinth, worldly values like honor, prestige, and self-promotion were desired. Traveling bands of speakers called Sophists made their way through Corinth, persuading followers with their rhetoric. The city contained many wealthy benefactors who used their money to advance their reputation. These influences can be seen in 1 Corinthians (Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*; Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation*; Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*).

Ancient Corinthians worshiped a wide range of deities. There was a large temple dedicated to Apollo, the sun god. Corinthians would seek healing from Asclepius, the god of healing and medicine. There were also temples to Roman imperial personalities, such as a temple to Octavia, the sister of the Roman emperor Augustus. People also worshiped Dionysius, Neptune, Pan, Artemis, Zeus, Athena, Poseidon, and Aphrodite.

The Graeco-Roman society in Corinth valued status and power. Wealth was a key to social standing, and many Corinthians worshiped it like a god. The citizens competed for honor, and each promoted his own accomplishments and possessions in order to win praise from others (Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 19–53).

Paul's History with the Corinthians until the Writing of 1 Corinthians

Paul first visited Corinth in AD 49 during his second missionary journey. He lived with Aquila and Priscilla and worked with them as tentmakers (Acts 18:1–18). The first part of Paul's ministry in Corinth was to those who were Jewish—but also to Gentiles who feared God. He was opposed by the Jews in the synagogue and then expelled. However, Titius Justus and Crispus—the synagogue ruler—believed the message (Acts 18:8). The first church meeting may also have met in Titius Justus' house; he was also known as Gaius (1 Cor 1:14).

The second phase of Paul's ministry in Corinth was directed to the Gentiles. The Lord spoke to him in a vision and encouraged him to continue preaching in Corinth. He stayed about 18 months in the city. As a result of his efforts, Paul was the founder of the church in Corinth (1 Cor 4:14–15). Within that church were notable people mentioned within the Bible elsewhere,

such as Chloe, Erastus, Tertius, and Stephanas. In AD 51, after the church was founded, Paul left for Ephesus.

After Paul left Corinth, he began writing letters to the church that he founded there. The first letter that he wrote is lost, but we see evidence of it from 1 Cor 5:9–13. That letter chided the Corinthians for their sexually immoral behavior and forbade them from associating with immoral believers who refused to repent.

After he wrote this letter, Paul received a report from Chloe's household at Corinth and learned that there was quarreling and factions in the church (1 Cor 1:11). At about the same time, it seems that Paul also received a letter from the Corinthians asking for him to give answers concerning marriage and divorce, weak and strong brothers, spiritual gifts, and collections. As a result of this report and these questions, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in AD 55 while in Ephesus.

The Message of 1 Corinthians

(This section is adapted from Brown and Twist, *Lexham Bible Guide: 1 Corinthians*, 2013.)

First Corinthians represents Paul's response to the report from Chloe's household and the letter from the Corinthian church (1:11; 7:1). Yet Paul does not write to the Corinthians as an unknown authority figure, but rather as the apostle who founded the church and whose apostolic leadership had been challenged by rival leaders. Paul's main goal in the letter is to teach the Corinthians to think according to true wisdom—which comes only from the Spirit of God—so that they can live holy lives until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:4–8).

Paul communicates this overarching message throughout two main sections of the letter. In the first part of the letter he addresses problems mentioned by Chloe's household (1:10–6:20). In particular, Paul writes about divisions within the Corinthian church and reminds them of their status as the holy temple of God's Spirit (3:16–17). He also condemns the church's deplorable tolerance of sexual immorality (5:1–11) and lawsuits between believers that further fragmented the community (6:1–11). In the second part of the letter, Paul responds to questions raised by the Corinthian believers (7:1–15:58). These questions touch on various issues concerning singleness, marriage, sexual relationships (7:1–40); food sacrificed to idols and challenges to Paul's apostleship (8:1–11:1); the importance of orderliness and intelligibility in worship including the proper use of spiritual gifts (11:2–14:40); and questions about the resurrection of the dead (15:1–58).

Unity of 1 Corinthians

Most scholars view the letter of 1 Corinthians as a unified work. Some, however, view the letter as partitioned for various reasons. One of these is the length of 1 Corinthians; at 16 chapters, it is significantly longer than most of Paul's other letters. It is also lengthier than many other letters written at that time.

Helpful in this matter is the possession of the entire letter in the Papyrus Chester Beatty (P46). This papyrus is dated to AD 200—approximately 150 years after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. This is significantly earlier than any full manuscripts that we have on the canonical Gospels. Also significant is that in this manuscript, only 1 Cor 9:3; 14:15; and 15:16 are missing.

While the majority of scholars currently favor 1 Corinthians being viewed as a unity, earlier in the 1900s several scholars proposed a variety of partition theories. These individuals offered various opinions on the points of division within 1 Corinthians. The main problematic issues include:

- supposed tensions between 1:10–20 and 11:18–19;
- supposed tensions within 1 Cor 8–10;
- supposed differing sources of information (Schrage, *Brief*).

J. Weiss viewed 1 Corinthians as a composite of two letters but later changed his mind, arguing that the letter was composed of three separate letters (Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*). Weiss' revised theory sees one letter as being 10:1–23; 6:12–20; 10:23–30; and 11:2–4. A second letter would be 7–8; 9:1–23; 12–16. A third letter would include 1:1–6:11. W. Schmithals proposes nine letters that then formed 1 Corinthians. These divisions differed significantly from Weiss' proposal. G. Sellin viewed the letter as composed of three letters; Khiok-kng Yeo, four separate documents; and R. Jewett, six separate letters (Yeo, *Rhetorical*).

Of the partition theories, M. C. de Boer provides the most plausible alternative. He postulates that Paul stopped writing and then resumed twice following the visit of Chloe's people. By de Boer's thinking, Paul addressed the envy and jealousy at Corinth in 1 Cor 1–4. Then Stephanas arrived with the Corinthians' letter, which led to Paul's responses in chapters 7, 8, and 12 with the greetings in chapter 16. Chapters 5–6 were then initiated from conversations that were held by the Stephanas delegation (de Boer, "Composition").

Several aspects of these theories are striking. Weiss and Schmithals have changed their minds on the identity of the various portions that make up 1 Corinthians, indicating uncertainty on their parts. Also, these scholars cannot come to agreement as to the various portions that make up the letter. When compared with recent studies that examine thematic coherence within 1 Corinthians, it is more likely that the letter is a unified whole. There are many scholars who advocate for the integrity of 1 Corinthians, including G. Fee, J. C. Hurd, H. Merklein, J. Murphy-O'Connor, F. Lang, R. F. Collins, W. Schrage, and M. Mitchell.

Mitchell's study is significant on this matter. In her work *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, Mitchell depicts 1 Corinthians as a single letter that is united by the theme of promoting unity within a divided Corinthian church. Against the background of Greek deliberative rhetoric, she examines 1 Corinthians in relation to Graeco-Roman deliberative rhetoric, using 1:10 as the thesis statement in the epistle. In her view, 1:11–17 contains the facts of disunity at Corinth. The majority of the remaining text provides arguments for unity. In 1 Corinthians 1:18–4:20, she finds Paul censuring Corinthian factionalism. The next section, 5:1–11:1, encourages the unity of the Corinthian community against outside defilement. The following section, 11:2–14:40, details manifestations of Corinthian disunity when coming together. The last section points to the resurrection as a common rallying point for unity (15:1–58). Her overall analysis concludes decidedly on the epistle's overall unity.

Several recent commentaries on 1 Corinthians identify various thematic ideas that would unite the entire letter:

- Thiselton’s early work identified the problem in Corinth as an over-realized eschatology and a hyper spirituality (Thiselton, “Eschatology”). He later revised this, suggesting instead that the Corinthians misunderstood grace and the proclamation of the cross and resurrection within a secular Graeco-Roman society (Thiselton, *Corinthians*).
- Dale Martin and A. R. Brown also see the letter as Paul’s gospel confronting the secularity of Graeco-Roman society. For them, 1 Corinthians is a reproclamation of the different values of the cross and resurrection. The virtues of love and respect for the less esteemed are important counters in a society focused on status and wealth (Martin, *Body*; Brown, *Cross*).
- Ciampa and Rosner understand Paul as addressing immorality and idolatry. Rather than seeing the letter partitioned, they see it organized around encouragements to purity and exhortations against two vices—immorality and idolatry.

These recent studies and commentaries all favor seeing 1 Corinthians as one letter rather than separate ones that were sewn together. Current scholarship clearly favors viewing 1 Corinthians as a unity.

Major Interpretive Issues within the Letter

Paul mentions many topics in his letter—human wisdom, food sacrificed to idols, head coverings, and others—but gives little explanation. His readers would have understood these matters, but 2,000 years later, they are not as clear. There are many conflicting interpretations of this letter. It is widely accepted that Paul was the author and that he wrote the letter from Ephesus between AD 55–56. There is also widespread agreement that it was accepted into the canon quite early. The two contested points concern the nature of Paul’s opposition at Corinth and the unity of the letter.

Paul’s Opposition at Corinth at the Time of Writing 1 Corinthians

Due to the varied history of the Corinthian letters, it is necessary to be clear about the opponents within each letter (see extended history of Paul and the Corinthians in “Second Letter to the Corinthians”). Within 1 Corinthians, the opposition is internal (compare 1 Cor 4:18; 15:12). There is no mention of specific opponents—unlike 2 Corinthians, in which Paul addresses certain men who had slipped into the community (2 Cor 3:1; 11:13–15).

Some believe that the problem is false teaching within the Corinthian church (Goulder, *Paul*; Baur, *Paul*). They see the mention of party factions in 1 Cor 1:12 and 3:22 as showing that different teachings from Peter and Paul are the cause of the conflict. However, this assertion does not make sense of the rest of the letter, as Peter is not mentioned.

Others have proposed different false teachings within the Corinthian community; Schmithals and Winter have proposed Gnosticism as the source. However, this is unlikely because Gnosticism originated in the second century (Schmithals, *Gnosticism*; Winter, *Pneumatiker*, Wilckens, *Weisheit*). Some have assumed that the false teaching originated from charismatics or from a misunderstanding of the resurrection (Baumann, *Mitte und Norm*; Käsemann, *Jesus*). Although it is likely that the Corinthians misunderstood many of these issues, none of them seems to be the prime element that Paul refutes throughout 1 Corinthians.

J.C. Hurd and J. Drane have claimed that Paul is correcting his own previous teaching (Hurd, *Origin*; Drane, *Paul*). However, this is unlikely—Paul does not draw attention in 1 Corinthians to any previous errors of his that needed fixing. Others have assumed that those with Jewish viewpoints are the ones causing difficulties (Davis, *Wisdom and Spirit*; Pearson, *Terminology*; Horsley, “Wisdom of Words”). However, Paul does not mention Jewish opposition (2 Cor 11:13–15). Furthermore, Paul would not address concerns about idolatry if his opposition had only been encouraging a more “Jewish” outlook (compare 1 Cor 10).

Others have found the source of Paul’s opposition to be a misunderstanding of eschatology within the Corinthian church. In 1978, Anthony Thiselton proposed that the Corinthians had an over-realized eschatology (Thiselton, “Realized Eschatology”). In other words, they were living as if the end of time had already come. This triumphalism of the Christians in Corinth distorted their view of ethics and worship. They were believing that the kingdom of God had come and thus were acting rich, powerful, and wise (1 Cor 4:8–10) (Barrett, *First Corinthians*).

Another suggestion is that the source of the opposition was a personal conflict between Paul and the Corinthians. Gordon Fee sees the opposition between Paul and the Corinthians as evident from 1 Cor 4 and 9, in which Paul defends his apostolic ministry. His demands that the Corinthians submit to his apostolic authority supports this viewpoint further (14:37–38; Fee, *First Corinthians*, 5ff). However, the Corinthians did seek Paul’s opinion on several matters, and he feels that he can ask the Corinthians to contribute to the collection for saints in Jerusalem (16:1–4). Thus, while certain passages exhibit conflict with Paul, this is not the main opponent in his writing of 1 Corinthians.

A better proposal for the source of the opposition comes from those who have read the letter in relation to the Graeco-Roman background of 1 Corinthians, including Bruce Winter, Duane Litfin, and Stephen Pogoloff. They have drawn connections with the Sophistic movement that was active in cities like Corinth. The Sophists were traveling speakers who would use rhetoric to draw people away to follow their wisdom. They were divisive—they made disciples, boasted of their own abilities, and demanded respect. If they had any influence on the church at Corinth, this probably would have led to division amongst the Christian community (Winter, *Paul and Philo*; Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology*; Pogoloff, *Logos*). In this case, it would make sense for Paul to preach the cross rather than human wisdom (compare 1 Cor 1:17–2:5).

Further connections to first-century Graeco-Roman culture infiltrating the Corinthian church have been noticed. Clarke sees that secular leadership practice has been evident within the Corinthian community from his reading of 1 Cor 1–6 (Clarke, *Secular*). Chow sees Graeco-Roman patronage significantly influencing the life of the church. Basing his view that there were at least a few influential people within the Corinthian church on 1:26, he finds the problems at Corinth were due to a network of patrons within the church. These used their status or riches to exercise influence over a group who depended on them for some favors (Chow, *Patronage*, 87–93). In *Enmity in Corinth*, Peter Marshall finds Graeco-Roman social conventions throughout Paul’s address to the Corinthians. Ben Witherington has also examined 1 Corinthians to find many other Graeco-Roman ideas infiltrating the community at Corinth (Witherington, *Conflict*).

Another likely solution is that worldly Graeco-Roman values were the source of opposition. This solution has led Thiselton to modify his view on over-realized eschatology and admit

secular influence within the Corinthian church (Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 40). This viewpoint is reflected in major commentaries on the letter—even those that are not directly concerned with examining the Graeco-Roman background (compare Ciampa, *First Corinthians*).

Theological Unity of the Letter

A second important issue for understanding 1 Corinthians is the letter's unity. Those who propose a unified letter describe a variety of unifying themes.

Rhetorical studies on 1 Corinthians effectively argue that the letter was originally a single whole. These studies affirm that Paul's appeal for unity in 1:10 not only influences the immediate chapters, but can be seen to extend throughout the entire letter. For example, Paul shows concern for unity in chapter 1, but also in his statements on church discipline in chapter 5; on civil litigation in chapter 6; on weak and strong brothers in chapters 8–10; on the Lord's Supper in chapter 10; and on the proper use of spiritual gifts in chapters 12–14. This viewpoint agrees with the understanding of the earliest interpreters of the letter—the writer of *First Clement* and Ignatius of Antioch. Several scholars see 1 Corinthians as an example of deliberative rhetoric—an ancient Greek means of arguing that addressed both the heart and the intellect and compelled an audience to come to a decision. These scholars have seen the influence of this rhetoric in 1 Corinthians and view the entire letter as an appeal for unity (Mitchell, *Rhetoric*; Wuellner, "Greek"; Kennedy, *Interpretation*).

Others see the theological themes of 1 Corinthians as proof of its original unity. Instead of being a series of unconnected ethical instructions, 1 Corinthians is a letter in which the role of the cross and resurrection are everywhere at the center. Paul appeals to the death of Jesus in order to promote a community ethic consistent with the values shown by His death (Pickett, *Cross*). The cross plays a clear role in Paul's instruction for unity in chapter 1, Christian stewardship in chapter 4, community exclusion in chapter 5, civil litigation in chapter 6, weak and strong brothers in chapters 8–10, and the Lord's Supper in chapter 11 (Williams, "Living"). First Corinthians is about the reproclamation of a different value set based on grace, the cross, and the resurrection (Brown, *Cross*; compare Martin, *Body*). W. Schrage sees Paul's proclamation of the cross as "ground and criterion of church and apostle" (Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 1:165).

Another newer approach to proving the letter's original unity is that of Ciampa and Rosner. Rather than seeing the letter partitioned or organized around the theme of unity or the reproclamation of the cross and resurrection, they see the composition of the letter organized around purity and vices: immorality and idolatry. These are the two main Gentile vices, and they consume the majority of the letter. Paul argues against immorality in chapters 5–6. In chapter 7, he promotes sexual purity through the proper use of the body in both marriage and celibacy. In chapters 8–10—in the context of weak and strong brothers and food offered to idols—Paul encourages the Corinthians to flee idolatry (compare 6:18; 10:14). He then discusses how proper traditions of worship and use of spiritual gifts in love foster right worship of God (1 Cor 11; 12–14; Ciampa, *Corinthians*).

Ciampa and Rosner also discuss the role of the Old Testament in 1 Corinthians. There are 18 citations from or allusions to Old Testament material found within the letter. Many of these

come from the books of Deuteronomy and Isaiah. Other less explicit references to Scripture have also been noted within the book, and thus, a greater amount of Jewish influence may be seen than previously acknowledged (compare Hays, *Echoes and Corinthians*; Rosner, *Paul*; Kuck, *Judgment*, Tomson, *Paul*; Williams, *Wisdom*). Further attempts to show the letter's unity will likely involve an examination of the influence of the letter's Graeco-Roman setting, the Jewish Scripture Paul quotes, and the role of the cross of Christ.

Theology of 1 Corinthians

First Corinthians is filled with many ethical injunctions. While Paul could have simply declared “do this” or “do not do this,” appealed to community dynamics to resolve issues, or forcefully used his own authority, he instead employed theological arguments to convince his audience. Theological ideas are found multiple places throughout the letter; three of the most important are:

1. the cross;
2. the Christian recapitulation of Old Testament theology;
3. the lordship of Christ.

The Cross

The role of the cross of Christ is the most significant theological idea within 1 Corinthians, just as the cross is pivotal to understanding much of the ethics of the New Testament (Hays, *Moral Vision*). Paul appealed to the death of Jesus in order to promote a community ethos and ethic consistent with the ideals and values it symbolized (R. Pickett, *Cross*; Williams, “Living”). As Paul begins to address party strife and division at Corinth, he ties these ideas directly to the cross in 1 Cor 1:17. Surprisingly, the gospel message of the cross is the first theological item he uses to encourage unity—he could have simply urged the Corinthians to be united without referring to Jesus' death at all.

The cross is found throughout Paul's arguments for unity. In 1 Cor 1:26–31, Paul shows how all of the Corinthians—regardless of their wisdom, power, and wealth—are saved by the message of the cross and can boast only in it. Thus, the cross draws the divided Corinthians' attention to the one calling that they share in Christ (1:24, 26). The message of the cross cuts across divisions based on worldly claims of wisdom, power, and wealth and treats everyone the same in saving them.

In 1 Cor 2:1–5, when Paul speaks about his manner of preaching, the cross functions as a unifying factor. It helps to unify the Corinthians by causing them to focus on the one message that Paul, their founding father, preached (compare 2:1–5; 4:14–15). He claims only to know Christ crucified and preach the cross. In these ways, Paul uses the cross to create unity amid a divided situation.

While the cross is not explicit in 1 Cor 4 (as it is in 1 Cor 1), it exerts influence there as well (see Fee, *Corinthians*; Fitzgerald, *Vessel*; Marxsen, *Foundations*; Schrage, “Leid”). As Paul describes his apostleship, he declares himself to be weak, in disrepute, reviled, and persecuted. He declares that he has “the sentence of death” and perceives himself to be a “spectacle to the world” and the “scum of the earth” (4:10–13). All these are aspects of the cross, and the effect

of these descriptions is to connect Paul's leadership directly with the cross—the message that he preached (1:17; 2:1–5). While other leaders in Corinth were fascinated with human wisdom, riches, power, and honor, Paul's leadership style has a theological basis in his theology of the cross.

Paul will also apply the cross to the problem of exclusion in 1 Cor 5. In this chapter, Paul rebukes the Corinthians because they have done nothing about a man in their midst who was caught in incest. In the midst of this argument, Paul writes, “Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (5:7 NIV). As in previous situations, the cross works as theological support in a section that could have been argued solely sociologically.

Cross-related ideas are also found within Paul's next ethical injunction in 1 Cor 6. In the midst of arguing against civil litigation between Christian brothers, Paul states in 6:7, “The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?” (NIV) These questions recall Paul's example of disregarding himself in 4:11–13—a passage that concerned Christian leadership in light of the cross (Rosner, *Paul*). In this case of civil litigation, Christ's death functions as the basis for self-sacrifice. Rather than choosing the ways of Graeco-Roman secular society and flaunting their status or social privilege, the Corinthians should look to Christ crucified as a model for sacrificing their rights for one another.

In 1 Corinthians 10:32–11:1, Paul writes, “Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (NIV). These are the final verses from Paul's discussion about weak and strong brothers. Throughout much of 1 Corinthians, Paul has been advocating for the protection of the weak brothers. As he concludes this three-chapter section, he refers again to the cross. This passage contains the matter of self-sacrifice—a theme linked with the cross earlier. He also repeats the imitation idea that was found in chapter 4, a section with influence from the cross. As imitation is now clearly linked with Christ, who went to the cross, it thus recalls the theological foundation of the cross within 1 Corinthians.

