

Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians

by

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Preface

Without question, the correspondence of Paul to the Corinthian church is the longest and most complete in the New Testament. It is usually accepted that he wrote to the Corinthians some four times if not five, and of these letters, we possess two in the New Testament canon. Paul's relationship to the Corinthian church was up and down, as is well known. It is precisely in this fluctuating relationship that the modern reader gains some of the clearest insights into Paul's ethics, methods, and ideals.

In this particular study, we shall examine only the correspondence called 2 Corinthians in the English Bible. This interaction comes mid-stream in Paul's relationship with the Corinthians, so some amount of background material is necessary to fully appreciate the letter. In this letter, Paul is very personal. The reader gains access to Paul's heart and emotions as well as his theology and ethics. He shows himself to be both a man of tact as well as acerbity. In the end, he demonstrates his deep compassion and strong pastoral concern for this congregation of difficult and wayward children. 2 Corinthians is an admirable case study of pastor-church relationships, and the applications to the modern congregation are many!

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Paul and the Corinthian Church

The relationship between the Apostle Paul and the Corinthian Christians was mercurial. Due to the information provided in both Acts and the two extant letters, we probably know as much if not more about this relationship than Paul's relationship with any other New Testament church. The personality of Paul and his inner conflict in the midst of diverse theological and ecclesiastical opinions are vividly recorded. In more than a few ways, Paul's troubles with the Corinthians reflect similar rifts between Christians today.

Founding of the Church

Paul came to Corinth on his second missionary journey after God had directed him to cross the Aegean from Asia Minor to the peninsula of Greece (Ac. 16:6-10). Paul and his companions had been preaching in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea, all in Macedonia to the north. At Berea, due to some agitation against Paul, Paul was sent to the south, leaving Timothy and Silas to carry on the work at Berea (Ac. 17:13-15). After a brief stay in Athens (Ac. 17:16-34), Paul went to Corinth (probably in about AD 50), where Silas and Timothy soon joined him. Together they continued to preach for the conversion of Jews, and eventually, due to Jewish opposition, they began to preach for the conversion of non-Jews (Ac. 18:1-6). The Lord Jesus himself attested to Paul in a vision that he had "many people in this city" (Ac. 18:9-10), and they stayed there a full eighteen months before turning back to the East (Ac.18:11).

The Corinthians¹

The city of Corinth commanded the land route from the Grecian mainland onto the Peloponnese, since it was built at the edge of the narrow land bridge, which connected the two. This "master of two harbors" had suffered enormous destruction in the mid-second century BC in a war with Rome. It did not begin to regain its status until Julius Caesar designated it a Roman Colony in 44 BC, at which time colonial settlers, who had been recruited from the freed slaves and poor of Rome, were sent to repopulate it. By the time Paul arrived a century or so later, the city had become wealthy with a diversified economic base in agriculture, manufacturing, trade and commerce. The quality of Corinthian bronze manufacturing was well attested in the ancient world, and the city's pottery works were extensive. Furthermore, by Paul's time Corinth was the capital of Achaia, a Roman province under the jurisdiction of the Roman Senate. The official language in Corinth was Latin, but like most cities in the Mediterranean world, it was bilingual, the citizens also speaking their native

¹ The following sketch of Corinth is largely drawn from V. Furnish, "Corinth in Paul's Time-What Can Archaeology Tell Us?" *BAR* XV, 3 (May/June 1988) 14-27.

Greek. In conformity to Roman culture, the city's streets were laid out in a Roman pattern. Archaeologists have uncovered an inscription with the name and title, "Erastus in return for his aedileship laid [the pavement] at his own expense," and this is almost certainly the same Erastus mentioned by Paul as the city treasurer, when he wrote his Roman letter from Corinth (Ro. 16:23).

Quite a bit about Corinthian life is known also. A columned temple (possibly to Apollos) with seven of its columns still remaining stood south of a market complex, which was used for the sale of produce, meat and fish. Each of the shops opened out into a rectangular, enclosed courtyard. Nearby was a theater, and to the south were other temples and religious shrines along with various public buildings and public baths. Along the two-mile road to the port of Lechaëum, a series of shops opened directly onto the street. The Isthmian Games, dedicated to Poseidon, were held near Corinth every other year. Though Rome added its versions of pagan religion to Corinthian culture, the ancient Greek pantheon of gods were still prominent, and shrines in honor of Athena (goddess of wisdom and women's crafts), Apollo (god of sunlight, music, prophecy and poetry), Tyche (goddess of good fortune), Poseidon (god of the sea) and Aphrodite (goddess of love, fertility and beauty) have been uncovered. A center for the mystery religion of Asclepius (god of healing) was also in Corinth. This divine healing cult, with a building complex for bathing, dining, exercise and sleeping, boasted of many miraculous cures, and the walls were graced with terra cotta models of bodily parts which were allegedly healed by the god.

Paul's Corinthian Correspondence

The canon of the New Testament contains two lengthy letters by Paul to the Corinthians. However, we know that Paul wrote to them more letters than these, and furthermore, we know that they wrote exchange letters back to him. Though there are more ways than one to piece together the Corinthian correspondence and the circumstances which gave rise to the letters², the following seems to be a reasonable reconstruction.³

Pauline Correspondence A (lost)

That Paul wrote to the Corinthians prior to the canonical 1 Corinthians we know from his comments in 1 Co. 5:9-11. In this letter he apparently warned the

² Different approaches are discussed and overviewed in standard introductions to the NT, such as, R. Fuller, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament* (London: Duckworth, 1971) 40-51; W. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, rev. ed., trans. H. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975) 276-278, 281-293; D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1970) 424-441.

³ For a fuller discussion of the chain of events leading up to Paul's final Corinthian correspondence, see F. Bruce, "Corinthian Correspondence," *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 264-279 and V. Furnish, *II Corinthians [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984) 22-55.

Corinthians to disassociate themselves from promiscuous people. Apparently they misunderstood him to mean that they were to completely isolate themselves from anyone who lived at variance with Christian ethics, whereas Paul had in mind that they only disassociate themselves from those who claimed to be Christians but lived at variance with Christian ethics. This letter has been lost, and no record of it survives except what is mentioned above.

Corinthian Correspondence (unavailable)

After the sending of this first letter, while Paul was still at Ephesus in Asia Minor (on his third missionary journey, AD 55 or 56), three members of the Corinthian church appeared bearing a responding letter from the Corinthians back to Paul (1 Co. 7:1; 16:17). The report of these brothers, along with a letter that posed several ethical and theological questions, prompted Paul to write a lengthy correspondence in return which we know as 1 Corinthians.

Pauline Correspondence B (1 Corinthians)

Of most serious import, as far as Paul was concerned, was the rivalry and dissension in the Corinthian church. It is not unlikely that the rivalry was carried on between different house churches, and at least one of these house churches was forthright in reporting to Paul about the factions (1 Co. 1:11-12). The problems of partyism, moral laxity and lawsuits occupy the early part of the letter (chapters 1-6). Beginning with 7:1, Paul addresses the questions which the Corinthians had posed to him in their letter, questions regarding sexuality and marriage (1 Co. 7:1, 25), food dedicated to pagan deities (1 Co. 8:1), spiritual gifts (12:1), and the relief fund being collected for Palestinian Christians (1 Co. 16:1). Among his answers to these questions, Paul digressed long enough to discuss other Corinthian problems of which he was aware, problems with defining freedom (1 Co. 9-10), with public worship (1 Co. 11), and with the doctrine of resurrection (1 Co. 15).

A Painful Visit

When Paul sent off what we know as 1 Corinthians, he intended to follow it up with a personal visit during which he hoped to spend a winter with the Corinthians inasmuch as winter travel in the Mediterranean world was seriously hampered by weather (1 Co. 16:5-6). The Corinthian problems were of such a serious nature that he felt he needed more than a brief visit in order to rectify them (1 Co. 16:7). However, he explained that he felt obliged at the present time to stay longer at Ephesus due to the success of his evangelistic efforts there (1 Co. 16:8-9). In the meantime, he intended to send Timothy as his representative (1 Co. 4:17; 16:10-11). Shortly, however, he modified this plan of an extended visit and replaced it with a plan for two shorter visits, one on his way to Macedonia and one on his return back from there (2

Co. 1:15-16)

Paul was unable to follow through on any of these intentions. Though nothing particular is known of Timothy's visit, it was apparently unsuccessful inasmuch as Paul felt constrained to jettison all his earlier plans and make an immediate emergency visit to Corinth (2 Co. 12:14; 13:1). This visit ended in disaster. In Paul's own language, he described it as a "painful visit" (2 Co. 2:1), and during his time there, Paul apparently was publicly humiliated (12:21).⁴ It is not impossible that an individual in the congregation publicly opposed him, an individual whom he said "grieved him" and "did the wrong" (2 Co. 2:5; cf. 7:12). In any case, the Corinthians ended up judging Paul to be timid, weak and lacking in personal charisma (2 Co. 10:1, 10; 11:6, 21; 13:3).

Pauline Correspondence C (lost)

The "painful visit" ended in such indecision and lack of resolution that Paul felt he could not leave the situation as it was. Consequently, he composed a stinging letter carried to the Corinthians by Titus (2 Co. 7:6-7, 13, 15; 12:18), a letter which was, in his own words, written "out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears" (2 Co. 2:3-4). While Titus was gone, Paul waited for news with a heavy heart, as he himself describes it, "under great pressure" (2 Co. 1:8) and "harassed at every turn--conflicts on the outside, fears within" (2 Co. 7:5). So anxious was he for news from Titus that he left Ephesus and went to the port of Troas, both to preach and to wait for Titus' return by sea (2 Co. 2:12). When Titus was not forthcoming, he crossed the Aegean to Macedonia, "still with no peace of mind", probably hoping to intercept Titus by land (2 Co. 2:13).

When word finally came from Titus, it was doubly welcome! The severe letter, no longer available to us,⁵ had sufficiently stung the Corinthians so that they immediately began to redress their wrongs (2 Co. 7:8-11). The one who had opposed Paul was put in his proper place by a majority of the church (2 Co. 2:6). As Paul's ambassador, Titus reported that he had been very well received, and the Corinthians had undergone a change of heart regarding Paul (2 Co. 7:6-7, 13-16).

Pauline Correspondence D (2 Corinthians 1-9)

Upon Titus' encouraging report, Paul immediately sent another letter which

⁴ Grammatically, it is possible to take the word *palin* (= again) with either the verb *elthontos mou* (= when I come) or *tapeinose* (= humiliate). The latter seems better, and if so, then the phrase, "God may again humiliate me in your presence," reflects back on this painful visit, cf. Furnish, 562.

⁵ Of course, some scholars hold that the stinging letter is 2 Corinthians 10-13, but on the whole, it is probably better to assume that the letter has been lost, cf. discussion in Bruce and Furnish.

included at least 2 Corinthians 1-9.⁶ This letter is conciliatory in tone, and in it, Paul pours forth his heart (2 Co. 6:11-13). He openly shares his own hardships (2 Co. 1:3-11; 4:7-12, 16-18; 6:4-10), he explains his change of travel plans (2 Co. 1:12--2:4), and he urges forgiveness for the man who grieved him (2 Co. 2:5-11). More than that, he describes the reconciling ministry of Christ, a ministry that was surely exemplified in the reconciliation of Paul and the Corinthian church (2 Co. 5:11--6:2). In fact, Paul was so encouraged by Titus' good news that he felt bold enough to renew his request for help with the relief fund for the Jerusalem church (2 Co. 8-9). He resolved to send Titus back to Corinth along with two others, a very well respected brother chosen to represent several congregations and another brother, to receive the offerings (2 Co. 8:6, 16-19, 22-24).⁷

Titus' Second Visit

The second visit by Titus was not as congenial as his first. Perhaps the plea for money was not well received, or perhaps some who disliked Paul had been busy raising their voices against him. Whatever the case, 2 Corinthians 10-13 depicts a change in atmosphere in Corinth from what is described in 2 Corinthians 1-9.

Pauline Correspondence E (2 Corinthians 10-13)⁸

A very resilient challenge to Paul's authority was now being fostered in Corinth, and the optimism voiced in 2 Corinthians 1-9 is largely missing from 2 Corinthians 10-13. Possibly Titus had returned to Paul with this alarming news (cf. 2 Co. 12:18), or perhaps Paul had heard about it through other sources. In any case, he writes to them, as he says, "...while I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority" (2 Co. 13:10). It is apparent that Paul is planning a third visit to Corinth (2 Co. 10:11; 12:14, 20-21; 13:1-2). This promise of a third visit he kept, staying there for three months (Ac. 20:1-3a), and while in Corinth on that third visit he dispatched his letter to the Romans, mentioning in it that the churches of Achaia and Macedonia had contributed to the relief fund (Ro. 15:25-27).

⁶ There is considerable discussion as to whether or not 2 Corinthians 1-9 is a separate letter from 2 Corinthians 10-13, two letters that have been combined into one by the early Christians who preserved them. The tone between the two is so strikingly different that many scholars feel that they could not have been written at the same time. On the other hand, this difference in tone might be accounted for by some interval or pause in the composition of 2 Corinthians, cf. Guthrie, 439-441.

⁷ Neither of these two additional representatives are named, and conjecture is pointless.

⁸ It will matter very little to the actual exegesis of 2 Corinthians 10-13 if it is treated as a letter separate from 2 Corinthians 1-9 or both as a unified letter with an abrupt change of tone in the middle. Here, I am treating it as a separate letter, but this opinion is, of course, debatable.

Letter of Conciliation

(2 Corinthians 1-9)

Opening: 1:1-11

It is well known that Paul generally adapted the standard letter writing form of the Greco-Roman world. Usually, his letters consisted of five sections:⁹

Opening (sender, addressee, greeting)

Blessing and/or Thanksgiving (often with intercession and an eschatological climax)

Body (introductory formulae; often having an eschatological conclusion and/or an indication of future plans)

Paraenesis (ethical exhortations)

Closing (benedictions, greetings, sometimes a mention of the writing process)

This letter follows much the same pattern, but if 2 Corinthians is actually a composite of two letters, then the closing for the first letter (end of chapter 9) and the opening for the second letter (beginning of chapter 10) have been dropped.

Address (1:1-2)

Paul usually identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ and indicates that this position resulted from a direct call by God. Timothy stands as a co-sponsor for the letter, which is also common in the Pauline letters (Phil. 1:1; 1 Th. 1:1; Phlm 1; Col. 1:1; 2 Th. 1:1). Paul seemed to have depended heavily upon Timothy as his lieutenant after the disappointing failure of John Mark (cf. Ac. 12:25; 13:5b, 13; 15:36--16:3). The letter is addressed to the church at Corinth, probably involving several house congregations (cf. 1 Co. 1:11, 16; 16:15), and it also is extended to the other Christians churches in the province of Achaia, which were in the general vicinity of Corinth.

The Christian greeting of grace, coupled with the Grecianized form of the Jewish *shalom*, is typically Pauline, as is the reference to God the Father and the Lord Jesus.

Blessing and Thanksgiving (1:3-11)

While the blessing with which Paul begins his letter is general enough, he applies it to a very specific situation--his near-death experience in Asia. The

⁹W. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973) 11-27.

expression, "Praise be to the God and Father..." or more literally, "Blessed be God..." is a Christianized form of the synagogue *berakah* (= blessing), a liturgical ascription of praise to God.¹⁰ The description of God as the "Father of compassion" is a particularly Near Eastern way of speaking, in which the term "father" or "mother" is used to describe the essential source of a thing. As such, Satan is the "father of lies" (Jn. 8:44), and Babylon is the "mother of harlots" (Rv. 17:5). God, then, is the source of compassion and comfort for those who are in trouble.

Paul speaks not merely of trouble in general. He has in mind the particular troubles he has been experiencing of late, so he speaks in the first person. Since he has himself received comfort from God, he is able to show comfort and compassion toward others who are confronting difficult times. As a member of the body of Christ, the Christian is obliged to share in the sufferings of Christ (cf. Ac. 9:4; Ga. 3:4; Phil. 1:29; 3:10; Col. 1:24; 1 Th. 2:2, 14; 1 Pe. 1:6; 2:20; 3:14, 17; 4:15-18; Rv. 2:10). Yet, just as the Christian shares in the sufferings of Christ, he/she also shares in the comfort of Christ. As a missionary, Paul comes in for the lion's share of this suffering. When he suffers, it is so that the gospel can be preached, or as he puts it, he suffers for the Corinthians' "comfort and salvation." On the other hand, when God comforts him, they still benefit, since he reciprocates this comfort to them.

Moving to the specifics of his own dilemma, Paul recounts to the Corinthians the perilous circumstance in Asia (1:8). Precisely how this near-death experience occurred, we are not told, but Paul's vocabulary indicates that it was serious indeed. Besides the word "hardships," Paul says that he and his company were pressed beyond the point of any normal endurance.¹¹ So deadly was his peril that he considered death to be the certain outcome. In his heart he "felt the sentence of death" (1:9).

Various suggestions have been offered in the attempt to historically identify this near-death experience. In the early church, Tertullian (early 3rd century) connected it with the opposition Paul encountered at Ephesus, an opposition that escalated into a riot with the potential of a lynching (cf. Ac. 19:23-41; 1 Co. 15:30-32).¹² Others have made a case for a severe illness and have connected it with other allusions in Paul's letters to his sicknesses (i.e., 2 Co. 12:7; Ga. 4:13). These solutions are only speculative possibilities, of course, and Paul's tantalizing mention of the "many who oppose me" (1 Co. 16:9) leaves much room for other suggestions.

Paul's attitude in the midst of these life-threatening circumstances is noteworthy. Such situations drive the believer to depend upon God who raises the

¹⁰R. Martin, *2 Corinthians [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1986) 7.

¹¹Lit., "we were burdened excessively beyond [our] power [to copy]."

¹²*On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, XLVIII.

dead. Whether he lived or died, Paul knew that he was under the protection of the Lord. If he lived, he lived by a miracle comparable to a resurrection. If he died, he would in fact be raised to life again in the end. As it turned out, God did in fact preserve Paul's life, and for Paul, such a deliverance indicated that God still had work for him to do and would continue to preserve him. Of course, such a deliverance was incentive for continued prayer support on the part of the Corinthians. A miraculous escape might not be the only answer God gives to prayer, but it certainly is a gift for which to be thankful!

Paul's Recent Relationship with the Corinthians: 1:12--2:13

Having opened his letter, Paul now turns to the most obvious bone of contention between himself and the Corinthians, his change in travel plans. Originally, Paul had hoped to spend a winter with the Corinthians (1 Co. 16:5-7). Though he could not come immediately, due to his work at Ephesus (1 Co. 16:8-9), he hoped to send Timothy as his representative until he could come himself (1 Co. 4:17; 16:10-11). These plans apparently never materialized, and nothing is known of Timothy's visit. However, it seems from Paul's tone that the Corinthians used his change in travel plans to level a charge against him of vacillation and perhaps even double-talk. Paul had, in fact, finally felt compelled to make an emergency visit to Corinth, which had ended in disaster (see introductory material on "Paul's Corinthian Correspondence"). He followed up this visit with a severe letter of reprimand. In neither his "painful visit" nor his "tearful letter" had he adequately explained himself regarding his change in travel plans, at least to the Corinthians' satisfaction, so he does so here.

Transition to the First Theme (1:12-14)

Paul begins by baring his conscience. He defends his integrity and testifies to the holiness and sincerity of his conduct. Even though he had changed his travel plans, the Corinthians must know that he only did so because he was responsible to a higher authority. His behavior was not guided by worldly wisdom but by the grace of God. This being so, it was important that the Corinthians clearly understand his motives. So long as they treated Paul with suspicion, they would hardly receive his letters with respect. Until now, their understanding had been fragmentary: they had known the raw facts about his change of plans, but they had not sufficiently perceived the reasons behind them. Now, he hopes that they will reassess their opinion in order that their confidence in him might be restored.

Review of Previous Travel Plans (1:15-22)

To help them make this reassessment, Paul reviewed his previous travel itinerary. His original plan of spending the winter in Corinth (cf. 1 Co. 16:5-7) had

been replaced by a plan to visit the Corinthians twice, first on his way to Macedonia and then again on his return trip. This plan would have provided a "double benefit" for the Corinthians, since he would see them twice. Furthermore, it would have become an avenue for economic relief for the Christians in Judea, since the suggestion that the Corinthians could help "to send him on his way to Judea" is almost certainly a reference to the relief offering being gathered for the Christians in Palestine. Earlier, Paul had been unsure whether or not he would personally accompany those taking this gift (1 Co. 16:4), but now he seems to have made up his mind to do so (cf. Ro. 15:25). Nevertheless, his initial plans to visit Corinth had been changed, and because of this shift, Paul knows that some of the Corinthians have judged him to be untrustworthy and vacillating.

In defending himself against the charge of vacillation, Paul appeals to the Corinthians' knowledge of his preaching among them. Surely they knew that he and Silas had not preached the gospel in some double-tongued fashion, announcing promises in one breath and taking them back in the next. They had clearly proclaimed that God's many promises had their full affirmation in Jesus, the Messiah. The emphatic "yes" implicit in the good news about Jesus was precisely why the Christian response to the gospel was the "Amen," by which believers glorified God.¹³ It was this same God, the God who says "yes" to his promises, who stood behind both Paul and the Corinthians, enabling them to stand faithful in Christ. He had given to all of them the gift of the Spirit, assuring them of their salvation.¹⁴

In this discussion, Paul pauses long enough to describe a threefold work of the Spirit in terms of anointing, sealing and guaranteeing. The anointing of the Spirit recalls the various commissions for service of prophets and kings in the Old Testament.¹⁵ The sealing of the Spirit points toward God's recognition and acceptance of the believer. The guarantee of the Spirit emphasizes the assurance that the Christian has toward the future.¹⁶

Explanation for the Cancelled Visit (1:23--2:2)

Paul's cancelled visit, then, was not due to any uncertainties in the gospel or to any insincerity on his part.¹⁷ Rather, he had changed his travel plans so as to spare the Corinthians any discomfort due to the tension between them. While Paul exhibited

¹³Paul's way of referring to the collective "Amen" seems to verify its early liturgical usage in the churches of the first century, cf. R. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 37.

¹⁴The reader should not fail to observe Paul's triadic reference to God, Christ and the Spirit.

¹⁵In fact, the RSV translates the Greek verb *chrío* (= anoint) as "commissioned."

¹⁶While some interpreters see implicit references to water baptism and chrism (anointing with holy oils) in this passage, there is not sufficient context to demand such a meaning.

¹⁷Paul's oath formula. "God is my witness," is familiar from his other writings (cf. Ro. 1:9; Phil. 1:8; 1 Th. 2:5, 10).

the authority of an apostle, his attitude in ministry was not one of authoritarianism. Instead, his concern was for the Corinthians' well being. Consequently, though he had made a short and painful visit to them,¹⁸ one that had only served to increase their alienation, he determined for their sake not to do so again. During this short visit, Paul had warned them that he would not spare any who had sinned (cf. 2 Co. 13:2). Apparently, the Corinthians had not taken this reprimand very well. Now Paul realized that if the Corinthians became so deeply offended at him that they and he were completely estranged, he would be without any consoling entity in Corinth at all. Certainly none of the non-Christians in Corinth could be expected to offer him any comfort!

The Tearful Letter (2:3-11)

Turning from the painful visit to the tearful letter, Paul tries to explain why he wrote so sharply. His motive was to try to address the Corinthian problem, so that when he at last made another personal visit, it would not be plagued by conflict, as was his previous visit. He hoped that by addressing the problem in writing, his next visit would be a pleasant and an uplifting one (2:3).

The precise nature of the problem Paul does not describe, but the stinging letter seems to have contained an order for church discipline to be exercised against a particular member (2:6, 9). In composing this letter, Paul had labored under great duress, and he wrote while weeping in anguish (cf. Phil. 3:18). Of course, such a letter had stung the recipients, and until Titus had arrived to share with Paul how the Corinthians had accepted it in godly sorrow, he was fearful that he had been too severe (2 Co. 7:8). However severe the letter had been, Paul's motive was not to offend the Corinthians but to demonstrate to them the depth of his love. It was "tough love," to be sure, but love nonetheless!

As for the leader of the opposition, Paul was quite willing to extend forgiveness, and he urged reconciliation on the part of the congregation as a whole (2:6-8), since they all had been implicated in his rebellion. Furthermore, Paul offers his personal forgiveness as well (2:10).¹⁹ The disciplinary measures had been sufficient (2:6).²⁰ Paul's stinging letter, written to test the Corinthians' submission to

¹⁸This would have been the "second" visit mentioned in 2 Co. 13:2 and implied in 12:14.

¹⁹It has been traditional to regard this passage as directly related to the man who was guilty of incest (cf. 1 Co. 5:1-5), a church member who had been subjected to church discipline because of his immorality. Since the person described in 2 Co. 2:6 has also been under church discipline, it was assumed that they were one and the same, though it may be observed that Tertullian (3rd century) opposed this idea vigorously, cf. *On Modesty*, XIII-XVI. Most scholars today find it unlikely that the two references concern the same individual. The expression "grieved me" (2:5), indicating that the man had offended Paul personally, and the fact that Paul is willing to forgive him for this personal insult (2:10), suggests that the problem was not immorality but insubordination.

²⁰Paul does not describe what those disciplinary measures might have been, though likely it was some sort of sanctions against the offender restricting his function in the assembly.

his apostolic authority (2:9), had resulted in full compliance on their part. As a majority, the church had taken the necessary disciplinary action (2:6), and now forgiveness and love were in order (2:10). In fact, forgiveness was more than merely appropriate, for any negligence in extending forgiveness would open the Corinthians' to the schemes of Satan (2:11). The great slanderer could be expected to foster as much discord as possible, and in any case, an unforgiving attitude on the part of the Corinthians would be diametrically opposed to the spirit of Christ.

Paul's Unrest After the Tearful Letter (2:12-13)

After Paul had written the tearful letter, he experienced misgivings and anxiety over how it would be taken. Later, he says that he thought that he may have been too severe (7:8), and here he indicates that he left Ephesus for the seaport of Troas, apparently hoping to intercept Titus who would be returning from Corinth with news about how things went (2:12a). In Troas, there was further opportunity to preach the gospel, but due to his great agitation, Paul was unable to take proper advantage of it (2:12b). Leaving Troas, he crossed the Aegean to Macedonia, still anxiously hoping to intercept Titus (2:13). While there, he remained full of inner conflict. So deeply agitated was he that he could not sleep. He was harassed at every turn and filled with inner misgivings as he contended with outer conflicts (7:5).

Paul does not yet tell his readers about his eventual meeting with Titus. Before continuing the travel narrative, he will engage in a long interlude (2:14--7:1). However, the warmth and tenderness of this intervening theological discussion about the new covenant and the ministry of reconciliation presupposes that when Titus came, he brought good news. It will not be until 7:6ff, however, that the reader finally discovers how Paul intercepted Titus and what news he received.

The Ministry of the New Covenant: 2:14--7:1

As mentioned previously, Paul here enters into a rather lengthy theological discourse regarding the new covenant. He sandwiches this discourse between his earlier explanation concerning the tearful letter, which breaks off at 2:13, and the continuation of this explanation, which resumes in 7:5.