A direct reference to the cross appears in 11:17–34, where Paul passes along a tradition that he received from the Lord regarding the Lord's Supper—the body and blood of Christ. The cross can also be seen here in that Paul recognizes that the tradition he is delivering to the Corinthians is from the night that the Lord was betrayed before His crucifixion (11:23). Furthermore, according to Paul, the remembrance of this tradition results in the Corinthians proclaiming Christ's death on the cross until He comes again (11:26). This section then encourages self-sacrifice by waiting for others before eating together.

Sacrificial love that is found within 1 Cor 13 also carries with it cross-related ideas. This chapter, which is found between discussions on spiritual gifts, provides a model for how these gifts are to be practiced (Ciampa, *First Corinthians*). Rather than using a gift like tongues or prophecy for one's own benefit, Paul encourages the Corinthians to forego their rights (see especially 13:4–7). His words echo ideas about the cross that have been found prominently within other passages in 1 Corinthians.

One final appearance of the cross indicates its theological importance. At the end of 1 Corinthians, following many chapters of correction, Paul mentions the things of first importance. In 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 he writes, “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.” Of first importance is the cross of Christ. Thus, it makes sense that this is of influence within the rest of 1 Corinthians.

Old Testament Ideas

First Corinthians draws a significant amount of its theology from the Old Testament Scriptures. There are 18 quotations from or allusions to the Old Testament within 1 Corinthians that have been identified in major studies on Paul’s use of Scripture (Koch, *Schrift*; Stanley, *Paul*). These come from books including Genesis, Job, Psalms, Jeremiah, and Hosea (Williams, *Sources*). Of particular interest are the large number of references from Deuteronomy and Isaiah.

Deuteronomy. Within the Pentateuch, the book of Deuteronomy explains the response to God’s calling His people out of bondage in Egypt. The book calls God’s people to worship Him at a particular place and in a particular way (Deut 12; 14:23–24; 16:1–11). God’s people are to be careful especially to avoid idolatry (6:14–15; 12:1–6) and immorality (22:13–30; 23:2, 17–18; 31:16). As a result, Moses appoints judges (1), urges the people to heed his instruction (particularly the Ten Commandments; 6:1–13), to celebrate the Passover (Deut 16), and to inaugurate the covenant (Deut 29).

Deuteronomy as a whole has a sense of warning to it—God’s people are in danger of failing. In Deuteronomy 2, God’s people are compared with the pagan nations. Deuteronomy 31:16–18 already anticipates the Israelites’ failure to keep the covenant. Throughout the book, there are repeated appeals to remember, pay attention, and heed Moses’ words (5:1; 6:1–14; 7:12–15). Other sections also anticipate Israel’s inability to keep God’s laws (12:28–32; 13:18; 31:16–18; 32:19–26). There is, however, a sense of promise within Deuteronomy on the condition that God’s people respond obediently (11:13–15, 22–25; 15:5–6; 28:1–14).

The book of 1 Corinthians continues many of the ethical principles that Deuteronomy encouraged. For example, Paul promotes the appointing of judges (1 Cor 6:1–6) and gives exhortations for the keeping of the Passover meal (5:7; 10:16–21; 11:23–26). Particularly striking is the emphasis on fleeing immorality and idolatry (6:18; 10:14). These are the only two vices discussed in 1 Corinthians that are “to be fled.” Other sections within 1 Corinthians urge the Corinthians to clean out impure elements amongst them—such as immorality (1 Cor 5). Sexual purity is the concern of several other sections of 1 Corinthians (6:16–19; 7:1–40).

Idolatry is the focus of 1 Cor 8–10. Paul begins his discussion in 8:7–13 with warnings about food sacrificed to idols. The subtleties of idolatry are the concern of 10:12–33. Instead of repeating the failures of God’s people from the time of the Pentateuch, the Corinthians are to “do all to the glory of God” (10:31). In 1 Corinthians 11–14, to prevent the Corinthians from falling into idolatrous practices, Paul promotes the proper worship of God (Ciampa, *First Corinthians*).

Isaiah. As with the book of Deuteronomy, the book of Isaiah contributes significant influence to 1 Corinthians. The opening two chapters in 1 Corinthians contain several references to Isaiah, providing an explanation of the two types of salvation-wisdom that Paul opposes and endorses (Williams, *Wisdom*).

The first type of salvation-wisdom—one that Paul opposes (1 Cor 1)—is human wisdom that derives from the nations of this world and their rulers (1 Cor 1:23; 2:6). Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14 in 1 Corinthians 1:19 to argue that human wisdom is the opposite of the plan of God and will be brought to nothing. The larger passage of Isaiah 29 depicts those who follow human wisdom as following the path to destruction. By referring to human wisdom with reference to Isaiah, Paul explains why he opposes mixing the message of the cross with human wisdom: Following human wisdom leads to destruction, for it rejects the cross of Christ.

The second type of salvation-wisdom in 1 Corinthians is true wisdom, which triumphs and which comes from God (1 Cor 2). In 1 Corinthians 2:9, Paul refers to Isa 64:3 in conjunction with Isa 65:17. In both Isaiah’s original context and Paul’s use of the quotation, God’s plan will be a dramatic one that surprises those with a worldly mindset. The context of Isa 64:3 concerns the hidden nature of God’s revelation among people. This overlaps with Paul’s thoughts in 1 Cor 2:7–8, where he describes a secret and hidden wisdom that none of the rulers of this age understood. That wisdom is hidden from some, but it is revealed to those whom the Lord calls to Him. The context of Isa 65:17 suggests a similar idea, as the redeemed are able to see and appreciate God’s revelation with the new creation of the heavens and the earth.

Isaiah’s influence continues into Paul’s discussion about the mind in 1 Cor 2, where he refers to Isa 40:13. Here Paul speaks of the mind that is able to understand the ways of the Lord within history. Those without the Spirit cannot comprehend it, but those to whom the Spirit is given are able to understand (1 Cor 2:12–16). When read in the context of Isa 40:13, the understanding mind is found in a series of questions that indicate that God alone is able to reveal His mind and His ways (Isa 40:12, 14). Seen in context of Isaiah, the “mind” refers to the salvation plan of God, which is also an overlap with the wise plan of God in 1 Cor 2.

Isaiah’s theological influence regarding wisdom can also be seen in 1 Cor 14, where Paul quotes Isa 28:11–12 in his discussion concerning tongues. In this section, Paul challenges the Corinthians about using indiscernible tongues during worship. Rather than simply saying not to use them, he refers to Isa 28, in which the inability to understand language referred to being captured by God’s opponents.

When Paul concludes his discussion in 1 Corinthians 15 regarding the resurrection, he also refers directly to Isaiah. Paul quotes from Isa 22:13 in 1 Cor 15:32 when he writes, “If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’ ” The main ideas from the context of Isaiah fit with a world without a resurrection. Isaiah 22 concerns a siege that is due to occur upon the people of Jerusalem. Rather than repenting, they decide to “party like there is no tomorrow” since there is no hope (Hays, *Corinthians*). This context of Isa 22 fits the hopeless existence without a resurrection that Paul is describing in 1 Cor 15. Hopelessness leads to indulgence.

One final explicit reference to Isaiah is found within the section that speaks of the believer's resurrection body in 1 Cor 15. Paul quotes from Isa 25:8 when he states, "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory' " (1 Cor 15:54 NIV). In this section there is a sense of victory, thanksgiving, and celebration. Overtones from the Isaianic banquet from Isa 25:8–9 can also be detected.

Lordship of Christ

The lordship of Christ is the final significant theological theme. Paul encourages his readers to acknowledge this lordship from the beginning of his letter: "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours" (1:2). He then stresses Christ's lordship repeatedly throughout 1 Corinthians. The word "Lord" occurs 56 times in the letter, and the phrase "Lord Jesus Christ" occurs eight times. Jesus is referred to as "Lord Jesus" four times. Within the first 10 verses of 1 Cor, Jesus is explicitly referred to as "Lord" five times. The epistle concludes with a blessing in the name of the "Lord Jesus" (16:23).

Throughout the letter, Paul asks the Corinthians to change their behavior so that it might be in line with Christ's lordship:

- The church must be unified so that it reflects the mind of Christ (1:10; 2:16).
- The church be cleansed from the man caught in incest so that it might reflect the sacrifice of Christ (5:7).
- It is improper to have relations with a prostitute as that violates the body of Christ (6:18–20).
- The Corinthians should not eat food sacrificed to idols, since it can harm the conscience of some for whom Christ died (8:11).
- When the Corinthians are worshiping corporately, head coverings or the lack of wearing head coverings reflects the headship of Christ (11:3).
- The Lord's Supper is to be observed by discerning the body of Christ (11:29).
- Spiritual gifts are to be practiced by using them in relation to the Christian body, of which Christ is the head (12:27).

Paul even stresses that all of history is about the subjection of all things under Christ's feet (15:24–28).

Reception of 1 Corinthians

First Corinthians is one of the best received documents from the New Testament within early church history. In the writings that can be dated to the late first century and early second century, there are many places in which references from 1 Corinthians can be found.

Quotations are found within *First Clement*, the *Letters of Ignatius*, and the *Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians*. It is also likely that 1 Corinthians can be recognized within the *Shepherd of Hermas*. Portions of 1 Corinthians may possibly be found within the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the

Didache, and *Second Clement* (Oxford Historical Society, *Reception*). Later church fathers such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine all referred to 1 Corinthians. The church fathers John Chrysostom and Origen wrote a series of homilies on 1 Corinthians (Kovacs, *Corinthians*). Additionally, Cyril of Alexandria and Theodoret wrote commentaries on this epistle. In his *Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love*, Augustine uses 1 Corinthians as the foundational text for his treatise.

The reception within *First Clement* is especially significant, as it is one of the earliest books written following the New Testament (AD 95–97) and was highly respected within the early church. Some even placed it on par with other New Testament writings. Not only does *First Clement* quote portions of 1 Corinthians, but it reveals that the letter is to be considered as authoritative. Clement writes in *1 Clement* 47:1, “Take up the epistle of the blessed Apostle Paul. What did he write to you at the time when the Gospel first began to be preached? Truly, under the inspiration of the Spirit, he wrote to you concerning himself, and Cephas, and Apollos, because even then parties had been formed among you” (Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene*).

This quotation indicates that Paul’s exhortation for unity found in 1 Cor 1–3, and other portions of 1 Corinthians, was still seen to be authoritative some 40 years after the time that Paul wrote. This is particularly striking since Paul’s relationship with the Corinthians was evidently one that fluctuated, as is clear from sections within 2 Corinthians (compare 2 Cor 2:1–5; 7:2–4; 10:1–5, 10; 13:1–10).

Besides being cited within early Christian literature, 1 Corinthians was received into the earliest lists of the New Testament canon. In fact, it is found in all significant canon listings within the early church. Even when the heretic Marcion composed his shortened list of canonical books in AD 140, he included 1 Corinthians. The following early canon lists include 1 Corinthians:

- the Muratorian Canon (AD 180);
- the listing of canonical books in the Codex Barococcio (AD 206);
- Eusebius’ canonical listing (AD 325–40);
- the Canon of Cyril of Jerusalem (AD 350);
- the Cheltenham Canon (AD 360);
- Athanasius’ canon listing in his *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter* (AD 367).

One of the most significant receptions of a portion of 1 Corinthians can be found in the early Christian creeds. The Nicene Creed borrows wording from 1 Cor 15:4 when it reads, “On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures.” The words “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried” may have come from 15:3. It is also possible that 8:4–6 influenced, “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty.” The phrase “resurrection of the body” may have been influenced by 15:49–58. The Apostles’ Creed can claim influence from the same texts.

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CORINTHIANS, SECOND LETTER TO THE Paul's most personal letter to a congregation. It is emotional and filled with feelings of uncertainty, frustration, sympathy, and relief. This emotional spectrum was due to Paul's close relationship with the Corinthians. He had planted the church in Corinth, stayed with them for a year and a half (Acts 18:11), visited them a second time, and had written several letters to them prior to 2 Corinthians.

Though it is named 2 Corinthians, this is at least the fourth letter that Paul had written to them. Second Corinthians reflects the tumultuous relationship that Paul had with the church in Corinth. While it is not one of the Pastoral Letters (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus), it has been called the "pastoral letter *par excellence*" (Harris, "2 Corinthians," 309).

Many appreciate 2 Corinthians due to its memorable word pictures. Some have been encouraged from Paul's depiction of "the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (1:3b–4 NIV). Others have been inspired by the picture of the triumphal procession in 2:14 in which Paul and others are led in Christ. Still others have quoted Paul's words in 3:6, "for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life," while others have gained strength from Paul's struggle with of his "thorn in the flesh" in chapter 12.

Outline of 2 Corinthians

The book can be outlined in the following manner:

- 1:1–7:16—Paul's explanation of his apostolic ministry

- 1:1–11—Introduction
 - 1:1–2—Greeting
 - 1:3–7—Praise to God for divine comfort in great suffering
 - 1:8–11—Deliverance from affliction
- 1:12–2:11—Explaining the postponement of his visit
 - 1:12–14—Boasting in simplicity and godly sincerity
 - 1:15–22—Replying to charge of changing his mind
 - 1:23–2:4—Cancelled painful visit
 - 2:5–11—Forgiveness for the offender
- 2:12–3:6—Led in Christ’s Triumphal Procession
 - 2:12–13—Paul’s care and suffering for the Corinthians led to change of plans
 - 2:14–3:6—Paul’s conduct in the ministry is explained
- 3:7–18—Superior ministry of glory
- 4:1–18—Confidence despite rejection
 - 4:1–6—Transforming hearts
 - 4:7–12—Suffering displaying God’s glory
 - 4:13–18—Boldness from faith in the unseen
- 5:1–5—A heavenly dwelling
- 5:6–10—Hope in the future
- 5:11–21—The aim to persuade all men
- 6:1–7:4—Persuading the Corinthians to open their hearts
- 7:5–16—Joy at the majority of the Corinthians’ repentance
- 8:1–9:15—Paul calls for the collection to be completed
 - 8:1–15—The need for generosity
 - 8:1–6—The Macedonian example
 - 8:7–12—Liberal giving
 - 8:13–15—Aim for equality
 - 8:16–24—The service of Titus and his companions
 - 9:1–15—His confidence that the Corinthians will give generously
- 10:1–13:13—Paul defends his apostolic ministry against the unrepentant minority
 - 10:1–11—Entreating the unrepentant minority

- 10:12–18—Legitimate boasting
- 11:1–12:21—Foolish boasting
 - 11:1–9—Fear that the Corinthians are being led into idolatry
 - 11:10–33—Boasting over other supposed apostles
 - 12:1–6—Reluctant boasting in great revelations
 - 12:7–10—The thorn in the flesh
 - 12:11–21—Paul has become a fool in boasting, but the unrepentant have foolishly not responded
- 13:1–13—A third warning
 - 13:1–6—A final strong warning
 - 13:7–10—Paul’s prayer for the Corinthians
 - 13:11–13—Conclusion and benediction; calls for joy, unity, and peace

Historical Background and Purpose of the Corinthian Epistles

There is a significant historical background that informs the reading of 2 Corinthians. The history between Paul and the Corinthians is largely deduced from information within 1 & 2 Corinthians. Most of this history is constructed from what is contained in the letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians. Consequently the reconstruction of the letter’s background is an uncertain enterprise about which there is not complete agreement.

Graeco-Roman Corinth

The city of Corinth is located in modern-day Greece on the northeast corner of the Peloponnesian Peninsula. The religious, political, and philosophical background of the city are essential for understanding the correspondence between Paul and the Corinthian church. For more on ancient Corinth, see the section on “Graeco-Roman Corinth” in the article on First Corinthians.

Paul’s History with the Corinthians prior to 2 Corinthians

Paul first visited Corinth in AD 49 during his second missionary journey. Upon his arrival, he attached himself quickly to Aquila and Priscilla. His activities as a tentmaker and preacher are recorded in Acts 18:1–18. The first part of Paul’s ministry in Corinth was both to those who were Jewish, and also to Gentiles who feared God. He was opposed by the Jews in the synagogue and expelled. Still, there was fruit from this activity. Titius Justus and Crispus, the synagogue ruler, believed the message (Acts 18:8). The first church meeting may also have met in Titius Justus’ house, also known as Gaius (1 Cor 1:14).

The second phase of Paul’s ministry in Corinth was directed to the Gentiles. Despite his fear, the Lord spoke to him in a vision, encouraging him to continue on preaching in Corinth (Acts 18:9–10). He stayed about 18 months in the city. As a result of his efforts, Paul was the founder of the church in Corinth (1 Cor 4:14–15). Within that church were notable people mentioned

within the Bible elsewhere, such as: Chloe, Erastus, Tertius, and Stephanas. After the church was founded in AD 51, Paul left for Ephesus.

After Paul left Corinth, he began writing letters to the church that he founded. The first letter that he wrote is lost, but we see evidence of it in 1 Cor 5:9–13. That letter chided the Corinthians for their sexually immoral behavior and forbade them from associating with immoral people.

After he wrote this letter, Paul received a report from Chloe's household at Corinth. They reported that there was quarreling and factions in the church (1 Cor 1:11). At about the same time, Paul also received a letter from the Corinthians asking for him to give answers concerning marriage and divorce, weak and strong brothers, spiritual gifts, and collections. As a result of this report and these questions, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in AD 55 from Ephesus.

Paul's Painful Visit

Paul returned to his work in Ephesus with the expectation that he would travel to Corinth with the collection (1 Cor 16:5–8) and sent Timothy to visit the Corinthians in the meantime (1 Cor 16:10–11; compare Acts 19:22). When Timothy arrived in Corinth, he found that the problems were much greater than anticipated. These likely came from Paul's opponents outside of Corinth. As a result, Paul decided to visit Corinth immediately. He would then go on to Macedonia and return for a second visit on his way to Jerusalem (2 Cor 1:15–16). He was expecting that his arrival at Corinth would provide a "second experience of grace" and his sincere conduct would be proved.

Instead of exonerating Paul, this visit turned into what scholars call the "painful visit" (2 Cor 2:1). A group of leaders had infiltrated the church and caused many problems. These people are known as "super apostles." They were of Jewish origin, liked to boast, and carried with them letters of recommendation (3:1; 11:13–15). They were not apostles in the way that Paul was, proclaiming the death and resurrection of Christ, but were more likely agents of others who commissioned them. These super apostles likely were influenced by the surrounding Hellenistic culture. Due to their influence, Paul's gospel message and authority were called into question. One of the leaders severely criticized Paul himself (2:5–8; 7:8–13; 11:4). It was evident that the gospel ministry in Corinth was in jeopardy.

The "Severe Letter"

Paul left Corinth for Ephesus while the Corinthians revolted against his apostolic authority (1:23–2:5; 7:12). He chose not to retaliate, but instead extended mercy to the Corinthians (1:23–24). This left him open to criticism (1:16–17). Paul decided to send Titus back to Corinth with his next letter. This letter is known as the "severe letter" since it was written "out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears" (2:4 NIV). It has also been called the "letter of tears," the "tearful letter," the "sorrowful letter," or the "painful letter."

The aim of the severe letter was to embolden the Corinthians to discipline the ones who did wrong, and thus vindicate Paul, the one who suffered the wrong (2:6, 9; 7:12). Another purpose of the letter was to spare the Corinthians and himself from another painful visit (1:23–2:4). The letter also displayed his care for the Corinthians and was designed to test the Corinthians'

obedience to his apostolic ministry (2:4; 2:9). It also was a reminder that Paul was their spiritual father (7:12). After the Corinthians received it, most were repentant (2:5–11; 7:5–16).

There have been six identifications of the severe letter. Three unlikely possibilities include: a letter written before 1 Corinthians and the letter mentioned in 1 Cor 5:9–13; the “previous letter” mentioned in 1 Cor 5:9, 11; 2 Corinthians (Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, 55–56). Other possibilities that demand more attention are: the severe letter is 1 Corinthians, a letter incorporating 2 Cor 10–13, or a lost intermediate letter following the sending of 2 Cor 1–9.

Those who support 1 Corinthians as the “severe letter” do so for three reasons. With all of the great problems within 1 Corinthians, namely, division, immorality, litigation, profaning of the Lord’s Supper, and challenges to Paul’s ministry, it is possible that it caused him much distress. Additionally, the pain expressed in 2 Cor 2:5–11 could be seen from Paul’s discipline of the man caught in incest (1 Cor 5:1–8). Further, the identity of the “one who did wrong” in 2 Cor 7:12 could be connected with the man caught in incest in 1 Cor 5:1 (Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*; Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*; Hughes, *Second Corinthians*; Hyldahl, *Einheit des Zweiten Korintherbriefes*).