The Aroma of Christ (2:14-17)

The intensity of Paul's inward misgivings and anxiety sharply contrast with his description of the triumphant Christian life. To understand this paradox, one must have some appreciation of the Roman victory parade in which a victorious general was given a "Triumph." Given that he was the commander in the field, the campaign had been successful, at least 5000 of the enemy had fallen, and the victorious troops had been brought home, he was honored by a military parade through the streets of

Rome. In the procession, trumpeters followed the state officials and members of the Senate. Then came those exhibiting the spoils of war, a white bull for sacrifice, the enemy captives marked for execution or slavery, musicians and incense-bearing priests. Finally, there followed the triumphant general himself, clothed in a purple toga, surrounded by his family, and followed by his troops, all shouting "Io triumphe"!²¹

By analogy, God was staging a victory parade for his people, and the conquering general was Jesus Christ. The pungent smell of burning incense was like the preaching of the gospel, and the message about Jesus was being carried forth by missionaries like Paul. Depending upon who savored this message about Christ, it was either the fragrance of life or the smell of death. Just as in a Roman Triumph the acrid smell of incense issuing from the swinging censers signaled victory for the troops and execution for the prisoners, so the preaching of the gospel signaled life to those who were being saved and death to those who were rejecting the good news.

What a powerful paradox! What human could think to measure up to such a task apart from God's grace and enablement? Because of his commission to preach in such dramatic circumstances, the Corinthians must not view Paul as some common peddler of religious ideas. Such hucksters were common enough in the ancient world, of course.²² But Paul and his companions were not preaching for profit. Rather, they were representatives of God, sincerely speaking his word!

The Ministry of the New Covenant (3:1-18)

As a minister of Christ, Paul compares his mission with that of the Old Testament minister of Torah. It is obvious that he assumes his readers' familiarity with the Old Testament, and he draws freely from its images, ranging from the Law to the Prophets.

Paul's Credentials (3:1-3)

Because the Corinthians were more or less forcing Paul to defend himself and his motives, they were, in effect, treating him as an outsider who needed letters of reference. Letters of reference were common in the early Christian communities.²³ They served to authenticate delegates from one part of the world to another. The practice precedes Christianity in the Jewish synagogue system, where letters of

²¹W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 183-184.

²²The participle *kapeleuontes* (= hawking, huckstering) refers to retailers who were deceitful, such as, wine merchants who adulterated their beverages with water or those who sought to make a profit with inferior goods, cf. H. Windisch, *TDNT* (1965) III.603-605.

²³Examples can be found in which Apollos was recommended to the churches in Achaia (Ac. 18:27) and Phoebe was recommended to the church in Rome (Ro. 16:1).

authentication were carried from Judea to the synagogues of the Jewish dispersion (cf. Ac. 9:2; 22:5), and they were common among the Greeks as well.²⁴ While such letters of recommendation were appropriate where the visitor was unknown, surely they were unnecessary for Paul with respect to the Corinthians. He had himself founded the church! The fact that the Corinthians were Christians at all was owed directly to Paul, and as such, they were themselves his testimonial letter. Their change in lifestyle from paganism to Christianity was obvious to all, so that everyone could read their testimonial. It was not a testimonial written with a quill, but rather, a testimonial written in their hearts.

In this comparison between tables of stone and tablets of human hearts, Paul is obviously thinking of the contrast between Torah and the gospel. The old covenant was epitomized in the ten commandments as inscribed in stone at Sinai (Ex. 24:12; 31:18; 32:15-16; 34:1-4, 28); the promise of a new covenant was described by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, where God's ways were to be written in living, human hearts (Je. 31:31-34; Eze. 11:19-20; 36:24-27).

Paul's Enablement (3:4-6)

If Paul has posed the question concerning the challenge of missionary work, "Who is equal to such a task?" (2:16b), and if, as an apostle, he asserts that he needs no testimonial letters other than the lives of his converts (3:1-2), the question might be raised as to how he could claim so much. He obviously considers himself equal to his task, and he frankly admits that the claims are bold (3:4). At the same time, he wants the Corinthians to know that these claims were not a mere boasting about his own human resources (3:5). Rather, his enablement came from God, who called him to be a minister of the new covenant. Unlike the old covenant, which brought death to all who transgressed the written code of the law (Dt. 30:17-18), the new covenant promised life through the Holy Spirit.

It is apparent that Paul considers the new covenant to have been inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus (cf. 1 Co. 11:25). He sees a fundamental connection between the inauguration of the new covenant and the messianic gift of the Spirit (cf. Eze. 36:26-27). The Spirit is the power of new life, whereas under the written code of Torah, there was no enabling power (cf. Ro. 7:10-11). If Paul is competent as a minister of the new covenant, he is competent only because of the Spirit's power to engrave God's character in the tablets of human hearts (3:5; Je. 31:31-33).

The Glory of the New Covenant (3:7-18)

Paul now extends his comparison between the old and new covenants.

²⁴Furnish, 180.

Recalling the giving of Torah at Sinai, he describes the old code as a ministry that brought death, even though it also came with glory (3:7). When Moses descended from Mt. Sinai with the first engraved edition of the decalog, the idolatry of the Israelites in worshiping the golden calf resulted in the execution of some 3000 of them (Ex. 32:27-28). It was indeed a ministry that brought death! Yet when Moses descended from the mountain with the second engraved edition (Ex. 34:1, 27-28), it was equally a moment of glory, for Moses' face was radiant from conversing with God (Ex. 34:29-32).²⁵ In fact, Moses' face was so frightening that the Israelites would not come near him (Ex. 34:30b), and consequently, Moses veiled his face (Ex. 34:33-35). Still, this glory was temporary, for it was continually fading until Moses again confronted God face to face, and his visage was "recharged" with brilliance.²⁶ By contrast, the ministry of the apostles, as empowered by the Spirit under the new covenant, was even more glorious (3:8, 10), for the power of the Spirit did not fade (3:11). The ministry of the new covenant gave life rather than death (3:6), and it brought righteousness (3:9)!

It is because the ministry of the new covenant is so far superior to that of the old that Paul is so bold with his claims. The Corinthians were reluctant to accept Paul's apostolic authority. So, he posed their questions for them. Who is equal to the task of being to the world the fragrance of life, and simultaneously, the smell of death (2:16b)? Who is able to speak like those sent from God (2:17b)? Who is above the need for letters of recommendation (3:1-2)? It is surely the one empowered by the Spirit with an apostolic ministry, a ministry that brings life and righteousness and does not fade (3:12)!

The glory reflected on Moses' face may have been veiled, so that the people could not see it, but this is not the case for those under the new covenant (3:13)! Those under the new covenant see clearly the glory of God in Jesus Christ. Those who remain under the old covenant are, in fact, still isolated from God's glory. As Torah is read each Sabbath in the synagogue, the veil remains (3:14). Just as the reflected glory on Moses' face was hidden with a veil from the ancient people of Israel, so the full glory of God in Jesus Christ is hidden from those who still read the ancient law apart from the gospel. It is only when the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached along with the ancient law of Moses that the glory of God truly shines through (3:16).²⁷ Just as the veil over Moses' face was removed when he turned back

²⁵Paul is obviously following the LXX here, which translates the difficult Hebrew word *qaran* as "shone," though in the Latin Vulgate, Jerome translated it as "horned," and this translation led to many Renaissance paintings and sculptures of Moses depicting him with horns, cf. W. Propp. "Did Moses Have Horns?" *BR* (Feb. 1988/Vol. IV No. 1) 30ff.

²⁶The text of Exodus does not specifically say that the glory was fading or that Moses's visage was "recharged," but it implies that this was the case, cf. F. Bruce, *I & II Corinthians [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 191.

²⁷Jesus said much the same thing when he confronted his own generation with the words, "You diligently study the

to speak with the Lord [Yahweh] (Ex. 34:34-35), so the veil over Jewish hearts is removed when they turn to the Lord [Jesus]. This direct contact with the Lord creates freedom from wearing the veil (3:17).²⁸

In conclusion, those who have been set free from the veil by believing in Christ all are able to directly look upon the glory of the Lord. Unlike the fading glory on Moses' face, the glory of the new covenant is continually growing brighter (3:18)! As the believer continues to gaze upon God's glory, he/she is progressively being transformed into the Lord's likeness. The glory continually increases as it is mediated through the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Present Weakness, Future Glory (4:1--5:10)

Once more, Paul returns to the question of why he assumes so much as an apostle. If he defends his apostolic authority, he does so, not on the grounds of his personal resources, but on the grounds of God's sufficiency. Paul is capable of performing his evangelistic task (cf. 2:16b), qualified to speak as one sent from God (cf. 2:17b), above the need for qualifying letters of recommendation (cf. 3:1-3), and both confident and competent as a minister of the new covenant (cf. 3:4, 6). This ministry, however, arises not out of arrogant self-claims but out of the competence, which God gives (cf. 3:5). Because of this divine enablement, he is very bold (cf. 3:12), for his apostolic ministry in the new covenant is far more glorious than that of the old, since the new covenant produces true righteousness (cf. 3:9).

Since this ongoing theological discussion is rather extensive, the reader can easily lose sight of Paul's overall agenda, which is to explain his change in plans, to defend his authority to speak to the Corinthians, and to effect a reconciliation between them and him. Though lengthy, his theological discourse is far from irrelevant; in fact, it directly relates to his overall agenda, but does so in a doctrinal way.

Paul will continue to develop his theology of new covenant ministry, emphasizing that his apostolic mission is neither self-generated nor self-maintained, but rather, is divinely ordained and divinely supplied. Like all other people, Paul experiences the difficulties of human weakness and oppressive circumstances. However, such challenges do not cancel out his apostolic mission, for he is motivated by the historical death of Jesus and the hope of future resurrection.

Scriptures....[and] these are the Scriptures that testify about me" (Jn. 5:39).

²⁸There is significant debate over 3:16-17 as to how to take the term "Lord," cf. R. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 70-71; Furnish, 211-212. Is it referring to Yahweh in an exegesis of Ex. 34:34, or is it referring to Christ in the new covenant? It seems to me that the two ideas are not mutually exclusive, and that Paul may, in fact, be employing a play on words. When he says, "the Lord is the Spirit," he means both Yahweh, who confronted Moses, and Jesus, who gives his Spirit to believers. Whether it is Moses confronting the Spirit of Yahweh with unveiled face, or Christians beholding Christ with unveiled minds, the Lord is the Spirit in both cases, and there is freedom from the veil!

Jars of Clay (4:1-18)

Paul's apostolic ministry and the ministry of those who also served as missionaries²⁹ was not a self-chosen profession; it was given through God's mercy (4:1a). Since God had called and empowered Paul, he could continue to minister in the face of tremendous opposition without losing heart (4:1b, 16a). Instead of resorting to his own devices for survival, as was typical of the *theioi andres* (= divine men), Paul had rejected unethical methods (4:2a).³⁰ He refused to employ deception. Instead, he plainly demonstrated the truth of the gospel, both by his moral lifestyle and his doctrinal exposition (4:2b). If his gospel was veiled, it was not due to any devious method on his part (4:3). Rather, Satan, the god of the age, blinded those who could not see the glory of Christ (4:4).³¹

Again, unlike those whose teaching was a glorification of themselves, Paul's ministry was Christocentric; emphasizing the fundamental Christian truth "Jesus is Lord" (4:5a; cf. Ro. 10:9; 1 Co. 8:6; 12:3). His apostolic role was that of a servant (4:5b). The reason that he and the others served as apostles of Jesus Christ was that God's light had flashed in their hearts to reveal to them his glory as it was reflected in the face of Jesus (4:6).³² The revelation that Jesus is Lord is as much the creative act of God as was the creation of physical light in the origins of the universe (cf. Ge. 1:3). Just as the darkened and formless earth (Ge. 1:2) was bathed in light at the creative word of God, so the darkness of human hearts was vanquished by the glory of God as it shone forth with the knowledge of Jesus!

Still, however glorious was this apostolic ministry, it yielded no credit to Paul himself. Such a ministry was like a treasure in an earthen jar, and at best, Paul was only to be compared with the jar (4:7a). If he preached Christ rather than himself (cf. 4:5), it was equally true that his enablement to do so came from God rather than his own resources (4:7b).

²⁹When Paul uses the first person plural pronoun "we" throughout this section, he speaks of himself and the other apostles and missionaries.

³⁰The *theios aner* (= divine man) was a common enough figure in the first century Greco-Roman world. Such figures, like Apollonius of Tyana, Cappadocia, were ascetic wandering religious teachers known as wise men and wonder-workers. They probably used magic, but they were often believed to have supernatural powers, cf. E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 306-307; D. Cartlidge and D. Dungan, eds., *Documents for the Study of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 205-242.

³¹The present age was known as the "epoch of Belial" in the Qumran scrolls, cf. Bruce, *I & II Corinthians*, 195 (cf. Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 1 Jn. 5:19; Ga. 1:4). Paul's phrase "the god of this world" was used by Marcion and others in the early church who conceived of two Gods, a malevolent Creator and a benevolent Father. This idea was vigorously rebutted by the Church Fathers, cf. P. Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians [NICNT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 127-128.

³²It may well be that Paul here hints at his own experience on the Damascus Road, where a heavenly light blazed around him, and he was struck to the ground (cf. Ac. 9:3-6; 22:6-11; 26:13-18). The brilliance of this heavenly light became a symbol of Paul's Gentile mission, which was "to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God..." (Ac. 26:18a).

As a human being, Paul was not exempt from human suffering. In fact, in his missionary work, he experienced all the pressures, misgivings, oppositions and setbacks that are the common lot of the human race. Still, however difficult the opposition, Paul was sustained by God's power (4:8-9). His difficult experiences, particularly those incurred in ministry, were simply to be received as the expected sharing in the sufferings of Christ (4:10a).³³ It is probably significant that Paul here uses the term *nekrosis* (= dying, putting to death) rather than *thanatos* (= death). It is the process of dying that is in view rather than the completed death.³⁴ Just as Paul shares in the dying of Jesus, the life-giving sustenance of Jesus also is displayed as the Lord gives the power to survive and cope (10:b). This paradox of dying yet living, sharing in the sufferings of Jesus yet surviving by his life-giving power, is a continual experience (4:11). In the end, those who benefit most from this apostolic ministry are the Corinthians themselves. Though death works in Paul as an apostolic missionary, life works in those who believe his message (4:12).