However, passages such as 2 Cor 2:6 and 7:12 suggest that the “severe letter” dealt specifically with the punishment of the wrong-doer instead of questions surrounding the entire Corinthian church, which is the concern of 1 Corinthians. Further, 1 Corinthians does not seem to be written in place of another painful visit (compare 1 Cor 4:18–19; 11:34; 16:2–7) as 2 Cor 1:23; 2:1–3 demands. Additionally, in 2 Cor 2:10 Paul offers his personal forgiveness to the individual whom the Corinthians are to forgive, but it is highly doubtful that he would have seen this as a personal injury. Moreover, the passages in 2 Corinthians show no rebuking of sexual immorality but rather a direct confrontation with Paul’s authority (2 Cor 7:12).

Rather than seeing 1 Corinthians as the severe letter, others divide 2 Corinthians into two parts—chapters 1–9 and chapters 10–13. In this scenario, 2 Cor 10–13 is called the severe letter, and was written before 2 Cor 1–9 (Hausrath, *Der Vier-Capitelbrief*; Plummer, *Second Corinthians*, Dodd, *New Testament Studies*, Welborn, *Politics and Rhetoric*). Some believe that 1–9 intentionally allude to portions of 10–13. However, it is just as likely that 10–13 passage are alluding to 1–9. Furthermore, it is unlikely that 2 Cor 10–13 is the severe letter since there is nothing within these chapters about the punishment of the troublemaker—a key aspect of the severe letter (compare 2 Cor 2:5–9). Finally, the contents of 10–13 do not seem to fit the description of the severe letter, which stemmed from many tears. On the whole, 2 Cor 10–13 is a vigorous self-defense, filled with irony and warnings. Thus, this popular suggestion is unlikely (Harris, *Second Corinthians*).

It is best to see the severe letter as a lost letter; there are other letters from Paul that we do not have (compare 1 Cor 5:9, 11; Col 4:16). If this is the case, the severe letter was written after 1 Corinthians and Paul’s painful visit but before the writing of 2 Corinthians (Semler, *Paraphrasis*; Harris, *Second Corinthians*; Barnett, *Second Corinthians*; Barrett, *Second Corinthians*; Martin, *2 Corinthians*; Murphy-O’Connor, *Second Corinthians*; deSilva, “Measuring Penultimate and Ultimate Reality”; Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*; Thrall, *Second Corinthians*).

The “Deadly Peril” and Reunion with Titus

After he sent this letter, several things happened to Paul. He experienced a “deadly peril” such that “he despaired of life.” He felt a “sentence of death” upon him (2 Cor 1:8–10). While some might see this as his encounter with wild beasts or opposition in Ephesus, imprisonment in Asia, or the Demetrius riot of Acts 19:23–41, it was most likely a severe physical illness. Harris sees this from the association of the distress in 2 Cor 1:8 with the thorn of 2 Cor 12:7, as well as factors which would identify the three prayers for removal with distresses in Cilicia (AD 43), Perga (Acts 13:13–14 in AD 47), and in Troas (2 Cor 1:8; 2:12; 7:5 in AD 56; Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 164–82; compare Alexander, “St. Paul’s Infirmary”). Whether it was a physical illness or something else, this affliction did cause him to abandon self-sufficiency and trust in God’s power. It also forced him to consider the significance of death for the Christian believer.

Following this severe illness, Paul continued with his gospel ministry. He traveled to Troas, where there was a door open to him, but he found no peace as Titus was not present there (Acts 20:1–11; 2 Cor 2:12–13). So, he left Troas and headed for Macedonia. While in Macedonia, he helped to organize the collection for the Christians in Jerusalem as well his gospel ministry (Acts 20:1–2; 2 Cor 8:1–4; 9:2). While his ministry was successful in Macedonia, it took him longer than expected to connect with Titus. Thus, it took him longer to hear how his severe letter had been received in Corinth (2 Cor 7:5).

Titus finally arrived with good news for Paul, which led Paul to rejoice (2 Cor 7:6–9). Paul had worried about the effects of his severe letter, fearing that he had been too harsh. Hearing Titus’ report comforted Paul greatly—the Corinthians had deep sorrow for their behavior, and were longing to see Paul. Paul was overjoyed, perhaps greater than ever with their response. If his severe letter had wounded them, it was only for a while (2 Cor 7:8).

At this point, in AD 56, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians. Chapters 1–9 exhibit grace and relief while chapters 10–13 display a noticeably harsher tone. There are also several places within the letter in which the transition is less clear. This has led to the main difficulty in studies of 2 Corinthians—the issue of integrity.

The Message of 2 Corinthians

(This section is adapted from Brown, Twist, and Widder, *Lexham Bible Guide: 2 Corinthians*, 2013.)

Paul writes the letter known as 2 Corinthians to prepare the Corinthian church for his upcoming visit (12:14; 13:1). With this goal in mind, Paul devotes most of the letter to addressing doubts concerning his integrity and ministry that resulted from unresolved issues and recent events in Corinth. In 2 Corinthians, Paul confronts these doubts and implores the church to reconcile with him as their founding apostle in what is probably Paul’s most personal and autobiographical letter. In response to these issues and challenges to the legitimacy of his apostleship on the basis of his alleged “weakness,” Paul delivers a theological message that centers on the suffering Christ and the power of the resurrection.

The two main sections of 2 Corinthians reflect Paul’s attempt to defend his ministry and address problems caused by rival leaders in Corinth. In the first nine chapters of the letter, Paul primarily explains the nature of his ministry after briefly accounting for changes to his previous plans to visit (1:15–2:13). He then explores the nature of his apostolic ministry (4:1–7:4). For

Paul, the transformed perspective of the new covenant (3:1–18) allows him to regard his “weaknesses” as strengths that actually enhance his ministry and bring glory to God. Paul then returns to the question of his itinerary (7:5–16) before he makes his major appeal for the Jerusalem collection (8:1–9:15). In the second part of the letter, Paul takes up new challenges from the so-called “super apostles” in Corinth (10–13). He defends his own credentials while also criticizing the methods of his rivals throughout this section. The letter concludes with a final note about Paul’s trip to Corinth (12:14–13:10).

Unity of 2 Corinthians

The majority opinion is that 2 Corinthians is a divided letter of at least two or more fragments. For example, J. Weiss divides the material of 2 Corinthians into four different letters (Weiss, *Christianity*, 1.323–57). The most influential partition theory for 2 Corinthians is found in G. Bornkamm’s writing. He sees five letters in 2 Corinthians. The first letter is a letter of defense and includes 2:14–6:13; 7:2–4. The second is a letter of tears and is 10:1–13:10. He sees a letter of reconciliation composed of 1:1–2:13 and 7:5–16. The fourth letter is one of commendation made of 8:1–24. The fifth part is 9:1–15 (Bornkamm, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, 162–94). W. Schmithals has found portions of 2 Corinthians in seven of 13 pieces (Schmithals, *Briefe*, 19–85).

While there are several partition theories, the four passages that present the most difficulty are 2:14–7:4; 6:14–7:1; 8:1–9:15; 10:1–13:13. Many find the transition between these sections and other portions of 2 Corinthians difficult. Sufficiently different subject matter and tone has lead scholars to argue that these passages are separate from the rest of 2 Corinthians; yet there are also good reasons to see 2 Corinthians as a unity.

2 Corinthians 2:14–7:4

J. Weiss has felt that 2:14–7:4 is an insertion and should be viewed separately (Weiss, *Urchristentum*, 265, 272). He believes this to be likely because Paul mentions his trip to Macedonia in 2:13, but the reader must wait until 7:5 to hear about the results. Weiss believes that the lengthy thanksgiving section of 2:14–7:4 seems unrelated to Paul’s travels. Furthermore, Weiss sees conflict inserted in 2:17; 3:1; 4:2–3; and 5:12, which seems out of step with Paul’s attitude in 1:1–2:13 and 7:5–8:24 (see also Halmel, *Korintherbrief*, 79–86).

Many words and ideas link 2:12–7:4 within the original composition of 2 Corinthians. Verbal links found in 7:4 also appear later in 7. In 2 Corinthians 7:4, Paul uses words such as “encouragement” and “tribulation” which can be found within 7:5–16. He also boasts in the Corinthians and will return to this idea of boasting in 7:14. In 2 Corinthians 7:4, Paul rejoices and then returns to the theme of joy in 7:7, 9, 13, and 16. Finally, he mentions affliction in 7:4 as well as in 7:5. With all of these connections, 2:14–7:4 is much less likely to be an insertion (Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 20–25).

An important consideration in evaluating the integrity of this portion of the letter is Paul’s intention. He is not obligated to give a continuous account from 2:12–7:16. His digressions could be a result of his emotional dealings with the Corinthians. It is possible that as he was writing 2:12–13, he was emotionally moved, recalling his meeting with Titus in Macedonia. This may then have led to praise and thanksgiving, and thus account for his change of thought. A

Pauline digression is a better explanation for the change in thought in 2:14–7:4 than concluding that these verses are an insertion (Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 14).

2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1

Moffatt, Fitzmeyer, Gnilka, and Dahl have proposed that 6:14–7:1 is an insertion within 2 Corinthians (Moffatt, *Introduction to New Testament Literature*, 109–25; Fitzmeyer, “Qumran and the Interpolated Paragraph in 2 Cor 6,14–7,1” 271–80; Gnilka, “2 Cor 6:14–7:1,” 48–68; Dahl, “A Fragment and Its Context: 2 Corinthians 6:1–7:1,” 62–69). Particularly for Gnilka and Dahl, this idea emerged from similarities that they have found with literature from the Dead Sea Scrolls. As a result, they see 6:14–7:1 as Christianized theology that emerges from the non-Pauline Qumran community.

The argument for this view is that 6:14–7:1 lacks specific connections with the Corinthian problems. From their perspective, it calls for timeless principles of a holy life rather than addressing the specific situation at Corinth. They also believe that 6:14–7:1 interrupts the flow of 6:13–7:2. If 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 was removed, Paul’s writing could flow seamlessly from 6:13 to 7:2 with the exhortation for the Corinthians to open wide their hearts.

There are a series of words that are characteristically non-Pauline. Greek words translated into “unequally yoked” in 6:14, “agreement” and “Belial” in 6:15, and “agreement” in 6:16 (ESV) occur nowhere else in the Greek New Testament. Furthermore, two phrases in 7:1 translated from the ESV as “let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit” and “bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God” are unique in Paul. Finally, the Old Testament passages that are quoted at the end of 6 are unique and not referred to anywhere else in Paul’s letters.

While there are non-Pauline elements within 6:14–7:1, there are also reasons to see this portion as being written by Paul, and part of the original composition of 2 Corinthians. The passage does contain similar themes which are found in other parts of 2 Corinthians. For example, the distinction between believers and unbelievers in 6:14–7:1 can also be found in 2:15–16 and 2 Cor 4:3–6. The “fear of God” found in 7:1 can be found in 5:11. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 and 6:2, there are Old Testament ideas that are taken from promises for divine restoration like those in 6:14–7:1.

Besides the overlap in ideas, 6:14–7:1 seems to refer to the specific situation at Corinth. The passage is a powerful call to separate from Gentile temple worship, which is a concern from the Corinthian correspondence. It also could fit well within Paul’s exhortation to separate from pagan influences from the rival super apostles (Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 26–29).

Finally, 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 does possess a common Pauline stylistic feature. Paul often declares who Christians are, with the use of an indicative verb, and then follows with a command. This is found repeatedly throughout 6:14b–16a where Christians are declared to be righteousness, light, believers, and a living temple. As a result, they are commanded to separate from unrighteousness, darkness, unbelievers, and idols.

While 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 may be an abrupt transition from chapter 6, it should be seen in unity with the rest of 2 Corinthians. Besides its correspondence with the rest of the book,

Paul, as any writer, should be allowed to write periodically with unique words and phrases. A few unique words should not lead to the conclusions that the writing is non-Pauline.

Recent studies are supportive of the passage's Pauline origin. They also support that the passage belongs within the larger argument of 2 Corinthians (compare Fee, "2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 and Food Offered to Idols," 140–61; Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 25–36; Beale, "The Old Testament Background of Reconciliation," 550–81).

2 Corinthians 8:1–9:15

There are a variety of opinions regarding the relationship of chapters 8–9 to 2 Corinthians. Windisch, Bornkamm, and Wendland split chapter 8 from chapter 9 and propose that Paul wrote 8 before 9. They find that chapter 8 was sent to the Corinthian congregation, while chapter 9 was written to Christians of Achaia (9:2; Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief*, 242–43, 268–71, 286–89; Bornkamm, *Paul*, 245–46; Wendland, *Die Briefe an die Korinther*, 8–9, 222–23). Weiss, Schmithals, Dinkler, Betz, and others propose that chapters 8–9 originally were separate letters from 2 Corinthians (Weiss, *Christianity*, 1.356–57; Schmithals, *Briefe*, 77–85; Dinkler, *Korintherbriefe*, 18; Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 3–35).

There are, however, good reasons to see chapters 8–9 together. Paul continues his boast in 8:24 with further boasting in 9:2–3. Furthermore, the ministry of giving to the saints that Paul speaks of in 9:1 resumes his discussion of the relief of the saints from 8:4. His use of brothers in 9:3, 5 resumes his brother-talk used in 8:16–23 (Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 27–28).

There are then good reasons to see chapters 8–9 together, and following naturally upon chapters 1–7. While there is certainly a transition between 1–7 and 8, Paul is feeling confident with the defense of his apostolic ministry in chapters 1–7 (7:4, 16). Now is the appropriate time to encourage the collection for Christians in Jerusalem that was first started in 1 Cor 16 (Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 24; Harris, *Second Corinthians* 29; Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 38). Given Paul's defensiveness with the Corinthians, it is reasonable to believe that he would repeat his encouragement to give from 2 Cor 8 within 2 Cor 9 (Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 24).

2 Corinthians 10–13

One of the most popular partition views in 2 Corinthians scholarship is to separate chapters 1–9 from chapters 10–13. This is known as the Semler hypothesis (Semler, *Paraphrasis*), and many modern commentators support this view (e.g., Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Furnish, *2 Corinthians*, Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, deSilva, "Measuring Penultimate against Ultimate Reality," Murphy-O'Connor, *Second Corinthians*, Kruse, "The Relationship between the Opposition to Paul").

Semler bases his argument on a few notable differences, including a change in tone between 1–9 and 10–13. Titus' visit to Corinth appears to be a future event in 8:17–18, 22, but it appears to be a past event in 12:18. An imminent third Pauline visit is clear in chapter 13 but is not mentioned in chapters 1–9. Paul refers to "we" in 1–9, but in 10–13 he uses "I" or "me."

These objections, however, need not overthrow the traditional view of the letter's unity. It is possible that Paul received another report between the writing of 1–9 and 10–13 (Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 38–39), and this could have led to the change in tone. Another possibility is

that Paul addressed the repentant majority throughout 1–9 and then returned to address the unrepentant minority in 10–13 (Hafemann, *Second Corinthians*, 19–36).

While Titus' visit to Corinth appears to be a future event in 8:17–18, 22 but a past event in 12:18, it is possible that Paul is not referring to only one visit. There could be distinct, separate visits since in chapter 8 two brothers are with Titus in his visit, but in chapter 12 only one brother is with him. Titus would have initiated the collection, delivered the “severe letter,” or both in chapter 8. His second visit could equally have involved delicate financial and personal matters in chapter 12 (Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 40).

The change in emotion between these sections could fit the general tenor of 2 Corinthians in which Paul is quite emotional. Indeed, the seventh chapter of 2 Corinthians is one of the most emotional in all of Paul's writing. The sudden shift between chapters 9 and 10 within an already emotional letter might not be out of the question. The greater number of first person plurals within 10–13 can be explained by the personal nature of the conflict that Paul is having.

Paul's impending visit may not suddenly appear in 2 Cor 13, as those who see chapters 1–9 and 10–13 separately say. Hints of another Pauline visit can be seen in 2:1, 3 and 9:4, though he may not speak of it so directly in each of these places. In chapter 2, the Corinthians should be reconciled about the man who had wronged Paul. In chapter 9, the Corinthians should complete the collection and thus avert shame before he arrives.

Other matters make it likely that the traditional view—2 Corinthians as a single letter—is viable and preferable. There is a unified theme that runs throughout the entirety—a defense of Paul's apostleship (Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 44–47). Some of the vocabulary appearing in both 1–9 and 10–13 occurs less frequently in other Pauline letters. For example, the word “commend” is found throughout the letter (3:1; 4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 10:12, 18; 12:11); it is found only five times outside of 2 Corinthians. The phrase “in Christ we speak before God” occurs only in 2:17 and 12:19, suggesting a unity between chapters 1–9 and chapters 10–13 (Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 19–21).

Findings from studies on ancient rhetoric have been used recently to support a unified letter. Second Corinthians 10–13 recapitulates the arguments from chapters 1–9, which parallels other ancient letters (such as those from Demosthenes, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, or Quintilian). In ancient apologetic letters, there was a section known as the *exordium* that raised issues and sought the audience's sympathy. Paul could have had this in mind from 1:1–11. Such letters would conclude with a *peroration*, which restated the issues raised in the *exordium*. Paul could be considering chapters 10–13 as the *peroration* (Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 18–23; Young and Ford, *Meaning and Truth*, 28, 37–38, 43–44).

Several modern commentators promote 2 Corinthians as a unified letter (e.g., Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 31–33; Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 328–39; Scott, *2 Corinthians*, 4–7, 200; Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 33–44; Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 42–51; Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 17–23). The discussion concerning the unity of 2 Corinthians, however, is far from decided.

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CORINTHIANS, THIRD LETTER TO THE Corinthians, Third Letter to The. A pseudepigraphal work that circulated in the early Christian period and was attributed to the Apostle Paul; it is included as part of the noncanonical *Acts of Paul*. In the early church period, *3 Corinthians* was considered canonical in some Syriac and Armenian churches, but does not seem to have been widely considered authoritative elsewhere. Today no church considers it canonical.

Structure of *Third Corinthians*

The letter of *3 Corinthians* consists of four parts:

1. an introduction describing the context in which the Corinthians wrote to Paul
2. the Corinthians' letter to Paul
3. an additional introduction describing the context in which Paul responded to the Corinthians
4. the alleged letter

Although these four sections are often referred to cumulatively as “Third Corinthians,” the fourth section of this unit—Paul’s alleged letter—can be understood as 3 Corinthians proper. It is possible that the two letters—the supposed letter from the Corinthians to Paul and Paul’s alleged letter—were written first and the accompanying introductions were then added at a later time. The entirety of the document we now know as *3 Corinthians*, which includes all four sections, was then likely placed within the *Acts of Paul*.

Attestation in Early Witnesses and Reception

The oldest and most significant witness to *Third Corinthians* is Bodmer X Papyrus, a third- or fourth-century Greek papyrus that contains the ostensible Corinthian letter to Paul and the third letter to the Corinthians. The absence of *3 Corinthians*’ two introductions in Bodmer X Papyrus may suggest that they were produced later than the two letters. Aside from Bodmer X Papyrus, few witnesses to *3 Corinthians* in the Greek tradition exist, which may suggest that the letter was rarely regarded as authoritative in the Greek-speaking world. Translations of *3 Corinthians* into Armenian, Coptic, Syriac, and Latin have also been preserved.

Third Corinthians was translated into Syriac in the third century and was treated as canonical by early Syriac Christians; the fourth-century Syriac church fathers Aphraat and Ephrem cited it as authoritative and Ephrem’s commentary on the letters of Paul includes *3 Corinthians*. However, the fifth-century Syriac Peshitta translation of the New Testament excluded *3 Corinthians*. Since the Peshitta became the standard version of the New Testament in Syriac churches, *3 Corinthians* lost canonical status in Syriac churches (Metzger, *Canon*, 176, 219). The Armenian Bible was influenced by early Syriac tradition and so also included *3 Corinthians*. The work was used in the Armenian church at least until the thirteenth century, and probably later, since it appears in a printed Armenian Bible from the 17th century (Metzger, *Canon*, 176, 223; Nersessian, *Bible*, 20, 29; Charlesworth, *Fluid Borders*, xx). However, it is no longer considered canonical by Armenian churches (Charlesworth, *Fluid Borders*, xx).

On one occasion, Tertullian described the Acts of Paul—a collection of writings that included *3 Corinthians*—as a forgery. He noted that the writer of the *Acts of Paul* was a presbyter from Asia who was removed from his position after he confessed to writing the letter (Tertullian, *On Baptism* 17.5).

Lack of Epistolary and Historical Features

The actual alleged letter of *Third Corinthians* proper, being the fourth part of the document now available to us, includes no historical references to either the situation of the author or the recipients. Thus, there is nothing within the letter itself to suggest that it was originally an occasional letter that sought to address specific matters in a local congregation. Instead, the

letter is universally applicable, suggesting that the author intended the letter to be received by a large audience rather than one specific community.

Major Themes

Resurrection

Third Corinthians emphasizes Christ's resurrection and defeat of Satan. The letter's author seemingly considered Jesus' resurrection to be bodily just as the future resurrection would be for believers (compare 3 Cor 6). The author urges those who are skeptical regarding the resurrection to consider the Lord's restoration of Jonah (3 Cor 29–30) and Elisha's resurrection of a body (3 Cor 32).

The resurrection was also a central theme in 1 Cor 15, where Paul presents the resurrection as central to the gospel (1 Cor 15:1–8) and the ultimate hope for believers (1 Cor 15:12–22). Paul also describes the resurrection as the decisive event that defeated the “last enemy,” death (1 Cor 15:26 NASB). He taught that only those who are in Christ will ultimately “put on the imperishable” (1 Cor 15:54 NASB) at the return of Christ. *Third Corinthians* places much more emphasis on Christ's defeat of Satan, who the author describes as the evil one (3 Cor 2).

Jesus' Miraculous Birth

Third Corinthians also emphasizes Jesus' miraculous birth. On two occasions the author describes the Holy Spirit being sent to Mary (3 Cor 5; 14). According to the author, the purpose of Jesus' incarnation was to defeat death (3 Cor 6) and the evil one (3 Cor 15). In Paul's canonical letters, he only references Christ's birth in Gal 4:4, which describes Christ as “born of a woman” (NASB), and Rom 1:2, which describes Jesus as one “who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh” (NASB).

Related Articles

For further information on the *Acts of Paul*, which *3 Corinthians* sometimes circulated as part of, see this article: [Acts of Paul](#). For information on the process of canonization, see this article: [Canon, New Testament](#).

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14

THE CORINTHIAN CORRESPONDENCE

Valuing Oneself and Others in the Lord

The Corinthian letters provide us with our most extended window into the ongoing relationship of Paul with a group of churches. As it happens, this relationship appears to have been particularly difficult, which makes these letters all the more valuable to those of us who minister within Christian communities and thus encounter many of the same kinds of issues. What makes a minister a credible and legitimate representative of God? Is the church properly another arena for self-promotion and politicking for a particular agenda? Is Christian culture compatible with a culture that insists on the exercise of individual rights and on the values of self-gratification and self-fulfillment? Paul's answers to the issues raised in Corinth assist us in

⁴ Williams, D. (2016). [Corinthians, First Letter to the](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

discovering a more genuinely Christ-centered vision for life together in Christian community, for life in the body and for leadership in the church.

HISTORICAL SETTING

The city of Corinth. Corinth enjoyed a long history as a Greek city-state until Roman forces destroyed it in 146 B.C.E. After a century of lying desolate and minimally inhabited, Julius Caesar ordered its resettlement in 44 B.C.E. He reorganized Corinth as a Roman colony, with a new local government modeled after the administration of the city of Rome itself. Corinth became the seat of the Roman proconsul, who was sent by the Senate to govern the whole province of Achaia. Lucius Junius Gallio (Acts 18:12–17), the brother of the philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca, was one such governor. The city was settled largely by freed slaves (*libertini*) from Rome and elsewhere in the empire (Syrians, Egyptians, Jews). This elicited disparaging remarks from orators, seen, for example, in the following excerpt from Crinagoras:

What inhabitants, O luckless city, have you received—and in place of whom?! Alas for the great calamity to Greece! Would, Corinth, that you did lie lower than the ground and more desert than the Libyan sands, rather than be wholly abandoned to such a crowd of scoundrelly slaves!

When Paul, therefore, speaks of the “not many” who are wise, powerful and rich (1 Cor 1:26), even those who *are* may well have very humble origins and be stung by Paul’s remark.

Corinth was a politically important center of the province of Achaia (probably the capital city). It soon became a bustling center for trade, with two ports (Cenchreae to the east, which also had a Christian congregation after Paul’s mission, and Lechaem to the north). It was well placed to profit from trade between the eastern and western halves of the empire. Artisans flocked to Corinth to set up shop, whether they worked in bronze, pottery, glass or leather (like Paul and Aquila). Local artisans of like craft grouped together in *collegia*, which were rather like social fraternities with their own officers, parties and burial obligations, organized around devotion to a patron deity (and often patronized by a member of the local elite). Excavations of Corinth suggest that the central forum was lined with numerous small shops on three of its four sides, bearing silent testimony to the bustling productivity and commerce that filled the colony.

Figure 14.1. Ruins of Corinth, with the ancient Temple of Apollo in the background. (Photo courtesy of Todd Bolen [BiblePlaces.com])

Corinth was a growing city of the nouveau riche. The elites and semi-elites there were not all “old money” but rather third-generation veterans and freed slaves turned entrepreneurs, social climbers and people of local political prominence. This contributed to making Corinth a highly competitive environment, with people vying in business, politics and claims to status. A host of inscriptions testify to the self-promoting mentality of the inhabitants there, who had many opportunities to rise along various social and political ladders. As a new city there was always the opportunity for would-be benefactors of the city to construct a public building or pave a courtyard and publicize his or her munificence with an inscription.

One celebrated example is the Erastus inscription (figure 14.4), whose subject may have been a member of the Corinthian church (see Rom 16:23): “Erastus laid this pavement at his own expense in exchange for the aedileship”. This thirst for honor and the desire for public recognition attested by these inscriptions provide an important background for the topic of “boasting” that runs throughout the Corinthian correspondence. The prominence of erecting new buildings “at one’s own expense” as a public benefaction (and thus a source of honor in the community) also provides the background for Paul’s description of apostolic activity through the metaphor of erecting a public building in 1 Corinthians 3:10–16. Paul can rightly claim to be the patron or benefactor of this congregation through the work he has done among them “at his own expense” (cf. *sui pecunia*, [“with his/her own money”] in the Erastus inscription and Paul’s frequent discussion of his refusal to accept support from the Corinthian church).

Such a city of increasing prosperity and obvious wealth attracted artists and sophists seeking patronage. The northwest and south stoa (covered colonnades or porticoes) that bracketed the main agora and the north stoa that intersected with the north market would have afforded such sophists a venue for their self-promotion, as would the market places themselves. In this environment display was as important as substance in public speaking. Even classical rhetorical theorists stressed the importance of delivery, posture, voice and stage presence. In the popular eye these became even more crucial to the evaluation and acclamation of the orator. Lucian, for example, writes a satirical speech in “A Professor of Public Speaking”, highlighting (and no doubt exaggerating) this emphasis on externals over substance and careful preparation of argument.

Reflecting on his visit to Corinth, Dio Chrysostom, the philosopher and statesman, recalls that rivalries between sophists and declaimers in Corinth were rather fierce. He also paints a picture of the intense divisions that could arise between followers of different orators concerning whose favorite was the best. Dio describes the season of the famous Isthmian games, which were under Corinth’s jurisdiction (and, incidentally, brought a huge influx of tourists into the city every two years), as “the time when one could hear crowds of wretched sophists around Poseidon’s temple shouting and reviling one another, and their disciples, as they were called, fighting with one another” (Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 8.9). Seneca the Elder’s *Controversies* also provide eyewitness testimony to the activities of and rivalries between sophists. Orators would ridicule one another and compete for prestige before the crowds, who cheered their favorites like modern Americans cheer their favorite ball teams:

Such competition in *sophoi logoi* sometimes became quite divisive.... One philosopher and another or one rhetor and another were often strenuous competitors. The group following a particular teacher could be so strong that they could be described as a *secta*, a “sect” or “party”. This is the word Seneca the Elder uses to describe the followers of Apollodorus versus Theodorus, rival rhetoricians in Rome in the first century BCE (see Seneca the Elder *Controversies* 10.15 and *passim*).

These speakers found many new elites in Corinth quite willing to enhance their own reputation by collecting client-dependents. For these elites it became a source of pride and prestige to have the more able and gifted clients. This cultural backdrop provides important

insights into the kinds of divisions that arose in Corinth after Paul left and other Christian missionaries arrived (see 1 Cor 1–4).

The arts also enjoyed a prominent place in Corinth. Just off to the northwest of the forum stands a large theater for dramatic productions and a smaller odeion for music and poetry recitals, each with the customary semicircular seating arrangement. These complexes no doubt brought a constant flow of the Greek and Latin classics as well as new literary compositions to the people of Corinth and its visitors. These in turn would put a wealth of maxims and other sayings within the reach of artisan-preachers like Paul (who quotes the poet Menander in at least one place in 1 Cor 15:33).

As in any major city in the first-century Greco-Roman world, the traditional Greco-Roman gods were well represented in religious sites and activities. The “many gods and many lords” to which Paul refers (1 Cor 8:5) are very visible in the city. There was no distinction between religion and secular life, no separation of church and state, as it were. Traditional Greco-Roman religion undergirded most aspects of society. The gods stood behind earthly rulers and authority, through whom they manifested their favor; each divinity was held to watch over the city, the guild and the family especially devoted to its providential care. Proper reverence toward the gods, namely, the worship that acknowledged their gifts, was regarded as essential to continued political stability, economic prosperity and civil order. Civic festivals, the Isthmian games, meetings and dinners of the *collegia*, and private dinner parties all included some acknowledgment of one or another of these “many gods”, and acts of reverence toward these gods (whether heartfelt or not) surrounded, indeed cradled, most of life.

In his travelogue of Greece, the second-century C.E. traveler Pausanias lists twenty-six sacred places (temples, courtyards, freestanding altars) in the Corinth of his day—truly an impressive number of sites. The prominent placement of many of these temples and other sites in the center of town gave visible expression to their importance in the life of the city. The dedication of large amounts of public space to such cult centers shows the symbolic importance of the cults to the Greco-Roman world. The cults of Aphrodite and Athena, and the Egyptian cults of Isis and Sarapis, are attested in Corinth and Cenchreae (for the latter, see Apuleius *Metamorphoses*, chap. 17–18). The imperial cult was prominently represented in downtown temples and at the greater Isthmian games (held every four years), which is only sensible given the city’s close connections with Rome and its gratitude toward its founder, Julius Caesar. The oldest temple in Corinth was linked with Apollo, the patron deity of mantic wisdom and the arts. This cult’s activity may shed some light on the issue of women speaking in the church (1 Cor 14:34–35). It is possible that some women, accustomed formerly to asking questions of the priests of Apollo (the god of prophecy and fortune telling), misunderstood the different nature of Christian prophecy and were making a disturbance in the church’s worship time. Corinth also had a temple of Hera (the goddess presiding over marriage), at which devotees could be ritually wed to a deity. It has been suggested that this would have been a point of resonance for the believers when Paul spoke of presenting Corinthians as “a pure virgin” to Christ (2 Cor 11:2–3). There was also a temple of Tyche (good fortune, destiny; cf. *Fortuna Augusti* and *Fortuna Romae*). Coins and statues show this figure with the *corona muralis*, “the crown of the wall”, on her head. The *corona muralis* was the award given to the soldier who in a siege was the first to scale the wall of the besieged city. Some have noted this as a possible ironic background to

Paul’s “boast” in 2 Corinthians 11:30–33, that he was let down the wall of a city in a basket to escape a ruler’s anger.

Corinth also boasted a temple of Demeter and Kore, which had several private dining rooms, and an Asklepion (a cultic site of Asklepios, the god of healing; see figure 14.2) about one-half mile north of downtown. At the Asklepion was a temple, an *abaton* (place for sleeping to receive dream-visions), a bath house for purifications, an exercise area and dining facilities. These two temples offered private rooms for dinner parties, and invitations would be issued to the guests to “dine at the god’s table”. It is possible, though not certain, that Paul has such a setting in view when he proscribes eating at “the table of demons”. Even at a private dinner in the home of a pagan host, however, patron deities would be invoked and libations (sacrifices of poured wine) offered. Paul’s strong warnings against participating in any form of idolatrous feast or ritual in 1 Corinthians 10:14–22 and his cautions about eating, in a nonworship setting, food that had previously been sacrificed to idols (cf. 1 Cor 8:1–13; 10:23–33) could cover a wide range of the believers’ participation in the life of their city, their business associates, and their personal friends who had not converted. The avoidance of idolatry and scrupulousness about the source of meat (i.e., whether or not the meat came from an animal that had been sacrificed to a Greco-Roman deity) would have been a major factor in constructing boundaries between the Christian group and the outside world.

Figure 14.2. Votive offerings of hands, ear and foot left at the Sanctuary of Asklepios in Corinth as testimonies to healings experienced there. (Photo courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies, Corinth Excavations and Todd Bolen [BiblePlaces.com])

Paul in Corinth. The author of Acts records that, after evangelizing Philippi and Thessalonica, Paul turned south into Greece. After moderately successful stays in Berea and Athens, Paul went to Corinth (Acts 18:1), where he first encountered Priscilla and Aquila. A common trade—not a common commitment to the gospel—brought these leatherworkers together as Paul began his evangelistic efforts in Corinth, though the couple are certainly believers by the time they leave Corinth with Paul (see Acts 18:24–26; 1 Cor 16:19). Another point of contact between Acts and 1 Corinthians is the mention of Crispus, a synagogue official who is converted along with his household (Acts 18:8) and who is among the few believers that Paul personally baptized (1 Cor 1:14). As is ever the pattern in Acts, very modest success in and hostility from the synagogue leads to a more direct effort at converting Gentiles (Acts 18:4–8).

Acts locates Paul in Corinth for a full eighteen months, the latter part of which coincides with Lucius Annaeus Gallio’s term as proconsul (see figure 14.3). This slender detail provides scholars with their only firm date for developing a chronology of Paul’s life. Gallio was sent out as proconsul in the spring of 51 C.E., and he returned to Rome with a fever before finishing his two-year term. It would appear that Paul arrived in Corinth sometime before Gallio’s term began (Acts 18:12 introduces Gallio’s proconsulship as a recently changed circumstance), giving a judicious estimate of late 50 through early 52 as the period of Paul’s initial stay in Corinth. It is also highly probable that 1-2 Thessalonians were written from Corinth, that being the city where Timothy finally caught up with Paul with his confirming news about the Thessalonian

converts' commitment (1 Thess 3:1–6; Acts 18:5)—notably another detail where the Acts account agrees with Paul's own. After Gallio's important ruling that Paul's mission was an inner-Jewish matter (and thus not a cause for Roman judicial intervention), Paul stayed on in Corinth "for a considerable time" (Acts 18:18), apparently not being rushed from this city as he was from Philippi and Thessalonica.

Paul reflects on the character of his own preaching and presence in Corinth at some length in both 1-2 Corinthians. Throughout, he shows a concern for the convergence of the message he preached (the power of God revealed in a crucified Messiah) and the form of presentation he used (relying on God's power rather than rhetorical flair for persuasion). Paul refused to play into the cultural norms of popular Hellenistic society. He did not go about using impressiveness of voice, gesture and vocabulary to win over his audience: "Christ sent me ... to preach the gospel, and not with cleverness in the use of words, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (1 Cor 1:17). The proclamation must serve the message, not the tastes of the people and the reputation of the orator.

Figure 14.3. The administrative building of Corinth with the *bema*, or judgement seat, where Gallo dismissed the local charges brought against Paul (Acts 18:12–17). (Photo courtesy of Todd Bolen [BiblePlaces.com])

The apostle understood that using the world's means of gaining conviction would undermine the transformation that God sought to achieve in people's lives by confronting them not with beautiful speech but with the cross of a crucified Christ. Moreover, Paul explains that he was intent on having his converts' faith rooted in an experience of God and God's power, not in the persuasive artistry of a mere human being (1 Cor 2:1–5). This is not to say that Paul did not give a thought to rhetoric. Even the claim to avoid using the flashiness of presentation to awe an audience, focusing instead on the content of the message, appears to have been a rhetorical device that was also used by the great orator Dio Chrysostom:

My purpose is ... neither to elate you nor to range myself beside those who habitually sing such strains, whether orators or poets. For they are clever persons, mighty sophists, wonder-workers; but I am quite ordinary and prosaic in my utterance, though not ordinary in my theme. For though the words I speak are not great in themselves, they treat of topics of the greatest possible importance. (*Or.* 32.39 LCL)

Nevertheless, Paul underscores the ultimate importance of experiencing the transcendent power of God as revealed in the crucified Christ. If the Corinthians were to be won to the gospel, it must be by the power of God and the convicting power of God's Holy Spirit. Their trust needed to rest in God's transforming power rather than in any manifestation of human skill or fleshly excellence.

Paul decides therefore not to play to the cultural expectations of sophists and orators, those same expectations that lead to the "jealousy and strife" that characterized the adherents of one particular sophist over against another. Such was the business of "carnal" and "ordinary people" (1 Cor 3:3). In so doing he hoped to overthrow the values that focused on externals and

performance, and to reveal the wisdom of God that turned the world's wisdom on its head (1 Cor 1:18–29), a wisdom reflected both in the executed Messiah and in the kinds of people God has gifted with adoption into God's family and with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The congregation Paul left behind. The Corinthian church was really a collection of house churches, patronized by several wealthy converts who owned homes large enough to accommodate the smaller cells of the church. This is the pattern throughout Pauline Christianity. Aquila and Priscilla had opened up their house to such a “cell group” in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:19). In Laodicea and Colossae, Philemon and Nympha opened up their homes to host the meetings of their fellow Christians (Philem 1–2; Col 4:15). Stephanus, a householder whose people “have devoted themselves to the service of the saints” (1 Cor 16:15) is likely such a host in Corinth (as would have been Crispus and perhaps Chloe). These cell groups then came together as a whole assembly from time to time at the house of Gaius, “host ... to the whole church” (Rom 16:23). The whole community of believers might not have numbered above fifty and, indeed, even if Gaius had one of the larger houses in Corinth it would be difficult to imagine any number larger than this gathering there. It is a charismatic community, where believers are vividly aware of the Spirit's presence in their midst and of the potential of being endowed with spiritual gifts.

This congregation has especially been the subject of extensive sociological study since Paul provides so much information about the people there either in the Corinthian letters or the closing chapter of Romans (written from Corinth during Paul's third visit). Gerd Theissen and Wayne Meeks have subjected this information to close scrutiny with a view to determining the social level of Christians in Corinth.¹¹ Theissen examines statements made about the community as a whole (e.g., 1 Cor 1:26–31) and then statements made about individuals with a view to determining status and resources. He is particularly interested in references to offices held, services rendered, travel and property. He looks also at the statements about divisions in Corinth, noting how many of them appear to align with social divisions (most notably the abuses surrounding the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11:17–34). Meeks considers the contribution to an individual's status that would be made by his or her ethnic origins, liberty (whether free, freed person or slave), offices held, occupation, wealth and gender.

Both conclude that people were drawn into the church from a wide variety of social levels. When Paul says that “not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth” (1 Cor 1:26 NRSV), this should not mask the fact that some were indeed powerful and enjoyed privileged status. There were people of considerable means, such as Gaius, whose house was sufficiently large to provide a meeting place for all the Christians in Corinth; Erastus, who was on the rise from “steward of the city” (Rom 16:23) to aedile (the occasion of his public benefaction of laying a pavement; see figure 14.4); Crispus, the “synagogue ruler” and householder; and Stephanus and Chloe, each of whom had houses and could finance travel for themselves or their representatives to Ephesus, where Paul was staying when he wrote 1 Corinthians. There were also artisans and tradespeople of more modest means, and finally those who were of humble means, both free and slave, who appear to have been in the majority (1 Cor 1:26; 7:20–24; 12:12). Meeks argues that only the uppermost levels of society were not represented, as well as the lowest—the peasant farmers and field workers, since Paul's work in Corinth was an urban

phenomenon. This picture represents quite a shift from the late-nineteenth-century view, heavily influenced by Marxist historians, that Christianity was a movement of the lower classes.

It was also a congregation with a mixed ethnic constituency. There was a Jewish presence in Corinth, and at least one Jewish synagogue (probably at least two, since both Crispus and Sosthenes hold the title of “president of the synagogue”, Acts 18:8, 17) to which Aquila and Priscilla, for example, would have attached themselves after their expulsion from Rome by Claudius (together with a large segment of the Jewish population, expelled for fomenting riots over one “Chrestus”). Some Jews appear to have joined the congregation, including the household of Crispus, but Paul’s letter presumes a predominantly Gentile audience. Several passages presume that the converts were formerly engaged in idolatrous worship (1 Cor 6:9–11; 8:7; 12:2), while the issues of continuing to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols and whether or not marriage was sinful reflect concerns more appropriate for non-Jews.