Paul now cites Psalms 116:10 in order to illustrate his mindset (4:13).³⁵ He was like the ancient poet whose life was threatened by death (Ps. 116:3-4) but who depended upon Yahweh in his hour of desperate need (Ps. 116:1-2). In spite of overwhelming danger, the poet could speak words of confidence (Ps. 116:7), for they proceeded from a firm faith (Ps. 116:10). So, also, could Paul speak words of bold confidence, since his faith was in the God who raised Jesus from the dead (4:14a). The resurrection of Christ assures Christians that God also will resurrect them at the end³⁶ and present them as victorious trophies of Christ's grace (4:14b).³⁷ The consequence of Paul's apostolic ministry, then, was a direct benefit to the Corinthians, who had come to believe because of his preaching mission (4:15a). Furthermore, as the gospel continued to be preached, more and more people would come to faith and demonstrate an overflowing thankfulness toward God (4:15b).

³³The theme of sharing Christ's sufferings is a common one in Paul's letters (cf. Ro. 8:17; Col. 1:24; Phil. 1:29-30; 3:10; 1 Th. 2:2, 14-15; 3:3-4; 2 Th. 1:5; 2 Ti. 1:8, 12; 2:8-12).

³⁴R. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) 73-74.

³⁵He obviously cites the passage from the LXX (115:1), for the passage in the Hebrew Bible (116:10) bears a somewhat different meaning. The NIV rendering in the Psalm reflects the Hebrew Bible rather than the LXX.

³⁶There is some discussion about whether or not Paul changed his mind with regard to personally being alive at the coming of Christ. To the Thessalonians, he seems to anticipate being part of those who "are alive and remain" until the *parousia* (1 Th. 4:17). Here, he seems to include himself with those who will die and be resurrected. Accordingly, some scholars suppose that Paul originally believed that he would escape death but eventually came to accept that he would, in fact, experience death. Others interpret that Paul simply recognizes the uncertainty regarding the return of Christ as well as the arrival of death, cf. R. Lenski, *I and II Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963) 987.

³⁷The idea of a presentation or display of God's people at the end is found elsewhere in Paul's letters. In one sense, such a presentation is made by the apostle-missionary who preached the saving message (2 Co. 11:1; Col. 1:22), and in another sense, the presentation is made by Christ or God (Ep. 5:27; Col. 1:28).

Returning to his initial affirmation, "We do not lose heart" (cf. 4:1), Paul asserts that while he experiences the weaknesses and difficulties common to all people, he also experiences a daily inward renewal through the life-giving Spirit (4:16; cf. 3:6). Present hardships are only temporary, and in fact, they are accruing for the Christian a surpassing weight of glory in the future (4:17).³⁸ Because of this future reward, Paul is not preoccupied with the temporal, visible present. Rather, he looks toward the eternal, unseen future (4:18).

An Eternal House (5:1-10)

The promise of an eternal, glorious future (cf. 4:17-18) prompts Paul to enlarge on the nature of this Christian hope, which is resurrection. The ideal for the after-life in Greek thought was disembodiment; in contrast, the promise for Christians was resurrection (cf. 4:14).³⁹ In explaining the difference between the present and future life, Paul uses the metaphors of housing and clothing.

Our present housing, that is our body, is comparable to a tent. Like a tent, it is temporary. When it has been destroyed through death and decay, it will be replaced by a permanent building constructed by God, that is, a new body (5:1; cf. 1 Co. 15:35-57).⁴⁰ In the meantime, our human lives are characterized by hardships and longings for the permanency of resurrection (5:2). It is not that we wish to be naked, that is disembodied, for the Christian hope is distinctively different than that of Greco-Roman culture (5:3). It is true that in our present condition, we are weighed down with anxieties (5:4a). Still, the goal for the Christian is not a disembodied escape from the trials of life, but rather, resurrection, at which time we shall be clothed with a new body that will end our period of mortal woes (5:4b). So abrupt will be this transition that it will be comparable to the old being "swallowed up" by the new (cf. 1 Co. 15:54).⁴¹ This transformation was part of God's purpose for us all along (5:5a), and the gift of the Holy Spirit serves as the guarantee and down payment

³⁸Elsewhere, Paul says, "...we share in his suffering in order that we may also share in his glory" (Ro. 8:17).

³⁹It is for this reason that the Athenians ridiculed Paul's message at the Areopagus (Ac. 17:31-32).

⁴⁰Some commentators have maintained that the imagery here applies to the body of Christ collectively rather than to the individual. As such, the heavenly house is the body of Christ, the church, cf. C. Williams, "II Corinthians," *PCB* (1962) 970. However, even if this interpretation is conceded, it does not change the fact of individual resurrection. Most evangelical commentators, however, understand the passage to refer to individual resurrection at the *parousia* of Christ. Paul's other references to the body of Christ do not relate to the after-life, but rather, to the present life.

⁴¹The metaphor of abruptness, in which mortality is "swallowed up" by life, is interpreted by some to mean that Paul changed his views from 1 Co. 15. Earlier, he had expected this change from mortality to immortality to occur at the coming of Christ. Now, he expects this change to occur at death, W. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 311. However, such a construction is difficult to reconcile with Paul's later expectation of receiving a resurrection body at the coming of Christ (cf. Phil. 3:20-21). The traditional interpretation is still best, that is, that Paul refers to the resurrection body which Christians will receive at the *parousia* of Christ, cf. G. Ladd, *The Last Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 35-36.

on that future (cf. 1:22).

Because of the assurance that God gives through the gift of the Spirit, Christians can face the future with confidence (5:6a; cf. 4:1, 16). Though they are away from the immediate presence of the Lord and in their present temporary condition of mortality (5:6b), they live by their faith in Christ's promise and the inward assurance of the Spirit, not by the empirical evidence of their senses (5:7). Their anticipation and hope is oriented toward the future, when they will give up the temporary tent of their earthly bodies and will enter the post-mortem state of being near the Lord (5:8).⁴² With this in view, it is always the concern of the believer to please the Lord, regardless of his/her state (5:9). Every Christian will face Christ as the final judge of the deeds done during life (5:10; cf. Ro. 14:10-12). At this tribunal, the works of Christians will be assessed for their worthiness of reward. Some works will be credited as worthy of commendation, while others will not (cf. 1 Co. 3:12-15). Elsewhere, Paul indicates that motives as well as results will figure prominently in this tribunal (cf. 1 Co. 4:5). Good works will be rewarded (cf. Ep. 6:8), and wrongs will be repaid (cf. Col. 3:25). However, he is careful to point out that the believer's salvation is not at risk (cf. 1 Co. 3:15b).

The Gospel of Reconciliation (5:11--6:13)

From the discussion concerning the present weakness and future glory of the Christian, Paul now returns to the ministry of the new covenant.

The Compelling Love of Christ (5:11-15)

If the foundation for Paul's apostolic ministry is the new covenant inaugurated by the Lord Jesus (3:3-18), then the mission to which Paul was called is to proclaim the vicarious death of Jesus to all people (5:14-15). The motivation to preach this message revolved around two poles, one being the fact of the coming tribunal, when Paul would give an account to God of his ministry, and the other being the gracious nature of God who demonstrated his love in the vicarious death of Jesus. When Paul speaks of the fear of the Lord, he refers to his healthy respect toward Jesus Christ as the great judge at the final tribunal (cf. Phil. 2:12).⁴³ This healthy fear toward God

⁴²It is unclear whether Paul's statements in 5:6-8 are referring to the intermediate state between death and resurrection or to the resurrection state itself. However, there is something to be said for the former view in that it would illuminate the expression, "We are confident..." (5:8a). Though nakedness (disembodiment) is to be feared, it is a state that Paul could face with contentment so long as he knew that in the end he would not be left naked (5:3), cf. F. Filson, "II Corinthians," *IB* (1953) X.330. Disembodiment in the intermediate state is still a condition in which one is "with the Lord" (6:8; cf. Phil. 1:23). Paul seems to know only a little about the righteous dead in the intermediate state, but he at least knows that they are not abandoned. Rather, they are "dead in Christ" (1 Th. 4:16b), and when the Lord returns, they will be brought with him (1 Th. 4:14), cf. A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 169.

⁴³Older English Versions, such as the KJV, have translated the Greek word *phobos* as "terror," but while this may be

motivated him to carry out his apostolic duty of evangelism. God, who truly knows all things, surely knew Paul's motives. Paul only hoped that what was plain to God was also plain to the Corinthians (5:11; cf. 1:14, 17, 23-24; 2:3-4, 17).

As before, his purpose in this discussion is not merely prideful egotism, but rather, he wished to help the Corinthians have cause to be proud of him as their apostle-missionary, especially in the face of some who placed too much emphasis on external sensations and not on internal character (5:12).⁴⁴ Though some might even accuse Paul of insanity because of his intensity, he was content to bear up under such disparagement, since he was committed to the cause of God's new covenant mission and was working for the benefit of people like the Corinthians who would be saved (5:13). What motivated Paul was not the opinion of others, but the compelling love of Christ which was demonstrated in his vicarious death (5:14a; cf. Ro. 5:8).

Here Paul approaches the very heart of the meaning of the new covenant. When Christ died, he died for all (cf. Mk. 14:24; 1 Co. 11:24-25).⁴⁵ In his death, he died as a representative and a substitution for all humankind.⁴⁶ As in the imagery of the Servant of Yahweh, the one died for the many (cf. Is. 53:4-12). Because Christ died representationally and substitutionally for all humans, then all humans can be said to have died by proxy (5:14b).⁴⁷ This death for all, of course, does not mean that Paul envisions a universal salvation. If that were so, his statements about condemnation would be pointless (cf. 1 Co. 6:9-10; 11:32). Harris is correct in saying that there is universalism in the scope of redemption, since no one is excluded from God's offer, but there is particularity in the application of redemption, since not everyone appropriates the benefits of God's offer.⁴⁸ It is appropriate to say that the death of Jesus was sufficient for the salvation of all humans, but it is also necessary to say that his death was effective for the salvation of those who believe.

Since Jesus died for all, those who believe in his redemptive death should live, not for themselves, but for the one who died for them and arose from the tomb (5:15). This is the heart of Paul's message. Since the message calls for believers to live not for themselves but for Christ (cf. Ro. 6:4, 11; Col. 2:13), Paul's actions as an apostle

a permissible equivalent, it carries the wrong nuance. Surely the terror or horror of standing before God is reserved for the ungodly (cf. Ro. 2:8-9), cf. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 119-120.

⁴⁴The nature of those who "take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart" will be more fully addressed in 2 Corinthians 10:12-17; 11:12-15; 12:11-13.

⁴⁵Of course, the strict Calvinist says that the "all" only refers to "all of the elect."

⁴⁶See the discussion of Paul's view of Jesus' death in L. Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 216-224.

⁴⁷The death of humans by proxy, of course, was symbolic rather than physical. It is on the order of Paul's statement to the Galatians, "I have been crucified with Christ" (Ga. 2:20), or his statement to the Romans, "We know that our old self was crucified with him" (Ro. 6:6).

⁴⁸M. Harris, "2 Corinthians," *EBC* (1976) X.352.

must be judged in this light as well. He, also, lives not for himself but for Christ. His conduct was not according to worldly wisdom, but according to God's grace (cf. 1:12). His behavior, however misunderstood by the Corinthians, all along has been driven by new covenant values.

The Ministry of Reconciliation (5:16-21)

Given this understanding of Christ's vicarious death for all humans, Paul could no longer view men and women in the old way (5:16a). The worldly point of view was to view others through the eyes of prejudice, passing judgment on them according to their race, social standing, gender and so forth. Jews segregated themselves from Greeks, and the Greeks disparaged the unsophisticated barbarians. In Christ, however, these worldly categories have been abolished (cf. Ga. 3:26-28; Col. 3:9-11; Ep. 2:14-18). The only proper way to look at others is in terms of their relationship to Jesus Christ. Similarly, Paul once viewed Christ himself through the eyes of his Pharisaical prejudice, arresting the followers of the way and extraditing them for imprisonment (Ac. 8:1; 9:1-2; 22:4-5; 26:9-11; 1 Co. 15:9; Ga. 1:13, 23; Phil. 3:6; 1 Ti. 1:13). Now, of course, his understanding of Christ is radically different than before (5:16b). In Christ, he is part of a new order--a new creation. He shares the eternal life of the risen Lord (cf. 1 Co. 15:21-22, 42-49) and has passed from the old order into the new order. This new creation and new covenant ministry are from God, whose mission to the world is reconciliation through Christ Jesus (5:18).

In his writings, Paul uses several metaphors by which he describes God's saving action in Christ. Probably the three most important are the metaphors of redemption, justification and reconciliation. The imagery of redemption comes from the slave market. The imagery of justification comes from the law courts. The imagery of reconciliation, used here, comes from the common human experience of broken personal relationships. Human fellowship with God had been destroyed because of sin, and the human need was for restoration into God's intimate family circle.⁴⁹ God's mission to reconcile the world to himself was being accomplished through Christ, for since Christ had died for all (5:15a), there was now a way for the sins of women and men not to be held against them (5:19a).⁵⁰ Paul and his fellow

⁴⁹A. Hunter, *The Gospel According to Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966) 19, 22-23. Hunter also points out that there was no parallel in Greek religion to the doctrine of reconciliation. Furthermore, in Judaism, the concept of reconciliation was reversed in that God was reconciled to humans, not humans to God.

⁵⁰Translators vary as to how to render 5:19a. The older English versions render it, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself," thus emphasizing the incarnation (so KJV). Most scholars, however, think that on contextual grounds that the meaning is more likely to be that God was reconciling the world *through* Christ, cf. D. Clines, "2 Corinthians," *IBC* (1986) 1399. If the latter, then the translation should read "God was reconciling the world to himself in [through] Christ" (so NIV, RSV, NEB, NAB, NASB, JB, TCNT, TEV, Goodspeed, Phillips).

missionaries had as their task the proclamation of this good news (5:19b). When he evangelized in Corinth, Paul preached as God's royal representative announcing the possibility of amnesty (5:20a). His evangelistic message was a direct appeal on behalf of the living Christ for his audience to be reconciled to God (5:20b)!⁵¹ God grants amnesty because Christ, the innocent substitution (cf. 5:14-15), became the sin-bearer for all people (5:21a).⁵² The exchange is complete: human sin is now Christ's, and God's righteousness is now theirs (5:21b)!