Figure 14.4. An inscription in Corinth bearing to the generosity of one Erastus in return for public office. The full inscription reads “ERASTVS PRO AEDILITATE S. P. STRAVIT”, “Erastus laid this sidewalk at his own expense for the aedileship”. (Photo courtesy of Todd Bolen [BiblePlaces.com])

At some point between the founding of the Corinthian congregation and the writing of Romans, the Gospel spread to the neighboring seaport of Cenchreae as well. Prominent among that congregation is Phoebe, who bears Paul’s letter from Corinth to Rome (Rom 16:1–2), and who serves as a “deacon” and “benefactor” to the Christians in Cenchreae.

Developments precipitating Paul’s intervention. Whatever positive growth may have occurred in Corinth after Paul’s departure, Paul encapsulates the problems as “divisions” and “quarrels” (1 Cor 1:10–11). The first area of strife centers on the various Christian teachers the Corinthians have encountered. After Paul left Corinth, Apollos, a convert from Alexandria, visited the city and preached there. Here again is a point where Acts and Paul’s own letters are in strong agreement, down to the high quality of Apollos’s performance as a public speaker, which would surely play into the tastes of the believers there (Acts 18:24, 28; 19:1; 1 Cor 1:12; 3:5–6). Paul and Apollos do not appear to have regarded each other as a rival or to have been on bad terms with one another (1 Cor 16:12). The Corinthian Christians, however, fell into their learned behavior of measuring one against the other, arguing over their respective merits and forming factions around their favorite preacher (which may have included Cephas, or Peter, by the time 1 Corinthians was written). Attachment to Paul or to Apollos even provided an opportunity to “boast”, to make a claim to honor and precedence over those who are attached to the “inferior” teacher. Thus they became “puffed up in favor of one against another” (1 Cor 4:6 NRSV).

These divisions were fueled further as the householders of the Christian community sought to enhance their own prestige through claiming the more illustrious Christian orator as their partner or even client. Most itinerant teachers would be glad to accept their patronage and, indeed, would depend on it (1 Cor 9:4, 6, 11–12, 14). Paul’s refusal to accept patronage (and thus enhance the honor of any of the elites within the congregation) would also become a

stumbling block in their relationship. The partisanship in 1 Corinthians 1–4 therefore belongs to the cultural competition for honor, pursued here by collecting illustrious clients and then comparing one's own "sophist" with the "sophists" of rival households in an effort to assert precedence. This practice continued, leading to the problems underlying 2 Corinthians, where Paul is being compared unfavorably with other preachers, with whom he cannot (or will not) compete in terms of flashy style, speech and boasting about spiritual revelations—something certain itinerant preachers will exploit to the full.

This divisive competition for honor within the community extended itself to several other facets of church life. First, an argument about eating meat from animals that had been sacrificed to idols created lines of division between the "strong" toward the "weak" (1 Cor 8)—labels invented, no doubt, by those who claimed to be strong. This debate suggests that some were laying a claim to greater spiritual knowledge and power, and hence honor (in Paul's words, being "puffed up", 1 Cor 8:1). Those who had achieved this status were challenging the honor and progress made by those who still labored as slaves to their scruples. Second, divisions along social lines marred the celebration of the Lord's Supper, where the differences in secular social status among the various Christians were being replicated at the communal meals of the Christian group. These meals become an occasion to remind many believers of their low status and the social ladder of precedence on which they occupy merely the lower rungs (1 Cor 11:22). Third, even the spiritual endowments provided by God for the edification of the whole community had become the raw material for competition and precedence-seeking. The converts have been valuing more highly the more exotic signs of divine giftedness—ecstatic speech (speaking in tongues), for example. In this context Paul identifies a core problem in the church: in multiple areas of church life the Christians have not "given the greater honor" to the "less noble members" (1 Cor 12:23–26) to promote unity. Instead they have been acting in accordance with the cultural norms of competition for honor, promoting division through establishing precedence.

Even this list, however, does not exhaust the difficulties that developed. Some in the congregation had taken factiousness to the next level by going to court against one another, using the secular law to win settlements against a Christian sister or brother (and not always with just cause, hence Paul's use of the term "defrauding" and "injuring" in 1 Cor 6:7–8). Moreover, some believers insisted on making room for extramarital sexual indulgences in their lives, most likely in the context of the pagan banquets they attended in the homes of their non-Christian associates. At the "better" banquets, the host provided for all the appetites of the guests—eating extensively, drinking excessively and, after dinner, enjoying the companionship of members of the opposite sex. Frequently, these companions were hired, hence prostitutes (1 Cor 6:15–16). Such indulgences were not moral lapses but rather the right of citizens of Corinth who, Christian or not, were simply living out their cultural mores.

The issue of immorality in the Corinthian church, at least, had come up before. Paul had written a previous letter (referred to explicitly in 1 Cor 5:9–11) that dealt with the church's response to people who claimed to be Christian but still lived the life of the unsanctified. Paul clarifies and restates his earlier position in 1 Corinthians (which is thus the second letter that Paul *actually* wrote to the Corinthian congregation), but it is noteworthy that he has had to address this topic already.

Paul has received firsthand, though not unbiased, information about the developments in the Corinthian church. The fact that this information comes through two separate delegations is no doubt a symptom of the factiousness of the congregation. On the one hand, members of Chloe's household have brought an oral report to Paul (1 Cor 1:11). The contents of the oral report appear to have included the following:

- Divisions in the church based on weighing one apostle against another. Specific criticisms of Paul that appear to have been voiced, and to which Paul responds, include (1) Paul's refusal of support, unlike other Jewish Christian preachers (1 Cor 9), (2) Paul's inferior rhetorical skill and presentation (1 Cor 1:17; 2:1–5), (3) Paul's teaching being unspiritual, worldly, not sufficiently lofty (1 Cor 2:6–3:3).
- Consternation about the church's response to the immoral brother (1 Cor 5:1–13; Paul speaks of this topic as something "heard" or "reported among you" in 1 Cor 5:1), and quite possibly the other topics of lawsuits among Christians and lack of sexual restraint (chap. 6) that follow.
- Concern about the social divisions manifested at the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17–34; Paul, again, "hears" the report about this in 1 Cor 11:18).

On the other hand, Stephanus, Fortunatus and Achaicus (the latter two quite possibly being slaves in Stephanus's household) brought a letter from the congregation to Paul raising several other questions or issues (1 Cor 16:17–18). Some of these might reflect responses to or further questions about Paul's previous letter mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9–11. Paul specifically refers to "the matters about which you wrote" (1 Cor 7:1) and uses the formula "and concerning" (*peri de*) to introduce the topics in that letter that he takes up in 1 Corinthians. These topics include.

- assertions or questions concerning existing and new marriages and the sexual expression of conjugal love (1 Cor 7)
- an assertion of freedom with regard to idol feasts and meats on basis of "knowledge" about the meaningless of idols and the religion they represent (1 Cor 8–10)
- assertions or questions about the possession of spiritual gifts, revealing a certain overzealousness with regard to the more ecstatic, "spiritual" gifts (1 Cor 12–14)
- the administration of the collection for the poor in Judea (1 Cor 16:1–4).

Two other matters might have been raised in either report—the denial of bodily resurrection (perhaps as basis for the lack of concern regarding fornication or eating food offered to idols, since the body's end is destruction) and the proper headdress for men and women in Christian worship.

Paul writes 1 Corinthians to address this plethora of concerns, seeking to transform the way the Corinthian Christians have been viewing one another and their life in this body and in this world. Competition and strife must yield to cooperation and unity; social and spiritual divisions must yield to the oneness of all believers united in Christ; boasting must yield to humble gratitude for God's gifting for service; self-indulgence must yield to the sanctification of the whole person.

THE MESSAGE OF 1 CORINTHIANS

The church: A culture of factious competition or familial cooperation? Prominent among the problems facing the Corinthian Christians are the divisions within the church. These are largely the result of individuals or groups claiming superiority in some regard at the expense of others in the church, or living out the norms and expectations of their social status (and thus flaunting this status in the eyes of other believers). In many respects these divisions reflect the age-old problem of “looking out for number one” rather than looking out for the interests of fellow believers. The effects of this mindset were far-reaching. Not only did it create rivalry between Christians on the basis of the teacher to whom they were most closely attached (1 Cor 1:11–13; 3:5, 21–23). It also manifested itself in Christians using the law courts to win honor and “damages” at the expense of other Christians (1 Cor 6:1–8). It led to the competitive measuring of spiritual gifts and the use of a charismatic endowment as a boast or claim to status in the community (1 Cor 12–14). It led to the replication of the hierarchy of social status at the celebration of the Lord’s Supper as the rich provided fine fare for themselves and their guests of equal rank in addition to the bread and wine that was distributed to the “masses” (1 Cor 11:17–31). It led to contempt for the Christian who still had scruples about eating meat from animals sacrificed to idols—those who had “knowledge” that freed them from such superstitious taboos would not deny themselves their rights and the social networking that accepting invitations to the dinners of their non-Christian friends provided (1 Cor 8:1–13; 10:1–11:1).

Paul turned this way of thinking, evaluating and competing on its head by focusing on the mystery of the cross and on the abundance of God’s generosity. Conventional wisdom and notions of power and status crumble before the mystery of the cross. There, the nature of God’s wisdom and power makes itself known by commending as Lord of glory the One who died in disgrace and weakness for the sake of others (1 Cor 1:18–25). Such a revelation must overturn human ideas about what constitutes genuine honor and advantage. Lowering yourself in the world’s eyes to serve others and assist them on their journey of discipleship emerges as the path to lasting honor and advantage, not claiming honor for yourself or insisting on the enjoyment of your prerogatives.

This affects the Corinthian situation at a number of points. First, it must affect the way the congregation celebrates the Lord’s Supper. The rich are well within their rights and privileges to gorge themselves on fine food and indulge in drinking wine before the day-laborers arrive and on into the evening. They are well within their rights to reserve the finer foods for themselves, for they would already be seen as generous in supplying bread and wine for the whole congregation. This was quite in keeping with the way private dinners were served in the first century, especially in Roman contexts. The quality of the food served should match the status of the person dining.

Paul roundly criticizes the importation of this practice into the new community of the new creation. By replicating within the church the social status that each person had outside the church, the rich were “show[ing] contempt for the church of God and humiliat[ing] those who had nothing” (1 Cor 11:22 NRSV). At the Lord’s Table there are no distinctions. All are sons and daughters of God; all enjoy equal status. If it is to be truly the Lord’s Supper, the meal must

reflect the new status of all believers in God's sight. The rich therefore should content themselves with the same fare as the poor—the bread and the wine—or else provide the same for all to enjoy together. By forgoing their right to better fare, the rich would voice a strong message of unity and solidarity with the rest of the church; by putting the feelings and sensitivities of the poorer members first, they would affirm the worth of their poorer sisters and brothers in their eyes and do what makes for harmony.

Second, Christ's example of serving the good of his sisters and brothers rather than himself must alter the way the "strong" respond to the scruples of the "weak". In Corinth this centers on the issue of meat previously sacrificed to idols. A fair portion of the meat available for sale in an ancient city came from a sacrifice at some temple or other. For the poorer citizens a civic festival or the meeting of a trade guild (always involving cultic acts and sacrifices devoted to one or other of the "many gods and many lords") would be the only occasions for tasting meat at all. Eating meat could be tied to idolatrous rites, therefore, in a number of ways exhibiting varying degrees of contact with the idols:

- Meat from sacrificed animals was doled out at free public dinners on festal occasions.
- Meat from sacrificed animals was served at private dinners held in dining rooms in temple precincts (the ancient equivalent of fellowship halls).
- Such meat could be served in private homes after having been purchased in the market.

With regard to the issue at hand, Paul was clear that a Christian could not take part in any ceremony honoring a false god (1 Cor 10:14–22). Beyond that, however, food was food (1 Cor 10:25–27), and it was not actually tainted by having been sacrificed to an idol at some point in the past.

Danger arises, however, if by eating food that had been sacrificed to idols, an "enlightened" believer provided an example that encouraged scrupulous believers to eat such meat. The latter would be unsure whether or not they committed a sin and would feel that kind of guilt that would hinder their communion with God. Paul teaches the "strong" that they have a responsibility to safeguard the consciences of their more scrupulous sisters and brothers. In the end the "strong" could only have one reason for eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols—their own pleasure or advantage. Everyone enjoys a good meal, to be sure, and in first-century Corinth a good meal also provided the all-important context for renewing friendships and partnerships with well-placed neighbors, and for enhancing one's social, business and political connections.. Paul's rule for the church is clear, however: "Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other" (1 Cor 10:24 NRSV). This might cost the more privileged in the church quite a lot in terms of their continued social climbing, or even the maintenance of their status in Corinthian society, but there can be no true advantage where a fellow Christian is injured.

Paul appears to digress from the topic of idols and foods in chapter 9, where he speaks of his right to receive support from his converts for his proclamation of the gospel, but this is really quite integral to the subject. Paul's chief point in this chapter is to present himself as an example of setting aside your own rights and prerogatives to safeguard or advance the well-being of your neighbor. In order to make the gospel more accessible (and less susceptible to being seen as yet another "philosophy for sale"), Paul does not expect money from those he is

evangelizing and teaching. Rather than affirm his self-importance by exercising his privileges, his new boast—one quite upside-down in the estimation of worldly wisdom—involves giving up his privileges for the benefit of others (1 Cor 9:15–18). The Corinthian Christians are challenged to do likewise, boasting no longer in the freedom that their knowledge gives them or their “rights”, but seeking their ground for boasting in how fully they set aside their own rights to serve their sisters and brothers.

Turning to focus on God’s generosity, Paul points out that the Corinthians have been joined to Christ by God’s gift, and not through any claims to honor or worth that they could have made on the basis of the standard areas of “boasting” (power, wealth, wisdom; see 1 Cor 1:26). The only boast of any value that the Christians have is thus their “boasting in the Lord” (1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17), the “claim to honor” God bestowed on each Christian by God’s choice and inclusion of that person in the new creation. This is a boast shared by all believers, uniting them rather than dividing them. Moreover, the preachers of the gospel were God’s gift to the community, a sign of God’s patronage of the new community, and not a ground for the human patrons to promote their own honor. Neither could a believer’s allegiance to a particular apostle provide a ground for boasting (and therefore rivalry and partisanship) because the apostles are God’s gifts given to *all* the believers, not just to some who claim to be special devotees (1 Cor 4:7).

Spiritual endowments similarly appear to have become a source of rivalry and ranking. This is suggested by Paul’s admonitions that just as one body part cannot call another body part unimportant or dispensable, so one member of Christ’s body cannot claim precedence or put down another member on the basis of the endowments given to each. It is also suggested by the fact that the more clearly charismatic or ecstatic gifts were more valued and sought after, whereas the less visibly charismatic gifts were undervalued and the diversity of God’s provision thus unappreciated. God’s generosity—his giving of all things to all the believers—vitiates any attempts to claim honor or precedence on the basis of having some of these gifts while others lack them. Spiritual endowments are not given for the sake of the possessor (perhaps “vessel” would be a better term) but for the sake of the whole church (1 Cor 12:7). The gift any person exhibits is, in God’s economy, a resource belonging to all. To make allegiance to a particular preacher or the possession of particular gifts into a ground for self-promotion in a setting of competition and rivalry is a dangerous perversion of God’s generous intent, showing the worldly mind of the contenders (1 Cor 4:7).

Paul’s Use of the Old Testament in 1 Corinthians

In Galatians, Paul speaks without reservation about the limited duration of Torah as a binding law on the people of God. Nevertheless, the Old Testament as a whole remained the authoritative body of texts within Pauline Christianity (as it was in the early church). Although not binding as law now that the Christian was led by the Holy Spirit, the Torah in particular and the Old Testament in general still provided authoritative information about God’s character, purposes and desire for God’s people. In 1 Corinthians alone we find Paul putting Old Testament texts to the following uses:

- The stories of the exodus generation provide historical examples of the consequences that follow certain behaviors, showing God’s desires to be clearly against such practices (1 Cor 10:1–13). The Old Testament contains paradigmatic stories from which moral instruction is to be derived (1 Cor 10:11).

- Paul interprets the law about not muzzling an ox while it treads the grain (Deut 25:4; 1 Cor 9:8–10) symbolically as revealing a moral principle concerning the rights of those who work for the gospel to share in the material resources of those they benefit. As with the narrative portions, so the legal portions of Torah invite discernment of the moral instruction contained therein.
- The Old Testament Scriptures continue to disclose the purposes of God. From this resource Paul finds confirmation about God’s design to confound the wisdom of the world (1 Cor 1:19; 3:19–20) as well as God’s provision for victory over death and the grave, and other lavish benefits for God’s faithful people (1 Cor 2:9; 15:54–55).
- The Old Testament bears witness to Jesus and his work, not only during his earthly ministry but also beyond. For example, Paul finds in Psalm 8, a psalm traditionally read as a poem concerning the lofty status of human beings among God’s creation, a witness to God’s ongoing subjection of all things to Jesus as the consummation draws ever closer (1 Cor 15:25–28).

By no means, therefore, do Paul’s radical statements about the limited duration of Torah as law mean that the Old Testament Scriptures, which always remain reliable oracles of God for Paul, lose their authority or force within the church.

For this reason Paul sets an encomium on love at the heart of his discussion of spiritual gifts. Our loving attitude toward our neighbor represents the greatest spiritual endowment we can receive from God—and it is precisely one in which a believer will not boast, nor one that a believer will use to claim precedence or foster competition! The gift of prophetic utterance, being a gift given not to elevate the speaker but to edify the congregation, is also brought to the fore as a primary spiritual gift, again because it is other-centered, benefiting the whole family of God rather than puffing up its possessor. Only insofar as spiritual gifts are exercised in an attitude of love will they be of any value to the possessor; if they are exercised to establish precedence in the community or any other self-serving purpose, they are “nothing”.

Paul sets out a second rule for his converts, one that is even more counter cultural. Christians are to be characterized by bestowing honor on their sisters and brothers, not competing for honor or claiming precedence at the expense of fellow believers. In particular, those who possess the more obvious gifts are all the more to honor the “weaker” or “less presentable” members rather than competing for precedence and maintaining hierarchies of status and prestige (1 Cor 12:22–26). Paul’s vision for the church as a community of sisters and brothers again emerges here. It was proper for siblings to avoid competition against each other, to make concessions rather than insist on their own way, to make each other share in the honor or good fortune that befell any one of them singly, and to take great care, where the status of siblings was unequal, to hide those differences in status wherever and however possible.¹⁹ By such means, unity and cooperation, which benefited the whole family, would be assured.

The physical body in God’s redemptive purposes. Another set of issues arise in 1 Corinthians surrounding the topic of sexuality and the venues for sexual expression. Some of the converts understood that they had the freedom to indulge their body’s appetites. We have already seen how this was so in the matter of foods, with Paul agreeing in principal that food restrictions (like avoiding the purchase or consumption of meats previously sacrificed to idols) did not have binding force since foods all belong to this world that is passing away (see 1 Cor

6:13a, which appears to have been a slogan among these converts). Nevertheless, just as Paul restricted the applicability of that principle to those occasions when it would do no harm to a Christian sister or brother, so he refuses to allow that principle to be applied to matters of sexuality (“the body for sex and sex for the body”, cf. 1 Cor 6:13b). Whether these converts made room for fornication (*porneia* being a broad term for sexual expressions beyond the limits imposed by God) out of a philosophical conviction that nature had provided for the body’s pleasure during an individual’s life or out of a misunderstanding of the nature of Christian freedom, Paul advances a very different understanding of life in the body rooted in the scope of God’s redemptive purposes for humanity.

God does not just save souls. God also sanctifies bodies. Paul looks back on the experience of conversion and baptism as an occasion on which God separated the converts from their unsanctified past, that way of life that included idolatry, a variety of sexual indulgences and greed (1 Cor 6:9–11). Such behaviors are incompatible with the life of the kingdom of God, which is why God had to redeem human beings in the first place (1 Cor 6:20). That redemption extends to the whole person—the Christian belongs to God in total, having been “bought with a price”. Moreover, the Christian has been joined with Christ himself, having been made part of that mystery of the body of Christ (1 Cor 6:15). Sanctified by God, the believer is now a “temple of the Holy Spirit within you” (1 Cor 6:19), a reference to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit into the believers that was so central a feature of the early church (especially as Acts and the Pauline letters attest) as a sign of God’s acceptance of the convert.

Paul is frequently painted as a repressed and repressive individual who devalues the flesh, but where he speaks of the “flesh” he speaks of the passions that drive a person toward sin (interpersonal as well as physical sin) or of the mindset that characterizes the wisdom of the world (e.g., Gal 5:16–21; 2 Cor 10:2–4). Paul is seen here, however, to have a very high view of the physical body in light of God’s acts on its behalf and the privileges accorded the Christian as he or she lives in this body. God’s investment in the whole person is so great that the only fitting response is for us to live for the Lord with the whole person (1 Cor 6:13b), to bring honor to God in the way we use our body (1 Cor 6:20). To reinforce this, Paul reminds the believers of God’s ultimate ownership of the believer’s body, with the result that the Christian is to use the body as God wishes, not as he or she might wish (i.e., to indulge its desires; 1 Cor 6:19; cf. Gal 5:13, 24). Thus, how we use our body provides us with a wide array of opportunities to honor God, bearing witness to God’s redemption of our body from sin and to enhance our connection with Christ.