The Call to be Reconciled (6:1-13)

Now Paul directly appeals to the Corinthians upon the basis of God's reconciling mission to the world. If this is indeed God's mission, and if the Corinthians are Paul's fellow-workers, Paul entreats them not to abandon God's grace by rejecting him (6:1). If Paul is all of the things he claimed--an apostle of Jesus Christ by God's will (1:1; 2:17), the fragrance of life or the smell of death, depending upon how people responded to his message (2:15-16), if he is above letters of recommendation (3:1-3), competent as a minister of the new covenant due to God's enablement (3:4-6; 4:1-2, 7), and the ambassador through which God makes his appeal for reconciliation (6:20)--then the Corinthians could not reject Paul without also rejecting God's grace which was preached by him. Paul's statement is very similar to what Jesus said to his apostles, "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (Lk. 10:16). To reinforce this appeal, Paul cites Isaiah 49:8, which speaks of the time of God's favor and the day of salvation (6:2). He directly applies this passage to the Christian era.⁵³

Though Paul assured the Corinthians that he did not intend to engage in further self-commendation (5:12), that fact that the Corinthians have questioned his motives and conduct compels him to enlarge upon the character of his apostolic ministry. In no way had he behaved in such a fashion as to either hinder the Corinthians' faith or discredit himself as an apostle of Christ (6:3). Rather, his behavior had been such that it should have clearly attested to the genuineness of his apostleship (6:4). If earlier he

⁵¹There is no object to the Greek statement, "We implore," though most translations provide the pronoun "you" (KJV, NIV, RSV, NEB, etc.) Bruce is probably correct in suggesting that this statement is not so much directed toward the Corinthians, who can be assumed already to have been reconciled to Christ, but to all people who were the object of Paul's preaching, cf. Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 210.

⁵²The statement, "God made him to be sin," should probably be taken in the sense of a sin-offering, cf. Ro. 8:3 and NIVmg.

⁵³Of course, the passage in Isaiah was first directed to the exiles in Babylon who were on the verge of returning to Jerusalem. The time of favor and the day of salvation envisioned the impending Jewish restoration from captivity (cf. Is. 49:9). However, the vision for the Servant of Yahweh was far more than merely a restoration of the Jews to their homeland, for the ideal of restoration reached all the way to the salvation of the Gentiles in the ends of the earth (49:5-7).

had commended himself to the Corinthians' conscience on the basis of his ethics (4:2; 5:11), now he commends himself to their scrutiny on the basis of his behavior and suffering (6:5a).

He first lists for them some nine forms of suffering which he has endured and which he arranges in sets of threes (6:5b):

1. General suffering (troubles, hardships, distresses),⁵⁴
2. Suffering at the hands of others (beatings, imprisonments, riots),⁵⁵
3. Suffering through discipline (hard work, sleepless nights, hunger).⁵⁶

Moving to the character qualities which he sought to exhibit in his ministry, Paul lists several other items (6:6-7): purity (or integrity), understanding (knowledge), patience (forbearance), kindness (goodness), the motivation of the Holy Spirit,⁵⁷ sincere love, truthful speech,⁵⁸ the power of God,⁵⁹ and readiness to engage in spiritual warfare on behalf of the gospel.⁶⁰

The next listing describes the paradoxes of apostolic ministry. At one and the same time, Paul has experienced glory and dishonor (6:8a); he has been defamed and praised (6:8b). Though his integrity is impeccable, some regard him as an imposter (6:8c). Though his credentials have been disparaged as though he were an unknown person, his lifestyle and ministry have been open and plain for all to examine (6:9a). Though continually under the threat of death, he continues to live by God's grace (6:9b). Though beaten by his enemies, he has not been killed (6:9c). His apostolic mission has been plagued with sorrow, but he continues to rejoice in the Lord (6:10a). He has willingly surrendered his material possessions to the point of poverty, but through his preaching of the gospel, he has seen many men and women become rich toward God (6:10b). Though he has virtually nothing to call his own, at the same time he owns everything that has eternal value (6:10c).⁶¹

So, since Paul has spoken so freely and bared his heart to the Corinthians, he

⁵⁴Later, Paul will list some of these catastrophes in detail, cf. 2 Co. 11:23-28.

⁵⁵Cf. 2 Co. 11:23-25; Ac. 16:22-23; 19:23-41. Early Christian tradition says that Paul was imprisoned seven times in all, cf. Clement, *Epistles to the Corinthians* V.

⁵⁶Some commentators think that the sleepless nights and hunger are references to voluntary religious vigils and fasting, cf. Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 212, while other commentators think the context makes this unlikely and see the references as describing involuntary deprivations, cf. Furnish, 344.

⁵⁷The translator is left to decide exactly what work of the Holy Spirit is intended, since the Greek text does not specify. The NEB offers "gifts of the Holy Spirit" and *The Berkeley Version* of the New Testament offers "kindness by the Holy Spirit." A few translators, on the other hand, take the reference to be other than divine, i.e., "spirit of holiness" (JB, Goodspeed).

⁵⁸Or, "the word of truth," an expression which here may simply refer to the gospel, cf. Furnish, 345.

⁵⁹Cf. 2 Co. 12:12.

⁶⁰2 Co. 10:4; Ro. 13:12; Ep. 6:11-17; 1 Th. 5:8.

⁶¹Earlier, he included among his possessions the world, life, death, the present and the future (1 Co. 3:22).

appeals to them for a fair exchange (6:11). Though they have questioned his apostleship, he still holds them in high affection (6:12), for he considers them to be his children in the Lord (6:13). Because of Paul's apostleship, reconciliation between the Corinthians and himself is not merely advisable; it is imperative.

The Call for Purity (6:14--7:1)

The following section fits somewhat awkwardly in the flow of Paul's thought. The warmth and emotion of 6:11-13 are temporarily suspended and will not resume until 7:2. In between, there is a stern call for separation from unbelievers. So different is the change in tone in this section that some scholars have supposed that it may have been inserted from other Pauline material, perhaps even from the initial Pauline correspondence to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Co. 5:9). Others suggest that it may not have been written by Paul at all, but may have been interpolated from some other literature, possibly Qumran literature, because of ideological and linguistic affinities.⁶²

Without minimizing the difficulties of the passage, it still can be said that Paul is capable of digressing. Furthermore, it may well be that after attempting to address the Corinthians out of his deep affection for them, Paul has decided to put some teeth into his call for reconciliation, warning them that they must not lapse into a fellowship with the unbelieving, unreconciled world in their opposition to him.⁶³ It may even be, as Margaret Thrall has suggested, that Paul was interrupted in his letter at 6:13, and that when he began again, he had somehow become aware of the need to warn his correspondents against their contact with pagans.⁶⁴

In any case, warn them he does! He forbids them to be mis-mated⁶⁵ with unbelievers (6:14a), and he follows this prohibition with five sharp, rhetorical questions. To be mis-yoked recalls the Torah, which forbade certain kinds of associations (cf. Lv. 19:19; Dt. 22:9-11), and while this passage could certainly include the prohibition of marriage between Christians and non-Christians, it is not restricted to that meaning alone. Earlier, Paul had warned the Corinthians not to associate with immoral people (1 Co. 5:9), though he was compelled to balance this statement with a practical explanation (1 Co. 5:10-11; cf. 1 Co. 10:27). What is probably foremost in Paul's mind here is that the Corinthians must not take sides with the unbelievers in rejecting the gospel, which he had preached to them. If they persisted in rejecting him personally, they would eventually reject the message he proclaimed. In doing so, they would align themselves with those who opposed

⁶²See the entire discussion in Furnish, 371-383; Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 190-195.

⁶³Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 194.

⁶⁴M. Thrall, *I and II Corinthians [CBC]* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965) 155-156.

⁶⁵The verb *heterozygeo* (= mismated, unevenly yoked) appears only here in the NT. In fact, the section 6:14--7:1 contains some eight *hapax legomena* (words appearing only once in the NT), cf. Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 213.

Christ.

The five rhetorical questions are intended to sharpen Paul's prohibition against mis-yoking with unbelievers (6:14b-16a). Can there be a partnership⁶⁶ between righteousness and wickedness? Should there be fellowship between light and darkness? What sort of harmony could possibly exist between Christ and Belial?⁶⁷ What common ground is there between a believer and an unbeliever? What agreement could there be between the temple of God and the temples of idols? That which was true about the holiness of the physical temple in Jerusalem was just as true about the spiritual temple of the community of Christians! The church is the temple of the living God; for he himself said that this would be so (cf. Ex. 25:8; Lv. 26:11-12; Je. 32:38; Eze. 11:20b; 36:28; 37:27). Paul, like other New Testament writers, had no compunctions about taking passages in the Old Testament, which referred to ancient Israel, and transferring them over to the New Testament church, which he envisioned as the new Israel.

Since God was among them, the Corinthians were obligated to dispense with everything that was incompatible with his holiness. Once more appealing to the Old Testament, Paul reinforced his call to purity by interweaving various quotations addressed to ancient Israel and using them to warn the new Israel, the church (cf. 2 Sa. 7:14; Is. 43:6; 52:11; Je. 31:9; Eze. 11:17; 20:34, 41; Ho. 1:10; Zep. 3:20).⁶⁸ In view of the assurances that God would receive those who had purified themselves and would become a Father to them, the response of the Corinthians could be nothing less than a complete cleansing from all defilement. His expression "...everything that contaminates body and spirit," is intended to include the fullest spectrum of defilements. The responsibility of the Corinthians, as God's holy people (cf. 1:1), was to bring to completion the holiness which they had already received by decree when they came to faith (7:1; cf. 1 Co. 1:2; 6:9-11; Phil. 2:12). There is an implicit tension in Paul's holiness theology between the imperative and the indicative moods. Because believers are "in Christ," they have been declared holy (indicative). At the same time, they are exhorted to be holy (imperative).⁶⁹

⁶⁶The word *metoche* (= partnership, sharing, having in common) is another *hapax legomenon*.

⁶⁷Belial or the Sons of Belial is an OT expression denoting reprobate, dissolute or uncouth persons (cf. Dt. 13:13; Jg. 19:22; 1 Sa. 1:16; 2:12; 2 Sa. 20:1; 23:6; Pro. 16:27). The word properly means worthless or useless, and by the time of the writing of the intertestamental Pseudepigrapha, it was uniformly regarded as a title for Satan, cf. T. Gaster, *IDB* (1962) I.377.

⁶⁸It may be observed that Paul's use of the OT in this way closely resembles patterns which were employed in Judaism. This usage served to develop a theme from the Hebrew Bible based on the assumption that those who belonged to Christ, Israel's messianic king, constituted the true Israel. On the whole issue of such quotations, see E. Ellis, "How the New Testament Uses the Old," *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 199-219.

⁶⁹R. Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976) 170-180.

The Final Appeal for Restoration (7:2-16)

Paul now resumes where he left off at 2:13, at which point he entered into a lengthy theological interlude concerning the ministry of the new covenant. This excursus was not a pointless digression, however. It served to sharpen the need for reconciliation between Paul and the Corinthians. If the new covenant ministry consisted of God's reconciling action in Jesus Christ, and if Paul was God's apostle who proclaimed this message of reconciliation, then the Corinthians could not remain at odds with him.

The last thing Paul had mentioned in his discussion about the rift over his changed travel plans was his eagerness to hear from Titus (2:13). After his painful visit to Corinth, he determined not to make another such visit, at least until the tension had been resolved (2:1). Instead, he had sent a letter through Titus, probably from Ephesus (1:8), which he hoped would correct the problem (2:3, 9). His anticipation as to how the Corinthians might react to this letter, which seems to have contained a stinging rebuke, left Paul in terrible anxiety. Leaving Ephesus for the seaport at Troas (2:12), he apparently hoped to intercept Titus on his return trip. When Titus did not appear, Paul declined to stay at Troas, even though there was ample opportunity for evangelism (2:13). His anxiety over what might have happened in Corinth drove him to cross the Aegean to Macedonia, where he again hoped to intercept Titus. At this point, Paul broke off in order to enter into a lengthy discussion of the new covenant ministry. Now he returns to the subject of his deep anxiety as he awaited Titus in Macedonia.

The Appeal (7:2-4)

If Paul has spoken freely and bared his heart to the Corinthians about his life as a new covenant apostle (6:11), he calls for a fair exchange. The Corinthians must now open their hearts to him in return (7:2a; cf. 6:13). Travel plans notwithstanding; Paul had behaved himself in a truly Christian way. He had not wronged or exploited or corrupted anyone (7:2b). Though his opponents might even have been leveling such accusations against Paul, he did not wish the Corinthians to think that he charged them with making such statements (7:3a). In fact, Paul's love for the Corinthians was such that he would gladly live or die for them (7:3b), and his confidence and pride in their true Christian character remained strong (7:4a). In spite of his troubles (cf. 1:8-9), he was greatly encouraged (cf. 1:3-7), and his joy overflowed (7:4b).

The Coming of Titus (7:5-7)

After debarking from Troas and arriving in Macedonia, Paul's anxiety over the situation in Corinth had reached a crescendo. He was losing sleep, and the strain had become almost unbearable (7:5a). Every aspect of his life seemed under harassment

(7:5b). He faced conflicts on the outside, and he was filled with misgivings on the inside (7:5c). At long last Titus arrived, and in his arrival Paul experienced the comfort that only God could have provided for him (7:6; cf. 1:3-7). The news was good! The Corinthians had received Titus well (7:7a). Even better, they had voiced to Titus their deep concern for Paul, showing regret for their former defiance (7:7b). While Paul could express joy during his troubles (cf. 7:4b), the good news brought by Titus increased his joy that much more (7:7c).

The Stinging Letter (7:8-13a)

Returning to the letter he had written out of "great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears" (cf. 2:3-4), Paul affirmed the necessity which he felt in writing it (7:8a). At first, probably while he anxiously awaited the return of Titus, he feared that the letter might have been too stinging. He knew that it was severe, but he also knew that if the Corinthians would only show the right response, their hurt would be temporary and the final result would be healthy (7:8b). With the good report from Titus, Paul now rejoiced over the results of the letter, not because the Corinthians had been hurt, but because it had stung them sufficiently to cause them to repent (7:9a). Their hurt was not destructive but constructive, since godly sorrow, as motivated by God, leads to salvation and leaves no regrets,⁷⁰ unlike worldly grief that leads to death (7:9b-10). Striking examples of the difference between these two kinds of sorrow are to be observed in the lives of Peter and Judas, both of whom denied the Lord and both of whom were full of sorrow (Mt. 26:73-75; 27:3-5), but to much different ends.

The godly sorrow of the Corinthians produced all the appropriate emotions and responses. They were earnest in their efforts to clear their name. They were indignant at the instigator of the rebellion against Paul (and probably at themselves for allowing the situation to get so far out of hand). They were alarmed at the enormity of their error. They were filled with longing for the absent Paul and were concerned about his welfare. Finally, they were zealous to see that the problem was rectified and the offender punished (cf. 2:6).⁷¹ At every point they had tried to put themselves in the right after their complicity in the unfortunate confrontation with Paul (7:11). Paul's stinging letter, then, had not been composed out of a motive to get even with the perpetrator or even to vindicate the injured party (i.e., Paul himself, cf. 2:5). Rather, he wrote in order to effect a reconciliation between the Corinthians and himself, once more rekindling the warmth of Christian affection between them (7:12).

⁷⁰Paul uses an oxymoron here in that the Greek text literally reads *metanoian.... ametameleton* (= non-repentable repentance).

⁷¹The NIV dynamic equivalency in 7:11b, "readiness to see justice done," obscures the flow of Paul's verbage, particularly his reference to punishment. The whole line literally reads: "What earnestness it worked out in you, what defense, what vexation, what fear, what eager desire, what zeal, what punishment." Of course, the idea of punishment had been mentioned previously (cf. 2:6).

Since the letter seemed to have had this very effect, Paul was very encouraged (7:13a).

Paul's Confidence in the Corinthians (7:13b-16)

Not only had Paul been encouraged, but Titus, also, had shared in this improved relationship (7:13b). Before Paul had sent Titus on his delicate mission, he had told him that the Corinthians could be counted on to put things right. Now they had made good his boast (7:14). Consequently, Titus shared in this same bond of affection between Paul and the Corinthians, and his estimate of them was even greater than before, since he had been given the opportunity for first-hand observation of their obedience and reverence (7:15). Paul's confidence in the Corinthians had not been misplaced (7:16; cf. 7:4a)!

The Collection for the Church in Palestine (8:1--9:15)

Because of the good news reported by Titus concerning the Corinthians' longing for Paul, their regret over their conflict with him, and their concern for his welfare (7:7), the apostle was now emboldened to once more renew his request for their participation in the relief offering being collected for the church in Jerusalem. For some time, Paul had been soliciting funds from the churches in the provinces of Achaia, Galatia, and Macedonia to take to the impoverished Christians in the Jewish churches (1 Co. 16:1-4; Ro. 15:25-27).

Paul maintained a unique ethic with regard to money. For him, the believer is truly free, and this includes freedom from obligatory obedience to the requirements of Torah, requirements such as the ancient tithing laws (Ga. 2:1-16; cf. Lv. 27:26-34; Nu. 18:21, 24-32; Dt. 12:5b-19; 14:22-29; 26:12-15). In none of his letters does Paul ever attempt to demand money on the basis of Mosaic law. At the same time, Paul did not wish his converts to lapse into irresponsibility and careless stewardship. He encouraged generosity, particularly in 2 Corinthians 8-9. He was very concerned, however, that his converts did not misunderstand his motives. He was not seeking their money, but their commitment to Christ (2 Co. 2:17; 7:2; 12:14). In fact, so careful was Paul along these lines that he forfeited his own rights to receive financial support while he preached in the various cities, so that he might "offer the gospel free of charge" and become a model of self-sufficiency to his congregations (1 Co. 9:12b, 18-23; 2 Th. 3:9). Though he maintained that it was within the rights of missionaries such as himself to be supported by their ministry (1 Co. 9:6-12; 1 Ti. 5:17-18), Paul preferred to support himself with his tent-making trade, often working "night and day" to survive while he preached (Ac. 18:3; 20:34-35; 1 Th. 2:9; 2 Th. 3:8). This practice insured that he would not become a financial "burden" to his congregations (2 Co. 11:9; 12:14-16; 1 Th. 2:7, 9; 2 Th. 3:8). On rare occasions, he thankfully received offerings from churches where he was not currently preaching, because in

this way he knew that the offerings had been given willingly and not out of any compulsion (Phil. 4:15-18; 2 Co. 11:9).

Paul's diplomatic and careful plea for funds from the Corinthians must be read with this ethic in mind. It had been more or less a year since he had first approached them (1 Co. 16:1-4), and now he wished to renew his request.

The Model Churches in Macedonia (8:1-5)

To introduce his subject, Paul first cites the generosity of the Macedonian churches (Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea). The contributions by these congregations Paul describes as an expression of grace (8:1). His manner of speaking suggests that their generosity to others was a response to God's redemptive grace to them, and incidentally, it also reflects Paul's statement to the Romans that spiritual gifts, one of which is the gift of generosity, are given by God in proportion to the grace he supplies (Ro. 12:3, 6, 8). God gives his gracious gifts to believers, and believers share those gifts with others.

The Macedonians, for their part, were not wealthy Christians. They had given joyfully out of the midst of their severe trial⁷² and deep poverty (8:2), contributing even beyond their means (8:3). They considered their participation in this effort to be a privilege rather than an obligation, and in fact, they had even taken the initiative to ask Paul's permission to join in this service to others (8:4). Their eagerness was far beyond what might have been reasonably expected (8:5a), and in giving themselves over to the lordship of Christ, they did not hesitate to make their resources available to Paul's charitable collection (8:5b). Such a demonstrated attitude of sincere love and fellowship was certainly in accordance with God's will!

The Appeal to the Corinthians (8:6-15)

With the Macedonians as a model for Christian charity and generosity, Paul has decided to send Titus back to Corinth on a new mission, this time to complete the offering which had been begun earlier (8:6). The Corinthians were more affluent than their northern cousins,⁷³ and since they prided themselves on excelling in both spiritual gifts (cf. 1 Co. 1:5, 7) and Christian sincerity and love, Paul wants them to excel in generosity also (8:7).

His ethic of freedom remains in force in this appeal. He does not demand the Corinthians' participation (8:8a), but instead he considers his appeal to be a test of their sincere love and a chance for them to emulate the Macedonians (8:8b).

⁷²In his letters to them, Paul alludes to the Thessalonians' sufferings (1 Th. 2:14; 3:2-4; 2 Th. 1:4-7a) and to the Philippians' persecutions (Phil. 1:28-30).

⁷³Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 221.

Consequently, he reminds them of the grace of the Lord Jesus which was demonstrated in the incarnation. Though God's Son was "rich,"⁷⁴ through his condescension he accepted poverty (8:9a).⁷⁵ In so doing, he enabled those who would come to faith to experience the true riches of salvation (8:9b). The self-emptying humility of Christ in his incarnation becomes the highest example of altruistic benevolence.

In view of Christ's example, Paul offers this advice. Since originally the Corinthians had been the first to participate in this collection, both in expressing their desire to cooperate and in making a pledge (8:10), now Paul hopes they will complete their pledge and so demonstrate that their expressed desire was not merely talk (8:11). It is not clear whether the Corinthians had pledged to give a certain amount, had begun the process of collecting it, and had not as yet fulfilled their total, or whether they had simply promised to participate but had not as yet followed through with any actual donations (cf. 1 Co. 16:1-2). In either case, Paul certainly wants them to finish what they had started, and in keeping with his usual ethic, he qualifies his appeal by saying that they should give in proportion to their resources (8:12).

Paul's motive, of course, was not to fleece the Corinthians of their money or to create for them a hardship.⁷⁶ Rather, his purpose was that there could be some sense of equality between the Christians in Greece and those in Palestine (8:13). The surplus of the one would supply the lack of the other, and if necessary, this process would be reciprocal (8:14). There is more than an echo, here, of the early practice in the Jerusalem church to have "everything in common" (Ac. 2:44-45; 4:32, 34-35). Paul closes this section with a quotation from Exodus 16:18, where in the gathering of manna there was neither excess nor shortage (8:15).

The Mission of Titus and the Delegation (8:16-24)

In Paul's original communication to the Corinthians about the relief fund, he had instructed them to make weekly donations, so that when he arrived the collection would already be complete (1 Co. 16:2). When the various amounts from Galatia, Macedonia and Achaia had been pooled, Paul would write letters of introduction for a delegation of laypersons, whom they could choose from among themselves, and these individuals would serve as the couriers to carry the gift to Jerusalem (1 Co. 16:3). Paul had offered to go to Jerusalem himself, if necessary, but his remarks indicated that he deemed it unlikely (1 Co. 16:4). Then, with the complete breakdown in the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians, all these plans fell through.

⁷⁴Elsewhere, Paul describes the Son's pre-existent state as "being in very nature God" (Phil. 2:6).

⁷⁵Or, as Paul says elsewhere, he "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant" (Phil. 2:7).

⁷⁶It is not unlikely that such an accusation might have been leveled against Paul, particularly during the recent unpleasantness.

Now Paul is regrouping for another effort. This time he will send Titus back to Corinth. Titus was apparently eager to comply (8:16-17), given his warm reception on the previous visit (cf. 7:7a, 13, 15). Along with Titus, Paul intended to send another brother who had earned a strong reputation for his dedication to the gospel (8:18).⁷⁷ This accompanying representative not only would reinforce the fact that the collection was the cooperative effort of several congregations (8:19a), but he would serve as an independent guarantor that the offering would be handled with the utmost discretion and integrity. By this time, Paul seems to indicate that he will himself accompany the delegation to Jerusalem (8:19b), but he is careful to forestall any criticism in the way the collection was to be handled (8:20-21). Along with Titus and the representative from the Macedonian churches, Paul intended to send one of his own trusted traveling companions (8:22). Titus needed no recommendation, for he was well known to the Corinthians, and the others brothers who would accompany him were to be fully trusted also (8:23).⁷⁸

As a last appeal, Paul requests that the Corinthians demonstrate love and acceptance toward the three-person delegation, proving to all the other churches that his boast about the Corinthians had been legitimate (8:24).

The Corinthians on Display (9:1-5)

Since the Corinthians already had promised to participate in the relief fund (cf. 8:10), it was really superfluous for Paul to urge them to do so (9:1).⁷⁹ However, he finds himself in an awkward situation. He has told the Macedonians that the Corinthians were very generous in their pledges (9:2), and this competitive rhetoric in turn had stimulated them to give generously also. The Macedonians had fulfilled their pledges, but the Corinthians had not. Paul certainly does not want to be made into a liar (9:3-4), so he is eager that the Corinthians do not falter in their promises. Arranging the delegation to go with Titus in order to complete the collection would afford the Corinthians the opportunity to prove true Paul's boast. Paul indicates that he wants their gift to be generous and not grudging (9:5). At the same time, the sending of a delegation would put a certain amount of social pressure upon the

⁷⁷Paul nowhere names this other brother, but it can be assumed that he was a member of one of the Macedonian churches, probably appointed by his own congregation. Since the time of Origen, it has been speculated that he may have been Luke, cf. J. O'Rourke, "The Second Letter to the Corinthians," *JBC* (1968) II.285.

⁷⁸Since both the delegate from the Macedonian churches and the delegate chosen from Paul's traveling group are unnamed, it is usually assumed that they were well-known to the Corinthians and did not need to be named. This assumption may be correct, but in my judgment it is not likely. Why would Paul fail to mention the names of persons whom the Corinthians knew well? He certainly does not resort to calling Titus by any designation other than his name! It seems more likely that Paul would omit mentioning the names of persons whom the Corinthians did not know, preferring instead to wait until they could be personally introduced to the church by Titus.

⁷⁹Paul's statement here is analogous to the modern expression, "It goes without saying....", even though the speaker intends to say it anyway.

Corinthians to respond favorably, particularly if one member of the delegation was from Macedonia (see Footnote #77).⁸⁰

The Motivation, Ethics and Benefits of Giving (9:6-15)

In closing his appeal, Paul remarks on several factors that affect generosity. In the first place, giving is reciprocal. Generosity will be rewarded, while stinginess will yield a very small return (9:6). It is unlikely that Paul is here thinking of purely earthly rewards for generosity. His previous teaching has been that rewards for good works will be bestowed in the great tribunal at the end (cf. 5:10), and elsewhere, he challenges Christians not to become weary in doing good deeds, for a rich harvest awaits them in eternity (cf. Ga. 6:6-10).⁸¹ Second, generosity should be spontaneous, not contrived or forced. God loves those who give cheerfully and not out of compulsion (9:7). Third, generous Christians may be assured that God's divine grace will continue to be bestowed upon their lives, both to supply their needs as well as to provide them with resources which they can in turn share with others (9:8).⁸² To reinforce this statement, Paul quotes from Psalm 112:9, which describes the generosity of a godly person toward the poor (9:9). Such godly generosity demonstrates an enduring righteousness. For Paul, the righteousness, that "endures forever" surely means the righteous acts of a Christian that will endure until the great tribunal, where they will be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ.