The value of the body also emerges as Paul defends the belief in the resurrection of the dead, the enjoyment of eternal life in a resurrected body. A common view of the afterlife was that it was enjoyed by a disembodied soul, freed from the prison or house of the body. Paul does not share the view of a disembodied afterlife, however, since God’s redemptive purposes extend to all of God’s creation, including the human body (cf. Rom 8:20–23). The body is not abandoned to death, for God will not allow death or the grave to have even that measure of victory (1 Cor 15:53–57). The physical body will be transformed and will “put on immortality”. As a seed is related to the tree it will become, so the physical body is related to the resurrection body (1 Cor 15:42–49).

This is not merely a facet of eschatology for Paul: it has direct bearing on how we live our lives. Paul brings the resurrection into his discussion of ethics (1 Cor 6:14) and ethics into his discussion of resurrection (1 Cor 15:30–34, 58). What we do in the body is of eternal significance, with the result that the sanctification God provides for the whole person (1 Cor 6:9–11) is to be preserved and pursued with single-hearted focus. “Christians are commanded to bring one small piece of creation—their own bodies—into obedience to the healing love of God in Christ” as a foretaste and sign of God’s redemption of the whole of creation. Conversely, it is the hope of the resurrected body that gives the Christian boldness to use his or her body so boldly for a witness to the good news of Christ, facing dangers and hardships rather than avoiding conflict for the sake of continued enjoyment of pleasure (1 Cor 15:30–32).

Therefore, although the strengths and graces of the physical body cannot provide the basis for validating or invalidating ourselves or others as bearers of the gospel or favored people of God, the physical body is integrally connected with that “body of glory” that we believers will “put on” at the resurrection of the dead. Its properties cannot now be overvalued or used to measure one person against another, but on the other hand, it cannot be abandoned to sin or rejected as valueless or as something that belongs only to this passing world. Rather, it is to be sanctified as we use life’s opportunities for bearing witness to our connection to Jesus and God’s Spirit (1 Cor 6:15–20) and our hope in the resurrection from the dead (1 Cor 6:14; 15:20–34, 50–58).

EXEGETICAL SKILL

Rhetorical Criticism (3)—the Analysis of Topics

Ancient rhetorical handbooks are brimming with topics for creating a case and decimating the arguments of rival speakers, whether the case has to do with a decision about the course of action to be pursued, a verdict about someone’s behavior or the praise or censure of an individual or group. Awareness of these general topics helps a person understand how an author is framing an argument—what angles he or she is taking to persuade the hearers.

For example, if someone wants to persuade people to adopt a certain course of action or behavior, he or she could promote it by using any number of special, deliberative topics showing that it is

- virtuous, embodying *justice* (i.e., it renders to some other party what is his or her due, like gratitude to benefactors; loyalty to friends, family, guests and homeland; honor to parents; and the like), *courage* (preferring hardship to disgrace, choosing to face danger and pain rather than abandon duty), *wisdom* (weighing advantages and disadvantages with a view to achieving happiness, however that is defined by a group), or *temperance* (moderating desires for money, sex or food for the sake of some higher good)
- expedient, that is, it preserves existing goods, secures other goods or avoids loss
- honorable and praiseworthy, resulting in maintaining or increasing a person’s reputation in a particular circle
- lawful
- necessary
- feasible

- productive of security and the safe enjoyment of a person's goods
- or leads to good consequences

If the speaker seeks to dissuade people from a course of action or behavior, he or she would argue the opposite. Very often, a speaker is urging one course over another, so he or she is engaged in persuasion and dissuasion at the same time, or weighing the relative merits of the various courses of action facing the hearers.

Another set of topics would assist a person seeking to confirm or refute the validity of a position. For example, a thesis could be refuted by pointing out its

- inconsistencies (it cannot be reconciled to known facts)
- implausibility or impossibility (there are inherent flaws in the position)
- impropriety (e.g., it asks us to believe things unworthy of the gods or people)
- its inexpediency (if it were true, disadvantageous circumstances would follow)

Confirmation of a position would, of course, invite the use of the opposite topics. Still another set of topics provided a speaker with a checklist for praising a person (as in a eulogy) or for invective (denouncing a person).

- external circumstances: (1) descent/lineage (e.g., prestige and virtue of parents and ancestors), (2) education, (3) wealth/resources, (4) offices/public service, (5) friendships, (6) native city and its reputation, (7) manner of death
- physical attributes: (1) health, (2) beauty, (3) strength
- moral character (how have the foregoing qualities been put to use?): (1) virtues exhibited (justice, courage, wisdom, temperance, etc.), (2) actions exhibiting moral character, (3) objectives: (undertaken in the interest of others rather than oneself; done in accordance with virtue rather than pleasure or utility), (4) circumstances (timely, first person to achieve such deeds; performed alone or with little help; efficient, at great cost to the doer)

These same topics provide starting points for a "comparison" of two people, such as Plutarch attempts throughout his *Lives* or as Paul attempts in his tirade against the rival teachers in 2 Corinthians 10–13.

Other topics could contribute fuel for argumentation across the spectrum of deliberative, judicial and epideictic oratory. These are called common topics because they provide ammunition for all kinds of speeches. They include:

- The possible and the impossible. This can be used in judicial cases to demonstrate, for example, an alternative explanation of potentially damaging evidence, or in deliberative cases to show, for example, that certain circumstances requiring a response can or cannot arise, or that the course of action urged can or cannot be accomplished. There are many ways of using this basic topic, including the following arguments: (1) if the harder of two like things is possible, the easier is also possible, (2) if the whole is possible, so is the part; if the specific instance is possible, so is the general application, (3) if the result is possible or has occurred, then the cause is also possible or has already occurred
- arguments from contraries (if X produced this state of affairs, the opposite of X will produce, or has produced, the opposite state of affairs)
- arguments from similar cases (we know such and such to have happened in a previous case under similar circumstances and dynamics; given the same circumstances and dynamics, it is plausible and probable that the same would happen in a new case)
- arguments from the greater case to the lesser case or vice versa (e.g., if the greater person could not achieve this, the lesser person cannot, or if the lesser person can achieve this, the greater person can do this and more)

- arguments from consideration of timing (e.g., if we received help from the city before we were citizens, we will certainly receive help now that we are citizens)
- arguments from the definition of a word or thing, or the meaning of a name
- arguments from induction (e.g., considering multiple cases and deriving a conclusion)
- arguments from a previous judgment rendered in a similar case or decision made in a similar situation
- arguments from the consequences
- arguments from analogy
- arguments from incentives or disincentives to some action

As beginning exercises, try the following:

1. Read Matthew 6:1–7:11. What common *and* deliberative topics does Jesus use as he promotes the pursuit or avoidance of certain behaviors? Do any particular topics stand out as more prominent and frequent than others?

2. The Gospels have been called “encomiastic biographies”. That means that scholars have seen them not merely as records of Jesus’ life but as attempts to demonstrate the virtue and praiseworthy character of Jesus using the topics of praise. How, for example, might the genealogy in Matthew 1 function “encomiastically” to promote Jesus’ nobility? What topics of moral character are employed by John as he presents Jesus looking ahead to and enduring his crucifixion?

3. The same exercise could be profitably performed reading Hebrews. Compare the statements about Jesus’ person and achievements in Hebrews (including the comparisons made with angels, Moses and the Levitical priests) with the topics of praise and blame. What does the author have to say about Jesus’ external and physical attributes, and moral excellence?

4. First Corinthians 15 seeks, among other goals, to refute the view that there will be no resurrection of the dead for believers. What refutative strategies does Paul use in 1 Corinthians 15:12–19, 29–34 (i.e., what topics of refutation can you discern)? What common topics are also at work supporting his refutation (and thus his confirmation of the position that there will indeed be a bodily resurrection for believers)?

5. Hebrews, one of the most rhetorically crafted texts in the New Testament, offers many examples of common and specific topics at work. Consider how the topic of “the lesser to the greater” is used in Hebrews 2:1–4; 10:26–29. How are topics of justice and expediency used throughout the sermon to dissuade the believers from breaking faith with Jesus? How might Hebrews 10:32–39 be understood to employ topics of the “feasible” to promote continued endurance?

Clearly, it will take some time to become familiar with how these topics work in real contexts. Nevertheless, becoming competent in recognizing and analyzing the topics used by authors will help you understand better how they intended the specific content to function as well as the logical steps they expected the audience to be able to make on their own for the argument to work. Such study is of value because it takes us beyond a surface reading of the text toward a slower, more probing analysis of the logic of the text.

READING BETWEEN THE LETTERS

The story of Paul’s relationship with the Corinthian churches is still just beginning with the writing of 1 Corinthians. Second Corinthians bears witness to the ongoing saga of the apostle’s dealings with this more difficult group of believers. A prerequisite to reconstructing these next phases of the relationship, however, is determining whether or not 2 Corinthians as we have it represents a single missive or several shorter letters that Paul had written over time, later

blended into a single document by an unknown (and rather inept) editor. Many commentaries on 2 Corinthians, as well as reconstructions of this part of Paul's life, argue that 2 Corinthians contains as many as six letters or letter fragments. Such a view would greatly complicate our reconstruction. Because this view is fairly common among scholars, we would do well to consider it in some detail.

Second Corinthians: A composite letter. Scholars have detected a number of jumps or abrupt transitions as they read 2 Corinthians. The best explanation, in their opinion, is that 2 Corinthians is a composite document pieced together from several shorter letters. The content and order of these can be reconstructed by careful examination. The primary indicators supporters of a "partition theory" point to include the following:

- Paul's narration of his travels breaks off abruptly in 2 Corinthians 2:13, where he leaves Troas for Macedonia, then resumes in 2 Corinthians 7:5 with Paul finding Titus in Macedonia.
- The tone of 2 Corinthians 1:1–2:13 plus 7:5–16 is markedly different from that of 2 Corinthians 2:14–7:4, with the former being conciliatory and the latter being argumentative, even polemic.
- The subject matter of 2 Corinthians 1:1–2:13 plus 7:5–16 also has little or nothing to do with that of 2 Corinthians 2:14–7:4. How are we prepared for the middle section by the beginning section?
- The various parts of 2 Corinthians 1–7 seem to presuppose different situations: 2 Corinthians 1:1–2:13 plus 7:5–16 seems to speak of reconciliation as accomplished and confidence restored, whereas 2 Corinthians 2:14–7:4 appears to be calling for reconciliation.

On the basis of these observations many scholars would form two letters from these opening chapters: 2 Corinthians 1:1–2:13 plus 7:5–16 becomes the "Letter of Reconciliation", while 2 Corinthians 2:14–7:4, which is missing at least an epistolary opening and closing, becomes a fragment of another, perhaps earlier, letter.

The observations of seams and irreconcilable differences then continues:

- 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 interrupts the appeal by Paul to the Corinthians to open up their hearts to him (2 Cor 6:11–13 and 7:2–4) with an appeal to disassociate themselves from some other group whose identity is debated. These verses also show a concentration of vocabulary atypical of Paul. This segment is usually excised, therefore, as a fragment of another letter, possibly the "previous letter" mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9–11.
- Chapters 8–9 are often separated from the rest of the letter because of the difference in topic (the collection rather than the relationship of the apostle and congregation). Chapters 8 and 9 are further separated from each other as redundant appeals, resulting in two separate and independent fundraising letters.
- Even in the most conservative partition theories, chapters 10–13 are set apart as an independent letter because of the suddenness of the change of topic and tone, and because the invective of these chapters goes far beyond that of the earlier chapters. There is then

further debate as to whether or not 2 Corinthians 10–13 was written prior to 2 Corinthians 1–7 (thus making it the “tearful letter” mentioned in 2 Cor 2:4) or possibly joined to 2 Corinthians 2:14–7:1 as part of the “tearful letter” or written after the various other letters, marking a further deterioration of the relationship.

Second Corinthians might therefore represent four or five separate letters and fragments of letters, though the extent and order of these remains debated. We must also consider the purposes and methods of the editor or editors responsible. Why did they break up the original letters, discard parts (at least openings and closings, but in the case of 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 considerably more) and then rearrange the pieces into the letter’s canonical shape? A plausible suggestion for the *occasion* for such a compilation has been found in the later problems the Corinthian church had with its leaders (reflected in *1 Clement*)—an appropriate time for a church to revisit Paul’s words on the issue of authority in ministry—but not for why the particular editing it has received would have been necessitated by or better served that situation.

Second Corinthians: A unified whole. As is the way in scholarship, every argument advanced by a supporter of a partition theory has been countered plausibly by a supporter of a more unified view of 2 Corinthians (whether it is taken as a single whole or as two major letter fragments: 2 Cor 1–9 and 2 Cor 10–13). Additionally, the reconstructed letters are themselves open to criticism in terms of rough transitions and incongruities in vocabulary.

- Joining 2 Corinthians 2:13 directly to 7:5 makes the “for even” that begins the latter verse awkward (it should have been “but even”) and the shift from “I” to “we” abrupt and inexplicable.
- The difference in tone between 2 Corinthians 1:1–2:13 and 2:14–7:3 is overstated since Paul is quite on the defensive in both sections (note especially 2 Cor 1:15–2:4).
- Second Corinthians 7:4 flows integrally from 2 Corinthians 7:2–3, but it reflects the vocabulary and tone of the alleged “letter of reconciliation”. If it is detached from 2 Corinthians 2:13–7:3 and joined to the “letter of reconciliation”, the “travel narrative” of 2 Corinthians 2:13 and 2 Corinthians 7:5 would still be interrupted (this was a major reason for excising 2 Cor 2:14–7:4). On the other hand, if it is left as part of 2 Corinthians 2:14–7:4, the arguments for separating that “fragment” on the basis of vocabulary and tone are substantially weakened.

Similar objections are raised down the line to every argument for detaching some part of 2 Corinthians as a separate communication.

On the one hand, making cases for dividing a New Testament letter into several reconstructed letters might seem like a scholarly fad or armchair exercise. On the other hand, by drawing attention to these rough transitions, differences in tone and the like, scholars do a valuable service to all readers of 2 Corinthians, who are led to read the text more closely as they attempt to make sense of these data. If the solution is not to be found in a partition theory, these observations push us to consider more carefully the complexities of the situation Paul addresses, and thus the complexity and strategy of his careful response. Taken as a unified whole 2 Corinthians (or even just the first nine chapters) is certainly a complex letter. However,

a complicated situation compounded both by lingering prejudices against Paul and by lingering misunderstandings about the marks of a genuine apostle and minister would require a complex and carefully marshaled series of arguments as a response. The exploration of this strategy begins in the context of a discussion of yet another way that rhetorical criticism can assist us in the task of exegesis.

EXEGETICAL SKILL

Rhetorical Criticism (4)—the Functions of Parts of an Oration

Greco-Roman orations, whether deliberative or judicial, tended to follow a certain pattern of development. The speech would begin with an exordium, or introduction, the purposes of which were to (1) provide the hearers with “a sample of the subject, in order that the hearers may know beforehand what [the speech] is about, and that the mind may not be kept in suspense” (Aristotle *Rhet.* 3.14.6), and (2) secure the good will of the hearers, since a hostile or unreceptive audience would not be moved by any amount of argumentation. It is critical for a speaker to remove any prejudice against him or her at the beginning of the speech (Aristotle *Rhet.* 3.14.6–7). This would be followed, especially in judicial speeches, by a “narration”, or a statement of the facts of a case. The purpose of this section was to put the known facts into an interpretive narrative framework that would support the case one was trying to make. This would lead up to a “proposition”, the main point to be proven, followed by the body of “proofs” that could be marshaled, usually the longest part of an oration (and often including a refutation of the opposing speaker’s case). An orator would close with a “peroration” or conclusion, in which he would seek to (1) summarize the main points of the case, (2) arouse prejudice against opposing speakers and their arguments, and (3) reinforce the audience’s favorable disposition to the speaker.

New Testament letters rarely follow this pattern exactly, nor should they be expected to do so. A speech deals with a single issue; a letter such as 1 Corinthians or 1 Thessalonians may deal with multiple issues. Many attempts to force a New Testament letter into the mold of exordium-narration-proposition-proof-peroration have been rightly and roundly criticized. Overzealous application of this model unfortunately has soured some scholars against rhetorical criticism altogether (an example of throwing out the baby with the bath water). However, an awareness of what the various parts of an oration sought to accomplish can help us heuristically by suggesting what we might look for in the opening and closing sections or in the major sections of a letter, or how we might understand the function of narratives in Pauline letters. (For example, is Paul just sharing “news” or his “faith journey”, or is he setting the record straight and establishing the facts?)

As we turn to 2 Corinthians, how might an understanding of the functions of the parts of a speech—particularly here the exordium, or introduction—help us rethink the relationship of 2 Corinthians 1:1–2:13 to the “middle” section, 2 Corinthians 2:14–7:4?

If 2 Corinthians 1:1–2:13 truly provides the opening of a letter that has 2 Corinthians 2:14–7:4 as its middle, we would expect there to be a sampling of themes introduced in the former that will be developed in the latter. We find one such sampling in 2 Corinthians 1:8–9, where Paul explains that the afflictions he and his team endured in Asia Minor, in which he despaired of life itself and felt like he was under a death sentence, happened “to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead”. That Paul should be made to rely on God and not himself announces the major theme of 2 Corinthians 2:14–7:4 (and, as it happens, chapters 10–13), namely, that the true apostle, who bears the true gospel, is the one who considers his or her legitimation (or “credentials” for ministry) to come not from fleshly or worldly strengths but from God, and who therefore allows God to pierce the veil of his or her flesh and manifest God’s transforming power:

Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God. (2 Cor 3:5 NRSV)

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. (2 Cor 4:7)

Paul regards this as an essential mark of his own ministry, one that leads the Corinthians to place their faith in God, and not in human displays of strength or impressiveness.

A second sampling of the main argument emerges when Paul discusses his own hardships as the way that divine benefits come to the Corinthian believers. Paul's suffering of affliction might discredit him before a worldly minded audience—an audience looking for beauty, power and poise. Paul shows, however, that his affliction provides encouragement for the believers (2 Cor 1:3–7). This theme is taken up again in 2 Corinthians 4:3–15 (esp. visible in 4:10–15), where Paul's bearing the death of Jesus in his body actually works to the believers' advantage: that Jesus' life may be at work in them and that they might have a share in the world to come. His hardships are thematic throughout the body of the letter (2 Cor 4:7–18; 6:3–10; 11:21–12:10).

Second Corinthians 1:3–11, then, fulfills the first function of an exordium. An orator's success, however, rests on his ability to secure the good will of the hearers and to convey an impression of complete reliability, that is, establish the right ethos. It follows that an orator whose ethos, whose character, was called into question could not present his case effectively until those doubts about his behavior or motives were cleared up. Prior to writing 2 Corinthians, Paul faces a challenging rhetorical problem. His character has been called into question. He appears to have acted inconsistently, changing his travel plans and not keeping his promise to visit them on the way back from Macedonia as he announced previously. Rather, he appears to have acted in a cowardly fashion (or at least not in a friendly fashion), writing a nasty letter rather than visiting the Corinthians in person.

Before Paul can present his case developing the points he introduces in 2 Corinthians 1:3–11, he must carefully sweep away the prejudice that has accumulated against him. Pseudo-Cicero calls this the “subtle approach”, to be used when significant prejudice exists against the speaker or his case (*Rhet. ad Her.* 1.9–10). The whole of 2 Corinthians 1:3–2:11 then may be understood as fulfilling this essential function of an exordium. Because the situation is complex, the exordium is similarly complex, providing a full-scale defense of Paul's behavior and motives before launching into the arguments of 2 Corinthians 2:14–7:4.

Paul begins this process in 2 Corinthians 1:3–11, reaffirming his own costly commitment to the congregation's well-being and growth (2 Cor 1:6), his favorable disposition toward them (2 Cor 1:7), and their partnership with him in prayer (2 Cor 1:11). Paul goes on, however, to address at some length the prejudices against him and, in particular, to explain his motives for causing pain by means of a harsh letter rather than making another visit in person. In this explanation he uses several topics reflecting the rhetorical tradition of defense speeches. When a defendant had to admit to some wrongful act, he or she could set forward a defense by “comparison with the alternative course”, that is, “when we declare that it was necessary for us to do one or the other of two things, and that the one we did was better”, or by rejecting responsibility, when we “transfer [responsibility for the action] to another person or attribute it to some circumstance” (Pseudo-Cicero *Rhet. ad Her.* 1.24–25). Additionally, “one may also substitute one motive for another, and say that one did not mean to injure, but to do something else ... and that the wrongdoing was accidental” (Aristotle *Rhet.* 3.15.3).