If in nature God provides seed for the farmer and bread for the hungry through his providential supply of rain and snow to water the earth (cf. Is. 55:10), he will surely provide material resources for Christians so they can share them with others (9:10a). Such sharing will, in the end, be assessed as righteous acts, worthy of eternal reward (9:10b; cf. Re. 19:8). As God enriches his children in every way, he expects them to be generous on every occasion (9:11a)! Wealth is an occasion for Christian stewardship, not self-indulgence!⁸³ As the Corinthians demonstrated generosity to the

⁸⁰Paul was not above carefully using subtle pressure to achieve his goals. Not only here, but in the case of Philemon also, Paul applied pressure. In the latter case, he said that any favor Philemon granted should be "spontaneous and not forced," but then later, he reminds Philemon of his obligation to Paul for his salvation (19b) and announces an upcoming visit during which he could ascertain whether or not Philemon had done what was requested of him (22).

⁸¹If this is true, then the popular teaching that one should give to the cause of God in order that God may pour out earthly benefits, particularly wealth, should be reassessed. To be sure, generosity often creates a reciprocity from others (cf. Lk. 6:38), but such reciprocity is not a divine guarantee for the present life. The idea that reciprocity is a universal law to be exercised in the interests of personal wealth, such as advocated by popular Christian media figures, is highly questionable, contra P. Robertson, *The Secret Kingdom* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982) 103-120.

⁸²Once again, notice that what God has promised are the necessities of life, not excess. Christians cannot use benevolence as some sort of earthly investment program, but they can count on God to supply their needs.

⁸³Just how Paul would respond to the western goal of upward mobility in a free enterprise economic system is difficult to say. Certainly some of the people to whom he was writing had little opportunity for upward social mobility and increased wealth--industry and hard work notwithstanding. In a society that was not altogether unlike

poor believers in Jerusalem, they would afford those impoverished Jewish Christians the opportunity to give thanks to God for his care (9:11b). What the Corinthians performed in the collection of funds was a sacred service: it both supplied the needs of God's people and became the occasion for thanks to God (9:12). Others would praise God for the Corinthians' generosity, for it would be perceived as a direct response of obedience to their confession of faith (9:13).

This latter statement, that their generosity was a response of obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ, is worth further comment. There are deep levels of meaning here. In the first place, the participation of the Corinthians in the collection for Jerusalem served as a vindication of Paul's missionary work among them. It meant that they had been reconciled, not merely to Paul, but to God and to the Christian community as a whole. Secondly, while such benevolence was to be voluntary (cf. 8:8; 9:7), it was also the natural outcome of genuine Christian faith, so much so, that without such a response, the validity of the Corinthians' faith might also be questioned (cf. 8:8-9). To claim allegiance to the Christian gospel while at the same time refusing to follow the example of the Lord, who though he was rich became poor for the sake of others, is to obviate the claim of faith. Thus, generosity is, in fact, an act of obedience to the gospel.

Finally, Paul says that when the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem had received this generous gift, they would pray for their Gentile brothers and sisters in Achaia with open hearts because of such demonstrated kindness (9:14). Paul's last word is a heartfelt thanksgiving for the greatest gift of all, God's gift of his one and only Son (9:15; cf. 8:9; Ro. 8:32)!

We are left with the question, how did the Corinthians respond to Paul's plea for generosity? There are two indications that they completed their pledge. When writing to the Romans, Paul later reports that the congregations in both Macedonia and Achaia (of which Corinth was the capital) had donated funds for the poor believers in Jerusalem (Ro. 15:26). Also, the Corinthians preserved Paul's letter. Would they have done so had they not been reconciled to the apostle and had they not shared in this service he had requested of them?⁸⁴

feudalism, the increase of material wealth for those in the lower classes was difficult and in many cases impossible. At the same time, it should be recognized that Christianity was not merely populated by the lower classes. There were also middle class Christians as well as believers from the aristocratic classes, and Corinth is an excellent example of this diverse social mix, cf. D. Tidball, *The Social Context of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1984) 90-103.

⁸⁴L. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 299.

The Final Correspondence to Corinth (2 Corinthians 10-13)

Paul's Foundation for Speaking: 10:1-11

The abrupt change of tone in 2 Corinthians 10 from that in 2 Corinthians 1-9 is clearly initiated by Paul's emphatic personal reference, "I, Paul, myself..."⁸⁵ He begins his appeal (*parakaleo* = to urge, exhort, appeal) by describing the foundation from which he intends to speak.

Paul the "Timid", Paul the "Bold" (10:1-6)

Paul describes the tone out of which he intends to speak as *prautes* (= gentleness, humility, courtesy, meekness) and *epieikeia* (= graciousness, gentleness). The first of these words was used to describe the middle ground between being too angry and not being angry at all. It is the serenity and power not to be led by emotion but to maintain clear-headedness in sensitive situations.⁸⁶ The second word, sometimes rendered as "sweet reasonableness," is that which is not only just, but even better than just. It is the quality that transcends ordinary definitions of justice, that is, those stereotypical definitions that insist on the strict letter of the law.⁸⁷ These superlative qualities Paul had seen in Jesus, and he now intends to exhibit the same attitude toward the Corinthians.

Though Paul fully intends to control his anger, he also uses certain recognized forms of Greek rhetoric in seeking to persuade his Corinthian audience. One such rhetorical device, to which Paul will turn several times, is sarcasm and irony. The phrases "timid when face to face" but "bold when away" are undoubtedly paraphrases of the charge that had been leveled against Paul by his detractors in Corinth (of. 10:10). The character trait of being *tapeinos* (= humble, timid) was not well respected in the Greco-Roman world, because it was tinged with the connotation of inferiority, slavishness, cringing, cowering, and ignobleness.⁸⁸ By gently using such sarcasms, Paul hoped to take the sting out of his opponents' attacks.

It is not unlikely that those speaking against Paul had characterized him as a *kolax* (= flatterer), a stock character-type in antiquity who was widely known and detested due to chameleon-like qualities.⁸⁹ Such flatterers were mistrusted because of

⁸⁵ 10:1 begins with *autos de ego Paulos* (= now I, Paul, myself)

⁸⁶ W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 238; BAG (1979) 699.

⁸⁷ Barclay, *Corinthians*, 238-239.

⁸⁸ W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) 135.

⁸⁹ In the treatment of this and other rhetorical features, I am indebted to the research done by Mr. Mark Roberts at the Vanderbilt University Graduate Department of Religion, "Not That We Compare Ourselves: Rhetorical and

their inconsistency and self-seeking. Furthermore, Paul has been accused of living by the standards of the world, that is, in the manner of one who is not indwelt and controlled by the Holy Spirit.⁹⁰ Paul had wished to relate to his Corinthian congregation in parental love (11:11; 12:14b-15), but his gentleness had been misinterpreted as weakness, while the severity of his written communications had been misinterpreted as vacillation. Now he fears that the only attitude the Corinthians may understand is daring and boldness.

Nevertheless, Paul defends his ethics and his methods. He denies that he conducts his ministry in a worldly fashion or fights with worldly weapons. To the contrary, his meekness and gentleness are in themselves the divine weapons that demolish the opposition. There is a subtle irony in Paul's words. If he defends his own character traits of meekness and gentleness as being God's powerful weapons, he at the same time suggests that the Corinthians' admiration for daring and boldness is misplaced in that such daring and boldness are themselves worldly methods. The real enemies of the Christian life consists of *logismos* (= argument, sophistry), *hypsona* (=pretension, that which rises up), and *noema* (= design, plot), in short, the very boldness which the Corinthians deem so important, all of which deflect the mind from any true knowledge of God and all of which must be taken as prisoners of war under the lordship of Christ.⁹¹

Finally, Paul says that when the Corinthian congregation has brought itself under obedience -- obedience to Christ, that is, not to Paul (though it amounts to the same thing) -- then he will undertake to discipline those who have been distorting the gospel and the memories of Jesus (cf. 11:4).

The Superficial Accusation (10:7-11)

Paul challenges the Corinthians to "look facts in the face" (NEB). If the Corinthians would merely look at the obvious,⁹² they would recognize that Paul has as much right to speak as his opponents, for surely his credentials are as impressive as theirs. He does not need to feel ashamed that God had given to him authority for building up the church. Here, again, there is an irony. If Paul's authority is to "build up the church" rather than to "tear it down," he implies that his opponents are doing

Social Conventions in 2 Corinthians 10-12" (n.p., 1988).

⁹⁰Quite literally, the phrase reads "walking according to the flesh," but the connotation of this phrase in Paul's theology is an antithesis of walking in the Spirit (e.g. Ro. 8:4-8), of. L. Keck, *Paul and His Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 107.

⁹¹ Paul's use of the verb *aichmalotizo* (= to capture in war) lends itself well to the metaphor of the Christian life as a battle.

⁹² The opening phrase of 10:7 may be translated as an imperative ("Be alert to what is right in front of you", cf. RSV, NEB, JB, Weymouth), though it may also be translated as an indicative ("You are looking only on the surface of things", NIV), or even as a question ("Do you look at things according to the outward appearance?", NKJB).

precisely the opposite (cf. 11:20).

Paul has been accused of behaving like a chameleon, acting in one way when he was in Corinth and acting in another way when writing from a distance. However, his purpose in letter writing is not to frighten the Corinthians anymore than his purpose in public speaking was to bore them. Paul is quite frank in admitting that his public-speaking ability is not superior by the conventions of the day (cf. 1 Co. 1:17; 2:1, 4). In fact, he considered his own inability to be an asset so that the power of God could be more clearly in view (2 Co. 4:7). However, if the Corinthians misjudged him to be different in his letters than in person, Paul asserted that he would correct this false notion when he arrived.

Paul's Perspective on Boasting: 10:12-18

The values and limitations of self-praise and comparison were well known in the Greco-Roman world.⁹³ In keeping with what was commonly expected in Greek rhetoric, Paul refused to follow the lead of his detractors, that is, their practice of comparing themselves to him or vice versa, because there was really no significant basis for comparison. The criteria by which his opponents attempted to certify their claim to apostleship and superiority was strikingly different than the criteria used by Paul. The Corinthian interlopers had designed their own criteria by which to measure themselves, and of course, by doing so they succeeded in effectively measuring up. Paul, on the other hand, knew that he would be measured by the criteria which God had designed, a criteria not of his own making (10:18; cf. 1 Co. 4:3-5).

Hence, Paul was acutely aware that there were severe limitations to any sort of boasting, and he imposed these limitations upon himself. He refused to compare himself with the criteria designed by his enemies. He fully intended to confine his boasting to his assigned field, which included not only his apostleship but also his commission by God to conduct evangelistic work in Corinth. Once more, there is a subtle irony. If Paul is limited in his boasting to the criteria designed by God, which criteria not only includes his call to apostleship but his commission to preach in Greece, the implication is that his opponents have **not** stayed within such limits. In the first place, their claim to apostleship is questionable (cf. 11:5, 13; 12:11), and in the second place, they have invaded a Christian congregation, which they did not establish.

Paul's authority as an apostle to the Gentiles, and thereby his authority over the

⁹³ The rhetorical art of comparison, here represented by the verb *synkrino* (= to compare), was a well-known Hellenistic discipline. It was part of the standard education known as *progymnasmata* in which the student was trained in increasingly sophisticated rhetorical exercises, one of which was the art of comparison, cf. C. Forbes, "Comparison, Self-Praise, and Irony: Paul's Boasting and the Conventions of Hellenistic Rhetoric," *NTS* 32 (1986) 1-30; G. Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton, 1963), 270.

Corinthian church which he had himself established, ought not to have come into question (cf. Ga. 2:7-10; Ac. 16:6-12). Furthermore, his hope was that the Corinthians might assist him in his missionary work in areas to the west (cf. Ro. 15:19-20, 23-28), areas that were currently unevangelized. It was Paul's consistent policy to attempt to preach where Christ was not yet known so that he could avoid, as he said, "building on someone else's foundation" (Ro. 15:20). Once more, there is a subtle irony in his words. If Paul refused to practice his ministry in the territory evangelized by others, why should his detractors, who had come to Corinth from the outside (cf. 11:4), be allowed to do so? The fact that they had infringed upon Paul's rightful territory calls into question their basic sense of ethics.

Paul and His Opponents (11:1-15)

Paul already has explained his perspective on boasting along with some self-imposed limitations. He has stressed the folly of comparing himself with his opponents, who are intruders into his territory in any case. Nevertheless, the situation is so desperate that it calls for desperate measures, and it is a mark of Paul's desperation that he joins his opponents in their foolish game of self-praise. However, Paul repeatedly affirms that his own self-praise should be taken as an irony. It will not be a straightforward comparison of him to the opposition, but rather, a "tongue-in-cheek" comparison. In this way he attempts to maintain consistency with his earlier refusal to compare himself with his enemies (of. 10:12).

After signaling his discomfort with this whole business of boasting, Paul explains that he, too, will indulge in a "little foolishness" (11:1). After introducing his intention to boast, Paul gives a lengthy parenthesis, which calls attention to the dire seriousness of the Corinthian situation before he actually begins any direct comparisons (11:16 ff.).

Another Jesus, A Different Spirit, A Different Gospel (11:2-6)

Paul's deepest concern is not the fact of his personal rejection by the Corinthians but the danger of their rejection of the true Christian gospel and the Christ of whom it speaks. Paul compares the Corinthians' relationship to Christ to that of a virgin bride awaiting her wedding day, a metaphor that is found elsewhere in the New Testament (cf. Ep. 5:25-27, 29, 32; Re. 19:7-9). It may be that Paul was familiar with John the Baptist's use of the metaphor in which he compared himself to the friend of the bridegroom (Jn. 3:29). Certainly Paul would have been familiar with the Old Testament metaphor of Israel as God's wife. In any case, Paul compares himself with the father and guardian of the bride who had arranged for her espousal and was now serving as her protector until the hometaking. Christ was the groom. The Corinthian church was the bride. Paul was the father of the bride whose rightful jealousy over his virgin daughter compelled him to act as a protector, lest her chastity be spoiled

between the day of betrothal and the day of presentation.