In 2 Corinthians 1:15–2:11 Paul uses these topics to explain his decision not to come to them in another visit (2 Cor 1:23, 2:1, 2:9). The circumstances of the painful confrontation with the “offender” and the church's failure to stand up for their apostle at that occasion are responsible for Paul's decision not to make another visit and thus to break his word. He refrained from coming again to Corinth (1) to spare the congregation, (2) to avoid another painful encounter, and (3) to test their obedience. He urges that the alternative course he took, namely, writing to them (even if the letter was painful), was the more beneficial for both parties (2 Cor 2:3). He declares that he had the church's best interests at heart as well as his own, that is, that they should know the depth of his love for them (2 Cor 2:4) and not have grief from him (2 Cor 2:2) so that they might have joy from one another (2 Cor 2:2–3). Additionally, Paul offers an oath (2 Cor 1:18) by the faithfulness of God that

his word is reliable and calls God as a witness for the defense (2 Cor 1:23), oaths and witnesses being among the strongest proofs advanced in judicial cases.

Such an elaborate defense, together with the passion of Paul's identification of the reliability of his word with the reliability of the promises of God (2 Cor 1:18–20), indicates that reconciliation has not been completely effected, even if steps have been taken in that direction with regard to the "offender" (2 Cor 2:5–11), whom the congregation is now to reinstate. Paul uses the language of reconciliation accomplished and confidence restored throughout these sections precisely in order to consolidate the reconciliation that has been accomplished through the tearful letter, and to facilitate the full restoration of confidence he calls for in this letter. Only after clearing away the prejudice that exists against him can Paul move into the main topics of his letter with the assurance that he will now receive an attentive and amicable hearing.

The following exercises will provide additional practice reflecting on how the functions of the various parts of an oration can open up the functions of segments of New Testament speeches and letters:

1. Analyze the defense speeches in Acts 22, 24 and 26 as samples of judicial speeches. Do certain verses line up with the functions of the various parts of an oration? Does considering the functions of narrative in judicial speeches as a strategic framing of a "statement of facts", for example, illumine the purpose and strategy of that part of the speech?

2. Analyze Galatians 1:1–10 in terms of the functions of an exordium, Galatians 1:11–2:14 in terms of the function of a "statement of facts", and Galatians 6:11–18 in terms of the functions of a peroration. Can you identify the proofs introduced in Galatians 3:1–4:31? What are the functions of Galatians 5:1–6:10 (e.g., where is Paul drawing conclusions from the proof section, summing up his fundamental advice or amplifying his advice)?

3. Analyze 1 Corinthians 15 as an approximation of a complete oration. This is somewhat artificial, since the opening would not need to accomplish all the functions of an exordium. Nevertheless, how might the opening verses enhance Paul's credibility and the audience's receptivity to his argument? Does Paul provide a "statement of facts" in the form of a narrative of some kind? What would you identify as the proposition of the chapter? How does Paul marshal proofs to demonstrate this proposition? Are there "digressions" from the main topic (i.e., treatments of secondary topics)?

FOR FURTHER READING

Kennedy, George. *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

Mack, Burton L. *Rhetoric and the New Testament*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990.

Watson, Duane F. *Invention, Arrangement, and Style: Rhetorical Criticism of Jude and 2 Peter*, pp. 1–28. SBLDS 104. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988. (See especially pp. 20–21 and the extensive references to the ancient rhetorical resources given in the notes.)

By means of a close rhetorical analysis we can see how 2 Corinthians 1:1–7:16 could function as a unified response to a moderately hostile situation. What then about the alleged interpolation of 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1? And how would the "collection letters" (chaps. 8 and 9) and the rather more heated attack of chapters 10–13 function as part of the same piece of communication as chapters 1 through 7?

The objections against reading 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 as an integral part of its context are readily refuted:

- The atypical words found in this passage can be explained on the basis of the Old Testament quotations that Paul uses (the atypical words being part of a quotation) and of the rhetorical device of the multiple antitheses with which Paul opens the passage, a device that sends authors reaching for unusual synonyms and antonyms.
- The dualism reflected in the passage is quite at home in 2 Corinthians, which is pervaded by dualistic antitheses (“those who are perishing” versus “those who are being saved”, 2 Cor 2:15–16; “that which is seen” versus “that which is unseen”, and the “temporary” versus the “eternal”, 2 Cor 4:16–18; see also 2 Cor 3:1–11).
- The Scriptural quotations do not reflect the saving value of Torah but provide an argument from written authority concerning the importance of separating ourselves from the influences that keep us bound to this ungodly age so that we may receive the promised gifts of God.
- The argument that language of purification and uncleanness is out of place in Paul’s letters is patently false: the apostle frequently uses these cultural values to draw or reinforce the boundaries of the Christian community.

Rather than interrupt an appeal for reconciliation between Paul and the believers, then, 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 can be understood as a further extension of that appeal: reconciliation with Paul means dissociation from others who have not understood the implications of the faith, who are still in effect siding with the present evil age. Paul has spoken throughout the letter of rival Christian sophists who have made their way to Corinth, who bolster their credibility with letters of recommendation from other churches (2 Cor 3:1), promote themselves by means of their appearance and performance rather than their heart (2 Cor 5:12), and whom Paul accuses of peddling the gospel for food, shelter and gifts (2 Cor 2:17). These itinerant teachers, here grouped with the “unfaithful”, will be attacked even more directly in 2 Corinthians 10–13 as “ministers of Satan”.

With regard to chapters 8 and 9 it is clear that Paul is very concerned about the relief collection for the poor in the Judean churches. It is not unusual that he should include some instructions about this in a letter (see 1 Cor 16:1–4; Rom 15:25–29), especially since Paul hopes to complete the task and take his offering to Jerusalem in the near future. Since a letter, unlike the typical oration, could address numerous topics and concerns (1 Corinthians, for example, certainly runs the gamut of diverse topics), the introduction of a new topic at 2 Corinthians 8:1 should hardly surprise the reader. Chapter 8 in particular shares a number of key words with the first seven chapters, including the very characteristic “encouragement/comfort” (*paraklēsis*), “trial” (*thlipsis*) and “boast” (*kauchēsis*). The Macedonian Christians, who serve as a paradigm of generosity for the Corinthians to emulate, first rededicated themselves to Christ and to Paul before completing their contributions (2 Cor 8:1–5). Paul exhorts the Corinthians directly to this same series of actions in 2 Corinthians 5:20, 6:11–13 and 8:7, suggesting a strong thematic connection between the first seven chapters and the praiseworthy example of the Macedonians in chapter 8.

The connection of chapters 8 and 9 has been ably argued by S. K. Stowers, who has shown that the opening words of 2 Corinthians 9:1 announce not a new topic (and thus something that

would be out of place following chapter 8), but an explanation for the previous material. Indeed, 2 Corinthians 9:1–5 depends on information in 2 Corinthians 8:16–24 to be fully intelligible, and so it cannot be a separate communication. Moreover, the strategies of praising the Macedonian Christians' generosity to the Corinthians (2 Cor 8:1–5) and challenging the Corinthians not to disprove Paul's previous boasting of their generosity to the Macedonians (2 Cor 9:1–5) are entirely complementary. The Corinthians would lose face indeed if they had turned out not to be the generous exemplars that the Macedonians believed them to be—all the more as the Macedonians were spurred on to greater generosity by that example.

The collection material fits, therefore, quite well at the close of 2 Corinthians 1–7. After he has dealt with the problems in his relationship with the Corinthians and hopefully brought them back into line with his apostolate and message, Paul can now ask them to move ahead with the collection project. Indeed, their renewed participation in this endeavor would give them an opportunity to invest themselves in Paul's mission and in their restored relationship with him, acting again as his partners (2 Cor 1:7). It will also provide them with an opportunity to maintain their honor, which we saw the Corinthians so deeply concerned about throughout 1 Corinthians, in a manner that will benefit the global church (rather than merely serve the pretensions of individual honor-seekers).

Finally, we come to the question of chapters 10–13. It must be admitted that Paul employs a different rhetorical strategy in these chapters than in chapter 1–9. In the first part he moves delicately past the prejudices that alienate him from his hearers and subtly toward the issues that trouble him about the Corinthian believers' own grasp of the gospel. In the second part he declares open war on the rival itinerant preachers and is much more openly critical of the Corinthian Christians themselves. Given the stunning escalation of directness and criticism in the last four chapters, a partition theory is most easily defended at this point on the ground that Paul's earlier attempts at rooting out the problems had not met with success, and that in response to further distressing reports Paul cast subtlety to the four winds and laid the issues on the line for his converts. The editor's activity would be limited to omitting the epistolary conclusion to the first letter and the epistolary prescript to the second letter.

If these chapters represent a separate letter, we must at least leave them chronologically in place as subsequent to the letter that contained 2 Corinthians 1–9. That is, they do not constitute the "tearful letter" written before chapters 1–9 (mentioned by Paul in 2 Cor 2:1–4; 7:8–12). Chapters 10–13 never address the problem of an "offender" within the Corinthian congregation (whereas the punishment of this "offender" is the primary result of the "tearful letter", one that Paul regards as in keeping with the primary aims of that letter), but rather the problem of the influence of rival teachers on the congregation as a whole.

A number of scholars would argue, however, that even this modest partition theory should be disregarded. Apart from the complete lack of evidence in the ancient manuscripts that 2 Corinthians 1–9 ever circulated independently from chapters 10–13, they make the following observations:

- An intervening visit by Titus (one of the arguments put forward for the partition) need not have been made between 2 Corinthians 8:6 and 12:18 if the latter refers to the visit Titus made when he delivered the "tearful letter".

- The objection that the abrupt shift in tone signals a change in situation (and therefore two separate letters) founders when we encounter similar shifts of tone in texts such as Demosthenes' *Second Epistle*, the literary integrity of which has not been held suspect.
- The shift in tone, the more direct attack on the integrity of the opponents as bearers of God's word and Paul's stepping forward as the sole author of chapters 10–13 (2 Cor 1–9 is written from the standpoint of coauthorship; cf. 2 Cor 1:1 with 10:1), can be explained as the result of Paul's decision to close this letter with the rhetorical form of *synkrisis*, a "comparison" of himself with his opponents, in which he pulls out all the rhetorical stops (including the devices of vituperation, irony, sarcasm and strong appeals to the emotions) in an attempt to fully win over the Corinthian believers.

We may conclude that 2 Corinthians 1–9 and 10–13 address very closely related situations and quite possibly the same situation. The points at issue in both parts of the letter are substantially the same, indicated in the use of the same significant terms and topics in both. These issues all focus on "boasting", on the criteria by which we commend ourselves as servants of God, on the appropriate foundation of our confidence. The rival teachers commend themselves and criticize Paul based on appearances and quality of performance; Paul places his confidence solely in God, whose power is shown most completely where human strength fails (for example, in hardships), and insists that his converts cease evaluating their leaders from a worldly point of view. Only in this way will their own focus be detached from the temporary strengths of this present age and fixed on the power of God that alone suffices to bring us to the age to come.

Map 14.1. Paul's visits and letters to Corinth

Paul and the church after 1 Corinthians. Based on the evidence in 2 Corinthians and Romans, Paul's relationship with the Corinthian Christians after the writing of the "previous letter" and 1 Corinthians unfolded as follows:

- After sending 1 Corinthians (and perhaps receiving word back from his emissary concerning how the letter was received), Paul makes a second visit, en route to Macedonia. This marks a departure from his originally stated plan to visit them on the way back from Macedonia (compare 1 Cor 16:5 with 2 Cor 1:15–17), and it is possible that his early arrival took them off guard. On this visit Paul has an unpleasant confrontation with a member of the congregation (the offender of 2 Cor 2:5–11; 7:11–12), making this the "painful" visit. It seems likely that the confrontation again centered on Paul's legitimacy as a bearer of God's revelation, given the issues which dominate the remaining correspondence.
- Having left Corinth without resolution, Paul sends his third letter, the tearful letter, in place of a return visit from Macedonia. This letter (dispatched with Titus) together with Titus's personal presence and intervention, effect repentance on the part of the congregation for not taking action when the offender attacked Paul so openly. They respond now by punishing the offender in some way (probably exclusion). During this period Paul was in

Ephesus facing some unspecified hardships (2 Cor 1:8–9), possibly including one of his frequent imprisonments.

- Titus returns to Paul with an encouraging report. Reconciliation seems possible, although there are still some very troublesome issues to address. The offender acted, it would appear, on behalf of outsiders who had come into Paul’s field of missionary work to undermine his authority and assert theirs. Once more the issue of “who is the legitimate apostle” or “who is the superior bearer of revelation” emerges. From Paul’s point of view they should rather have asked “who is the bearer of the superior revelation”, that is, who makes the power of God more clearly present and genuine transformation more accessible.
- Paul writes 2 Corinthians 1–13 (possibly all at once, possibly in two stages) to deal with these issues, to cement his relationship with the Corinthian believers and to promote renewed commitment to the collection project. He consolidates the ground that has been gained in their relationship due to their willingness to punish the offender. He calls them to complete their conversion from the worldly way of thinking that focuses on appearances, or qualifications pertaining to the flesh, in favor of looking away to the eternal realities and evaluating apostles on the basis of how transparent they are to God, who causes this age and all its values to pass away and brings forth a new age. He calls them to complete the collection project, which provides an opportunity for them both to reaffirm their bond with Paul and, through him, with the Jerusalem church.
- Titus and the “brothers” are dispatched to deliver the letter and oversee the collection.
- Paul visits Corinth a third time (as he anticipated in 2 Cor 13:1). Reconciliation appears to have been achieved—the churches of Achaia come through with their contribution to the collection (Rom 15:25–27). Paul writes Romans from Corinth (Rom 15:25–28; 16:23) and sets out with the relief funds for Jerusalem, where the most trying phase of his career begins.

THE MESSAGE OF 2 CORINTHIANS

Human prowess or God’s power: What makes an effective minister? Paul writes 2 Corinthians in large measure to counter the influence of certain traveling Jewish Christian preachers who have deeply impressed some portion of the congregation. Paul takes issue not with their explicit theological teachings, leading us to suspect that they are not Judaizers comparable to the rival teachers we encounter in Galatians. Paul takes issue instead with the manner these teachers play up to the cultural norms and expectations of their audience, particularly in terms of the criteria they used to promote their own ministerial authority, as it were, and to compare themselves (favorably) with Paul at his expense. They had a fundamentally different answer than Paul to the question, What makes a person a worthy Christian leader?—one that was much more in keeping with the values of the worldly mind than the values Paul believed were intrinsic to the gospel of the crucified Messiah. For Paul this was a serious matter, comparable in weight, though different in form, to the threat to the gospel in Galatia.

The rivals’ self-understanding and the values they embodied and promoted amounted to presenting “a different Jesus”, preaching “a different gospel”, and imparting “a different spirit” in the Corinthian congregation (2 Cor 11:4). In many respects they reinforced precisely that

ethos (competition, comparing one person against another, boasting in gifts and achievements as a means of asserting precedence) that Paul had sought to overturn in 1 Corinthians. An ancient orator and instructor of orators wrote: “the greatest defect in a person is to show his or her humanness, for then a person ceases to be held divine”. Paul’s opponents embodied such worldly thinking. In building themselves up on the strength of their appearance and credentials, however, and asking that their followers evaluate them on this basis, they do not allow God’s presence to shine through. Rather, they remain opaque to God’s power, revealing no new basis for trust and confidence but mirroring and reaffirming the values of the world. Indeed, they empty the cross of its power to reveal the wholly other and greater wisdom and strength of God (cf. 1 Cor 1:17).

The gospel preached by Paul declared that this present world was passing away and that all marks of value (whether positive or negative) within this present world were therefore not of lasting value (see, for example, 2 Cor 4:16–18). The heart of Paul’s gospel, indeed, is conformity to Christ in his death and his self-giving obedience to the work of God in the world, so that one may also share in Christ’s resurrection. The present body—even if graced by poise, beauty, dramatic presence and all manner of human achievement—is still mere “nakedness”. It is not until the resurrection that we will be fully clothed with a body of glory. This flesh is penultimate, subject to death and decay, which looks forward to the day when what is mortal will be swallowed up by life (2 Cor 5:1–4). Indeed, this body and all that belongs to it is still “dishonor” and “weakness” when set alongside the resurrection body that God calls into existence (1 Cor 15:43). Only the latter body has genuine honor and strength.

What value then can fleshly strengths really have before God? Rhetorical ability, charismatic virtuosity and all that makes for a fine appearance in the flesh cannot make someone sufficient for the ministry of the gospel. These things, together with all human credentials, belong to the present age that is passing away, and they will prove valueless and impotent in the face of death. They carry nothing of the power of God that brings a person to the life of the age to come. They are like the fading glory of Moses’ face and, like Moses, the rival teachers are masking the truth of the temporary and fading nature of all human strengths (2 Cor 3:7–14). Only God can legitimate a person for the work of proclaiming the Word that separates those who are perishing from those who are being saved (2 Cor 3:4–6).

Paul therefore allows his humanness, his vulnerability, his seeming inadequacies to remain visible, so that when people look at him they will see not another paradigm of the myth of self-justification, but rather the fire of God’s favor and power glowing through the translucent walls of an ordinary clay vessel. Paul does not seek to adorn this poor vessel with external trappings, which would only distract from the One his converts must encounter and in whom they must place their confidence. In this way Paul truly presents no stumbling block to the gospel, as he claims (2 Cor 6:3). Paul’s experiences of affliction, understanding of apostleship and presence in the world all point away from human strength and self-reliance toward the provision of God and reliance on the divine. For Paul there must be no mistaking his successes for human triumphs, but rather they must be seen as God’s strength at work. Far from discrediting him, then, his hardships qualify him as an emissary of God, for in his weakness God’s strength is known and made present and accessible to the churches (2 Cor 1:3–7; 4:10–12; 12:9–10). The representative of the genuine gospel must resist the temptation to make himself or herself look

more divine than human, to make himself or herself the focus of trust and confidence. Only thus can the reality of God's power and promise shine through and reveal itself to people in need of God's transformation.

Paul's model of ministry, which also must be replicated in each disciple, is mandated first by Christ's example and the nature of his messiahship (cf. 1 Cor 1:17–25; 2:1–2; 2 Cor 4:7–18; 13:4). Viewed “according to the flesh” (*kata sarka*), Jesus is “Christ crucified”, an image of weakness and degradation; viewed by faith he is the “Lord Messiah” (1 Cor 12:3), the place where God's transforming power breaks into the perishing world. When we look at Jesus with the eyes of the Spirit, a veil is removed—the veil that covers the temporary, passing value of appearances and worldly achievements with a veneer of ultimate importance and reliability. Jesus, the Messiah who died on a cross—stripped, despised, worthless in the world's eyes—proves the unreliability of appearances. He whom the world regarded as worthless God estimated as of supreme worth. In obedience to God's purposes, Jesus allowed himself to be deprived of all outward signs of acceptability and worth, valuing the approval of God rather than the approval of society. The resurrection of Jesus proves that God's approval is of infinitely more worth than the world's, and it is to be pursued even at the cost of being evaluated as of no account by worldly standards.

Paul's Lists of Hardships

Paul prominently features lists of the hardships he has endured in his service to Christ throughout 2 Corinthians (2 Cor 4:7–12; 6:3–10; 11:21–33). In so doing he introduces a frequent topic of Greco-Roman philosophical texts into his defense of his ministry. These hardship catalogs served several ends. Often they reinforced the core value of the Stoic philosophy, namely, imperturbability in the face of external circumstances (Seneca *Constant.* 10.4; 15.1–3; Epictetus *Diss.* 4.7.1–18). A Stoic is a person “who though sick is happy, though in danger is happy, though dying is happy, though condemned to exile is happy, though in disrepute is happy” (Epictetus *Diss.* 2.19.24). Hardships prove the worth of a person, the inner strength, the determination of the will, the moral fortitude (Dio *Orations* 8). The person whose moral character and determination remains steadfast in the face of any hardship is the praiseworthy person (Seneca *Ep. Mor.* 82.11–12), and hardships can be viewed as the means by which God trains a person in virtue and proves that person's worthiness (Seneca *Prov.* 6.1–4; Epictetus *Diss.* 1.24.1–2). Hellenistic Jewish literature shows a similar tendency to interpret hardships as opportunities to display virtue, here transformed from “imperturbability” to “endurance for the sake of Torah”, for example (4 Maccabees 11:9–12).

One important point of connection between Paul and philosophical interpretations of enduring hardships is their probative value. Paul's endurance of hardships proves his fidelity to God's commissioning him as a servant (2 Cor 11:23–29) and gives evidence of his courage and sincerity. The positive spin that Stoics and others gave to the endurance of hardships (many of which would have entailed disgrace among nonphilosophers) certainly helped Paul set forward his own considerable list as proof of his genuineness as a philosopher of the Christian way of life.

However, there are some notable points of difference, as Victor Furnish ably demonstrates. Paul speaks candidly of the impact his hardships have had on him. He experiences their crushing weight quite fully (2 Cor 1:8–9). Moreover, his ability to endure hardships is not ultimately a proof of his own accomplishment in putting philosophy into practice (although he would make such a claim in Phil 4:11–12) or his moral determination, but of the “surpassing power of God”, the God who raises the dead and emboldens the afflicted (2 Cor 1:9; 4:7).

Understanding that God’s approval matters more than society’s affirmation of our respectability gives us true freedom to follow Jesus, which will often lead us away from what the world affirms and encourages. Society counsels us to secure our financial future through hoarding and investing; Jesus calls us to invest in the poor and hungry. Society advises us to network with people who can advance our careers; Jesus calls us to network with the outcast, the homeless and the sick to advance their good. Where the veil is removed, we see clearly how Jesus’ way leads to a better approval.

The disciple, therefore, must be free from evaluating worth, including his or her own worth, according to the criteria used by the worldly person. Rather, all that counts now is “the new creation” coming into being as a person is transformed into the likeness of Jesus (2 Cor 5:16–17). There is no more room for “boasting in appearances” (2 Cor 5:12). This frees the disciples to “live no longer for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Cor 5:15). Jesus’ death on our behalf changes the object and purpose of our lives. Rising up the ladder, gaining prestige, collecting wealth, making a name for yourself—these are no longer the goals of life, for they are no longer valid criteria for measuring a person’s ultimate value. The gospel proclaims advancement as serving and preferring others over yourself, investing yourself not in your reputation or standing in the community but rather in advancing the well-being of the community, caring for the weak members of the community. Jesus’ resurrection gives us the assurance that the new agenda will result in the experience of full and abundant life.

Paul’s theology of stewardship. Paul’s attempt to renew commitment to the collection for the poor in Judea (2 Cor 8–9) provides us with the fullest single exposition of Paul’s theology of stewardship. The opportunity to give is a “favor” from God “granted” to churches (2 Cor 8:1). This is quite a reversal of the cultural understanding of beneficence, according to which giving becomes a claim to honor and recognition on the part of the human giver. Here the recognition is referred back to God, the prime mover of every good gift and generous act. It is also a demonstration of the “genuineness” of the believer’s love (2 Cor 8:8; 9:13), particularly for Christ, who became poor to make us rich (2 Cor 8:9), but also for the family of God. Christian giving is thus both a privilege granted by God and a proof of our gratitude and love for the God who has enriched us to give.

Paul undergirds his collection project with a vision for the equal sharing of resources across the church, the perfect realization of the ideal of friendship. It would never be fitting among friends or kin for some to have (and to keep) an abundance while others lack what is necessary. Paul grounds this vision in the story of God’s miraculous provision of manna in the wilderness (Ex 16; Ex 16:18 is recited in 2 Cor 8:15). In that story God provides the required food for his people each day. Paul calls attention here to an often unnoticed “miracle”: those who gather more than they need end up with the same amount as those who were not able to gather enough for their need. There was neither excess nor want. Paul reads this story as a lesson about wealth and resources. God is the source of all the resources a person enjoys, and it is God’s desire that every person have what is needed for living. Paul has emphasized the first of these points before in 1 Corinthians, where he reminded them that anything the believers had, they had “received” from God (1 Cor 4:7) and taught them that spiritual endowments (including leadership and beneficence) are given to each Christian “for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7), and not for the benefit of the possessor. In God’s economy, and thus among those who are

obedient to God’s vision for human community, there is neither excess nor want, but “a fair balance” as those who have abundance provide for those who have need (2 Cor 8:13–14).

Paul and the Conventions of Acceptable Self Praise

In order to counter the influence of the Christian sophists and to point the Corinthians past the veneer of human strengths to the transforming power of God, Paul has to engage in a fair amount of “self-praise”. Self-praise could be highly offensive then as now, so the speaker who engaged in it had to be careful to do so only when circumstances and purposes justified it, and only in an inoffensive manner. Plutarch devotes an essay to this topic (*On Inoffensive Self Praise*;) in which he outlines the following parameters for acceptable self-praise. It is acceptable when the speaker does it (1) to establish the quality of his character with the hearers (i.e., appeals to *ethos*), (2) to benefit the hearers, whether by arousing them to the emulation of his or her virtues or achievements by emboldening them to some action or the like, or (3) “where mistaken praise injures and corrupts by arousing emulation of evil and inducing the adoption of an unsound policy where important issues are at stake” (Self Praise; 17, *Mor.* 545 D). Self-praise is rendered inoffensive when (1) it is mixed with praise of the audience, (2) the causes for praise are attributed to the gods or to good fortune, (3) when it is blended with the admission of shortcomings, (4) when it is indirect.

How well has Paul followed this advice? First and foremost, he has taken to heart the necessity of attributing all his successes and achievements to God, since this is thematic throughout 2 Corinthians (see, for example, 2 Cor 1:8–9; 2:14; 3:4–6; 4:6–7, 15). Paul also mixed his boasts with admissions of shortcomings, particular in terms of his stage presence as a speaker (2 Cor 11:6; 12:7–8, 11). He engages in a comparison of himself with the rival sophists so that the Corinthian Christians will be moved to make the right decisions and avoid disadvantage (2 Cor 12:19–21; 13:10), and above all else so that the rival’s self-commendation will not induce the Corinthian Christians to continue to think and act in line with their cultural values where these conflict so egregiously with the values of Jesus. The ironic nature of Paul’s self-praise, however, falls beyond the scope of what Plutarch could ever envision. By boasting most extravagantly in the things that show Paul’s weaknesses, he flouts all conventions of boasting and uses the form of self-praise to call attention to God (2 Cor 11:30–12:10).

A more extensive reflection on stewardship appears in 2 Corinthians 9:6–12, a text that, with its language of sowing in order to reap, could easily be used to promote the old pagan principle of *do ut des*: we give so that God will give to us. In Paul’s understanding, however, God enriches people in order that “by always having enough”, they might “share abundantly in every good work” (2 Cor 9:8 NRSV). From God’s provision a person is to use what is sufficient for his or her needs and share the rest with those who lack sufficiency. The harvest envisioned in 2 Corinthians 9:6 is specified in 2 Corinthians 9:10: material resources always remain seed for sowing (i.e., through sharing and acts of kindness); the harvest we hope to gain is righteousness, not more money to be spent on our own pleasure (cf. Jas 4:3).

Paul concludes his reflections with an affirmation of the mutuality of those who give and those who receive. The recipients respond with love for and prayers on behalf of those who have given material benefits, with the result that benefits flow in both directions and community between the parties is established (2 Cor 9:14). The primary value for Paul, then, is not the accumulation of wealth but the establishment and actualization of Christian community (locally and globally) through the sharing of resources.

THE CORINTHIAN LETTERS AND MINISTRY FORMATION

Status and factions in the church: An antique problem? A challenge facing every Christian leader, whether ordained or lay, is nurturing a community wherein each individual places the good of the other, and of the whole, above self-assertion and private agendas. The reader will be familiar with the stereotypes of the donor who expects to buy influence in the church, the faction that refuses to sing the praise choruses (or the opposite party that folds its arms and yawns during traditional hymns), the families who fall into rivalry over whose daughter gets to sing the lead in the children's musical, the group who preferred the former pastor, and so on ad nauseam. The squabbles and posturing might focus on loftier issues as well, but the dynamics would be the same and just as harmful to the health of the body.

As Paul addresses these issues at length in 1 Corinthians, he provides an alternative vision in which the person of less obvious giftedness is especially affirmed in the church, the people of privilege look to the sensitivities and sensibilities of the less privileged, and all seek the welfare of the sister or brother above their own enjoyment of entitlements. By word and example (Paul having given us a good start in regard to both), the Christian leader is challenged to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in calling the whole community toward this vision until the world's rules of competition are turned upside-down and the example of Christ is lived out in the nitty-gritty of committee meetings, choir rehearsals, counseling sessions and car washes.

The vision for the body in 1 Corinthians, however, reaches beyond the life of a local congregation to the interaction of Christians throughout their own denomination and within a community of diverse churches. Perhaps nowhere more egregiously than general conferences and conventions does the mindset of the world trump the mind of Christ and the ethos of cooperation and other-centeredness that Paul strives to nurture in the church. Moreover, in the situation of ever-splintering denominationalism, in which each believer can say "I am of Peter", "I am of Luther", "I am of Calvin", "I am of Wesley", "I am of Christ" or devise other divisive slogans that justify scorning and competing against Christians of another stripe, Paul's vision for a global church at unity and harmony with itself becomes all the more urgent and desirable. Moving toward the vision for the local church articulated above (and enacted at the global and interdenominational level) will give the gospel new wings for the third millennium.

Decision-making in the church. Paul's deliberations in 1 Corinthians 8–10 have important implications for decision-making and discipline in the church. Personal freedom to indulge in a particular pursuit or lifestyle is secondary to the purity of the conscience of the whole congregation. Personal preferences and pleasures must be secondary to what promotes the perseverance and growth of the group. Even what we know to be right and ultimately good cannot be forced on those who do not have such knowledge in the community. As one example, consider the widespread debates in churches concerning the style of worship. I have too often seen church leaders ride roughshod over the sensibilities of one sector of their flock as they move the church from a traditional to a contemporary-style service. As a music minister I have been privy to church leaders sharing their attitude toward the older generation: "they'll just have to adjust" or "those who don't like it can leave, but we need to do this to grow". Much could be accomplished through education of the whole congregation concerning the potential benefits of change *and* how the forms of worship that have nourished the faith of some in the congregation for over fifty years will continue to be honored and used. To force change on the congregation before they are ready, before their concerns have been heard and respected, before they are prepared to get on board may represent more of an act of self-assertion on the part of the leadership than an attempt to benefit the people the leaders serve. It is not an enticement to sin per se, as eating food sacrificed to idols in Corinth threatened to be, but it could represent the "strong" deciding to act in line with their knowledge with no regard for the "weak".

Consider another example: a church is pursuing a renovation project in the midst of a poor, urban neighborhood. The "strong" have thought out very carefully the needs of the congregation and have designed a new education and office wing to accommodate the desires of various church groups and personnel. A more attractive sanctuary would also be appropriate, both as a draw to visitors and

as a suitable monument to the beauty of God's holiness. But some people in the congregation are reluctant to give their support. It is not that they are unwilling to spend the money, but they have scruples about spending it on the building, which is still functional, if not perfect, when there are so many needs crying out around the church. Would it not be better to take these resources and develop outreach programs, child care and mentoring programs, perhaps even begin to offer some health care and career counseling? The plans are in the works, however, and the leadership moves ahead with the renovations, leaving the consciences of several people in the church defiled when worshipping in that space because the cry of the needy has been given second place.

Were the dissenters being scrupulous, weak and legalistic? Or were they being prophetic? How we listen to and honor one another's concerns about such matters may keep our churches from choosing self-indulgence over service, and it may keep us from creating division rather than seeking that consensus in the Spirit that will build up the whole body.

Christian life in the body and in the world. Paul's attitude toward sexuality is distinctly unmodern. Sexual self-expression, self-fulfillment and self-gratification, so central to modern understandings of personhood and relationships, were not highly valued by him at all. The body fulfills its purpose as it restrains itself from pleasure contrary to God's revealed design, not as it indulges its sexual drives. We have been taught that a person needs to be sexually active to be whole, fulfilled and accomplished. Paul taught that a person has been privileged to have direct communion with Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to have been redeemed from sinful passions so as to remain a holy habitation for God's own Spirit. The purpose of the body is to honor God and honor the union with Christ that God has effected in us, not fornication (1 Cor 6:13–20). As so often is the case, Paul completely reorients us to the issue. The question of whether or not I should be allowed to enjoy certain forms of sexual expression, or to have my right to certain behaviors validated by the church is ultimately a self-oriented question: How can I enjoy what I want? Paul would turn the question around toward God: How can I best honor God with the body God has deigned to indwell? With what will I join and in what manner will I now treat the body of Christ? Paul challenges us to deal wisely with the strong cultural currents toward acceptance of all manner of alternative lifestyles, not merely to run counter to them but to discern the essential marks of Christian culture. This includes the mortification of the fleshly passions for the sake of being driven by the Holy Spirit, and not by a lesser master—surely an unpopular concept in our age of gratification.

In 1 Corinthians 7 we see Paul at his most practical and pastoral as he deals with the issue of sexual expression within marriage, the divorce of "mixed" couples, remarriage and betrothal. We who tend to view the single person as the incomplete or disadvantaged are challenged by Paul. He cautions us, at the very least, to affirm singleness as a gift with its own distinctive opportunities for service to the Lord, not as a condition to be remedied (1 Cor 7:7, 32–35). For those who cannot exercise self-control, however, marriage or (for widows) remarriage is a perfectly acceptable choice (1 Cor 7:9, 36, 38). Marriage emerges for Paul as the only acceptable context for sexual expression, and in this context he even speaks of the mutual *obligation* of husband and wife, save for mutually agreed-on intervals for the sake of prayer (1 Cor 7:1–6).

It is clear from this chapter, however, that sexual expression is not a major preoccupation for Paul, as it is for present-day Western culture. Sexuality, like so many other enterprises that occupy our attention, belongs to this present life, and the "present form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor 7:31). Because of the transitory nature of this age, Paul advocates an "as if not" ethic for Christians living in the body and in the world. He calls for a certain detachment from the affairs of this world, not getting absorbed by them and losing sight of their temporary and penultimate nature. Here Paul lights on a central challenge for all who are disciples themselves and entrusted with forming disciples, namely, keeping everyday affairs in the perspective of eternity. Jesus likewise challenged us as he spoke of those who, like saplings choked out by thorns and thistles, allowed their dealings and interests in this world to eclipse and eventually eliminate their growth in God. If we can lead ourselves and our charges into adopting Paul's stance—"those who deal with the world" are to be "as though they had no dealings with it", and those who engage in commerce are to be "as though they

had no possessions" (1 Cor 7:31)—we will be the more likely to find ourselves and our communities of faith investing our attentions and energies well in the sight of God.

The credentials of a Christian minister. Second Corinthians merits close and careful attention because this letter, perhaps above all others, speaks so directly to the issues of identity, self-respect, authority and legitimacy for those who are or will be ministers in Jesus' name. While we study and practice to become effective communicators in our preaching classes, learn the art of pastoral counseling and build up our academic credentials for the work of ministry, we may be tempted to place our confidence in these credentials as if they demonstrated our legitimation by God. Paul invites us to consider that our strength in the pulpit, the numerical growth of our churches or the increase in annual giving must never become the basis of our confidence in ministry, nor can such things ever become the basis of confidence of our congregations.

When we need reaffirmation of our call or are pressed to defend our ministry to those who call it into question, Paul's own explanation of true apostleship offers us much meat for reflection. He calls us especially to avoid pointing to and relying on externals or encouraging others to put their confidence in us because of externals, and calls us to look instead for God showing God's power and love through us. The model of Paul calls us to be transparent, to draw attention not toward our own prowess or achievement but toward the God who calls us to reconciliation and to the transformation of our mind, and to regard ourselves and others not according to appearances but according to the sincere heart. When the viewer looks at a preacher or teacher, does he or she see a testimony to human achievement, finesse or giftedness, or a person who has had a transforming encounter with the living God, someone who makes it easier to connect with God's transforming power by not putting his or her own strengths and credentials and impressiveness in the way? Only if the latter is true is the minister making God present for those he or she serves.

According to this model, experiences of hardship become opportunities to experience God's comfort and encouragement, and thus a resource for extending comfort and encouragement to other believers (2 Cor 1:3–7). Here is one way God takes what others might intend for harm, or what might simply be hurtful in and of itself, and uses it for good, namely, the restoration of many who find themselves facing similarly hurtful situations.

Stewardship. Perhaps one of the more dreaded challenges facing Christian leaders is raising support for the ministry (whether this is in the context of a church, an outreach venture, a relief organization or so forth). A gifted pastor once told me that he was counting down to his retirement by the number of stewardship campaigns he still faced. Closely related to this is the difficulty many ministers have finding willing volunteers to exercise leadership and to invest their energies in the work of the kingdom.

Paul's perspective on ownership and volunteerism may help alert us to how far Christian leaders, in their embarrassment about asking for money and volunteers, have bought into the secular mindset concerning money and other resources. Any resource, skill or property we might have is a gift from God, given to us for building up the whole body of Christ. Christians are never asked to part with "their" money or to give of "their" time and talents, but they are invited to be faithful with God's gifts and to use them enthusiastically for building up their Christian family. Indeed, another of society's givens must fall by the wayside here as well, namely, where the line is drawn between family and not family. All who are united in Christ have become sisters and brothers, and believers are challenged by Paul to invest in one another at the level of siblings, not polite strangers.

Before leaving the topic of stewardship, Paul's dedication to the importance of financial integrity merits attention. Suspicion has always been directed toward those who handle money or make money in the name of religion. Paul was no exception, as can be seen from the vigor with which he defends himself and his ministry team (2 Cor 12:14–18) and from the precautions Paul takes to guarantee his integrity in the sight of his churches (2 Cor 8:16–21). Although there is ample warrant for receiving support for one's work as a minister, Paul made it clear that he should not be confused with hucksters who peddle the gospel for profit (2 Cor 2:17), but rather that he ministers out of sincerity and duty to the God who called him. Paul wanted first to be sure that those he served knew that his passion for God and for them drove his ministry, not any desire for financial gain. This,

combined with his desire to prove his sincerity and distinguish himself from those who peddle philosophies, led him to work with his hands in a leather shop. This debased him further in the eyes of the community pillars; menial work was akin to servile status in the eyes of the rich. Believers need to be careful today not to look down on those who engage in tent-making ministries as if they were less legitimate than professional clergy, for, in point of fact, they have a clearer testimony to the sincerity of their heart and their obedience to God. (I say this as a member of the “professional” guild.)

Paul also wanted to be sure that no suspicion of “skimming” from the collection for the poor could alienate his converts or impede the progress of that relief effort, thus reducing the good it would accomplish among the poor. Today, some *have* betrayed the trust of those who have supported a particular ministry or relief effort, and thus all Christian leaders are under scrutiny where finances are concerned. For the sake of their own integrity and of the good they can accomplish for the kingdom, it is absolutely essential for them not only to refrain from any hint of wrongful appropriation of funds but to even protect themselves from the accusation of such appropriation. Independent Christian auditors and other agencies for financial accountability can serve the same role as the unnamed Christian brothers who accompanied Titus and Paul when they finally gathered and delivered the relief funds for Judea.

Church discipline. The Corinthian correspondence brings the uncomfortable and unpopular question of church discipline to the fore. Paul frequently speaks of his authority to punish those who remain disobedient to the gospel in 2 Corinthians 10–13 (see, e.g., 2 Cor 13:1–4, 10). He gives specific directions for the discipline of the sexually immoral Christian brother living with his stepmother, instructing the other Christians to exclude him from fellowship and prescribing this excommunication for all who call themselves Christian and yet give themselves over to greed, idolatry, sexual immorality, drunkenness and hostile speech (1 Cor 5:11). Particularly now in the twenty-first century, “judge not that you not be judged” has become the slogan for the church, but Paul would still ask us, using the same verb, “Is it not those who are inside [the church] that you are to judge?” (1 Cor 5:12).

Once again, abuses of a scriptural mandate have led to the quiet attempt to reverse, ignore or eliminate that mandate. The gross exclusion of many people from the healing reach of the church on account of some particular sin or other, the devaluing of such people, and the use of religious rhetoric to pillory them has made it far more difficult for Christians of good conscience and heart to obey the scriptural mandates to keep fellow Christians on track when they fall into or persist in some sin. Paul himself is motivated by his desire to “present the church to Christ as a pure bride”, as an appropriate partner to Christ in all his holiness (2 Cor 11:2–3). Such a passion for the church and for the privilege of being united with Christ results in healthful discipline, beginning with ourselves and moving out toward our sisters and brothers.

Just as in Corinth the “offender” remained first and foremost a brother to be restored (2 Cor 2:5–11), just as the goal for the sexually immoral brother of 1 Corinthians 5:1–13 was his eventual deliverance, so all discipline within the church must have the benefit and reclamation of the erring sister or brother in view at all times. If discipline makes an individual or a group into an object of hate or contempt, it has failed its commission miserably. Sin, however, is a subtle and deceitful force, and the individual believer often needs the assistance of fellow Christians to recognize sin for what it is and to be encouraged to renounce the deceptive pleasures of sin and to return to those behaviors that advance his or her relationship with Christ and subsequent sanctification.

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