Just as Eve was deceived by the subtle arguments of the snake in the garden (Ge. 3:1-6),⁹⁴ Paul was fearful that the Corinthians also might be dissuaded from “sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” Just as the Satanic rebel infiltrated the old creation and caused the spoiling of human life, so now Paul fears an alien might infiltrate the new creation mind to spoil the new life in Christ.

This alien force Paul considered to be “another Jesus,” “a different spirit,” and “a different gospel.” Unfortunately for the modern reader, Paul does not specify the difference between this “other Jesus” and the Jesus whom he preached. Similarly, he does not describe how this “different spirit” was unlike the Holy Spirit or how this “different good news” was unlike the good news about the death and resurrection of Jesus. At the same time, it can at least be said that everything that was touted under the apparent credentials of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus was not the true gospel. Since the Corinthians had endured such interlopers as these, they surely should have not have any problem enduring Paul, who had founded the church.

That Paul’s opponents claimed apostleship in some sense seems probable (11:13), and here Paul sarcastically calls them “super-apostles”⁹⁵ while claiming his right to speak. Paul does not dispute their accusation that he was not a great orator, but he defends his knowledge in the gospel and Christian doctrine. Oratorical polish was probably an important social value to the Corinthians, and this suggestion seems to be supported by their loyalty to Apollos. Early in his Christian career, Apollos, a man known for his oratory (Ac. 18:24-25), had come to Corinth to preach (Ac. 18:27-19:1a). The Corinthians apparently developed a taste for this kind of oratory, for even after he was gone, they still compared Apollos and his preaching style with other ministers, including Paul, so much so that Paul rebuked them for “boasting about men” and “taking pride in one man over against another” (1 Co. 3:21-23; 4:6). Paul, of course, was not in competition with Apollos (1 Co. 3:4-6), but he was concerned

⁹⁴ The subtlety of the snake’s argument is worth further comment. Before the formation of Eve, Adam had been informed that he was not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Ge. 2:16-17). The woman, in her conversation with the snake, introduced a foreign element into the divine command when she said that they were also forbidden to *touch* the fruit (Ge. 3:1-3). Whether this inaccuracy was due to Adam’s failure to properly transmit God’s instructions or to the woman’s own tendency to exaggerate is unknown, but in any case, the inaccuracy gave the snake his opening. His assertion, “You will not surely die,” may seem to have been proved when Eve first touched the fruit and nothing happened. Because nothing happened when she touched the fruit, Eve may have supposed that nothing would happen if she ate it. Adam was certainly no help, since though he was standing there all the time (3:6b), he never once raised his voice in protest.

⁹⁵ Some interpreters believe that Paul was using the term “super-apostles” to refer to the Jerusalem apostles, James, Peter, John, etc. If so, then the Corinthian interlopers would have been appealing to the Jerusalem apostles as their authority, and as such, Paul places himself on an equal level with the Jerusalem apostles, cf. F. Bruce, *I & II Corinthians [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 236-237. However, there are strong arguments for seeing Paul’s use of the term to be directed at his opponents themselves, as we have done here, cf. Furnish, 502-505

that the Corinthians did not value oratory over knowledge, a value that must surely be reemphasized today in view of the widespread obsession of Westerners with entertainment over content.

The Gospel is Free of Charge (11:7-12)

Paul's basic policy in his evangelistic efforts was not to receive monies from the people in the churches he was trying to establish. In his own words, he had “forfeited these rights” as a living parable that the gospel was truly free (1 Co. 9:12b, 18-23; 2 Th. 3:9). Though he considered it to be his privilege to receive offerings for his ministry (1 Co. 9:6, 11-12; 1 Ti. 5:17-18), and though it doubtless made his task more difficult not to do so, he supported himself with his own trade of tent-making (Ac. 18:3; 20:34; 1 Co. 4:12a; 1 Th. 2:9; 2 Th. 3:8). When in Corinth, it was only after his friends arrived, presumably with an offering from Macedonia, that Paul was able to devote himself exclusively to preaching (Ac. 18:5). Only from churches with which he was not presently working would Paul receive funds, for only in this way could he be certain that the gift was offered without a sense of obligation on their part (Phil. 4:15-16). In this way, Paul guaranteed that he would not be a financial burden to his congregations (1 Co. 9:15; 1 Th. 2:7).

The Corinthians had misunderstood this stewardship ethic of Paul's. Far from appreciating his motives, they had been convinced by Paul's enemies that Paul only did this because he either devalued the Corinthians or else did not think his teaching was even worth payment. It was a Greek custom to accept payment for instruction, and if Paul charged no fees, he was probably discredited as an amateur and not professionally qualified.⁹⁶ Furthermore, patronage was an important social value in Greco-Roman society, and Paul's refusal to receive money was a rejection of the Corinthians' status as a patron congregation.⁹⁷

It is out of this misunderstanding that Paul poses the rhetorical question, “Was it a sin for me to preach free of charge?” Paul fully intends to continue his policy, not because he does not love the Corinthians, but because he wants to demonstrate that his own motives are truly loving while the motives of his opponents spring from greed. It is not unlikely that Paul's opponents demanded to be paid. Paul, at least, considers them to have exploited the Corinthians (of. 11:20).

False Apostles (11:13-15)

If Paul's opponents in Corinth claimed apostleship, it is not clear upon what basis they made their claim. There is no indication that they had personally witnessed

⁹⁶ M. Thrall, *I and II Corinthians [CBC]* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1965) 172.

⁹⁷ Furnish, 507-508.

the living Lord, either in Jesus' lifetime or in his post-resurrection appearances. Nevertheless, they had intruded themselves upon Paul's jurisdiction as an apostle, and he retaliates in scathing terms, calling them sham-apostles and servants of Satan. This is a most serious charge, for if they are serving Satan, then they are not merely antagonistic toward Paul. They are opposed to God and Christ and the gospel as well. Paul says that they "transformed themselves" into apostles, just as in Jewish tradition Satan transformed himself into the brightness of angels.⁹⁸ They stand to be judged by God.

Paul's Foolish Boasting 11:16-33

Paul has now ended the extended parenthesis in which he denounced the deceptiveness of his opponents and defended his own practice of not receiving offerings (11:2-15). Now he is ready to begin his famous "boast" which he set out to do earlier (11:1).

The Irony of Boasting (11:16-21a)

Paul tries to make perfectly clear that his boasting is intended as an irony. He considers it foolish to stoop to this level, but he has determined to do so in a way similar to the wisdom of the Old Testament: "Answer a fool according to his folly" (Pro. 26:5). He is quite frank that in so speaking he is not following the example of Jesus, but rather, he is following a worldly pattern. Yet, this is the essence of the irony. Paul is not in earnest in his boasting; actually, he intends to boast about things that he considers worthless. Still, since the Corinthians seem predisposed to put up with fools (a sharp reference to his opponents), he feels obliged to answer on foolish grounds.

In fact, Paul says, the Corinthians have developed a positive talent for "putting up" with undesirables. Here Paul shifts from irony to the deeper level of biting sarcasm. The intruders who have come to Corinth have been tolerated and even praised, even though they had enslaved the Corinthians with authoritarianism, exploited them financially, pushed themselves forward by self-aggrandizement, and insulted and humiliated them. With particularly deft sarcasm, Paul says, "To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that!"

The Hazards of Apostleship (11:21b-29)

In his sarcasm, Paul demonstrates that he can better any boast that his

⁹⁸ Paul's allusion is to what is described in the Jewish pseudepigraphical work *Life of Adam and Eve* (9:1, 15). After the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Satan "transformed himself into the brightness of angels" and appeared to Eve, deceiving her into breaking her pattern of repentance and purification. Similarly, according to the *Apocalypse of Moses* (17:1-2), "Satan appeared in the form of an angel and sang hymns like the angels."

opponents may offer. He is continually careful, however, that his “foolish boasting” is understood for its true nature--an empty exercise without real value. Hence, Paul’s repeated disclaimers, “I am speaking as a fool,” and “I am out of my mind to talk like this.”

At the first level of boasting, Paul puts himself on at least an equal level with his enemies. Both are Hebrews, Israelites and Abraham’s descendants. At first glance, these categories may seem to be synonymous, but there were fine lines of distinction between them. A descendant of Abraham is the most general of the terms, since Abraham had more than one child. As an Israelite, Paul was squarely within the covenant promises passed down through Jacob, and as a Hebrew he was a Jew whose culture and language was more closely identified with Palestine than those who were called Hellenistic Jews.⁹⁹ Of course, as Paul would later write to the Philippians, such nationalistic pride was only as human waste compared to the privilege of knowing Christ (Phil. 3:5-8).

At the second level of boasting, Paul claims superiority. If his opponents claim to be servants of Christ, Paul claims to be an even better servant. However, Paul gives this argument a strange twist. Whereas his opponents were eager to claim their connection with Christ through eloquence and power, Paul claims his servanthood to Christ in the sufferings of a missionary ministry. (Elsewhere, Paul comments that he bore in his body the “marks” of Jesus, Ga. 6:17). Paul’s boast comes in the form of an extensive list of mishaps, hardships and dangers. Of these, the following are worthy of special note:

Prison

Paul was imprisoned not only in Philippi (Ac. 16) but also for two years in Jerusalem (Ac. 21:33) and Caesarea (Ac. 23:23; 24:27). He spent another two years under house arrest in Rome (Ac. 28:16, 30). In the post-apostolic church, an early tradition says that Paul had been imprisoned seven times.¹⁰⁰

Thirty-nine Lashes

Torah described forty lashes as the maximum penalty for flogging (Dt. 25:1-3), but in their customary efforts to protect the law, the Jews only gave thirty-nine lashes so as to insure that they did not violate Torah even by a miscount. According to the Mishnah, such floggings were administered front and back, twenty-six lashes on the back and thirteen on the front.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Bruce, *Paul*, 41-43.

¹⁰⁰ Clement, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, V.

¹⁰¹ *Makkot* 3:10-15.

Beaten with Rods

This is specifically a Roman punishment, one occasion being Paul's flogging at Philippi (Ac. 16:22).

Stoned

Paul doubtless refers to Lystra, where he was left for dead (Ac. 14:19).

Shipwrecked

One of these occasions is described in Acts 27, though 2 Corinthians was composed prior to his voyage to Rome, and so was not the occasion described here.

Dangers in Travel

Many of the dangers in travel can be illustrated from narratives in Acts, but Paul's list here reminds the reader of just how fragmentary is even Luke's record. Brigands, the fording of dangerous currents, and the various other problems of living in strange cities and surviving in wild and lonely places must have been terrifying.

Pressures

The psychological pressures of ministry must have been massive for Paul. From the Thessalonians, who quit working in order to wait for the return of Jesus (1 Th. 5:14; 2 Th. 3:6-15), to the Philippians who were divided over the infighting of two prominent members (Phil. 2:14-15; 4:2), to the Galatians who were deserting the gospel of grace in order to embrace legalism (Ga. 1:6-9; 5:1-12), to the Colossians who were convinced by outsiders that Christ alone was not sufficient (Col. 2:8, 16, 18, 20-23), to the Ephesians who were entranced with myths, genealogies and controversial doctrines (1 Ti. 1:3-4), to the Corinthians who were embroiled in sexual promiscuity, lawsuits, and rivalries (1 Co. 1:10-12; 5:1; 6:7), to the desertions of Phygelus and Hermogenes in Asia and Rome (2 Ti. 1:15; 4:16), to the gullibility of the Cretans (Tit. 1:5, 10-14), to the problem of runaway slaves (Phlm 10, 15-16), Paul shouldered an almost unbelievable pastoral burden. When he speaks of "pressure" (*merimna* = anxiety), it is no understatement!

Paul is able to fully empathize with those who experience weakness, though whether he is speaking of those with overly active moral scruples (cf. Ro. 14:1-2), those who seem to be less gifted in the body of Christ (1 Co. 12:22), or those who struggle with physical weaknesses (2 Co. 12:9) is unclear. Furthermore, he senses keenly the dilemma of those who are led into sin (*skandalizo* = cause to fall, to sin, to be offended).

The Ignominy of Escape (11:30-33)

Unlike the interlopers in Corinth, who have boasted of their power and impressive credentials, Paul has chosen to boast of his weaknesses. As an added irony in this “foolish boasting,” he recalls his embarrassing escape from Damascus. To fully appreciate his irony, one must be aware that in Corinth the goddess Fortuna, protector of cities, was represented in sculpture as wearing a golden crown shaped like a city wall. This crown, the *corona muralis* (= a wall crown), was bestowed by the Roman Emperor upon the first soldier who was brave enough to scale the wall of an enemy city.¹⁰²

In keeping with his boast concerning his weaknesses, Paul says that in Damascus his “heroism” consisted in going over the wall to get out, rather than scaling the wall to get in! To escape arrest, Paul was lowered over the wall in a basket through a window (Ac. 9:23-25).

An Ecstatic Experience and Its Humiliating Sequel: 12:1-10

Paul has indulged in a series of boasts, all of which depict some aspect of personal weakness and all of which have been offered with an ironic twist. Paul’s enemies have boasted of their advantages; Paul boasts of his disadvantages. Now he offers to the Corinthians his crowning example, an experience that, on the surface, might have appealed very well to the Corinthians’ love for sensationalism. In it, Paul describes a highly spiritual and ecstatic experience. However, he concludes his testimony with a further ironic twist that this experience, which might tend to make him conceited, was countered by an embarrassing affliction that God refused to remove. Once again, God drove Paul to the position of weakness rather than strength. Paul intends this final example as a final Parthian shot in the overthrow of his detractors. While they bragged of their own power based on what they viewed as superior credentials, Paul bragged of God’s power, which was demonstrated through human weakness.

The Experience (12:1-6)

It is almost certain that Paul’s detractors in Corinth boasted of superior ecstatic experiences, since Paul chose such an experience for his climactic “boast.” His words, “I will go on to visions and revelations,” indicate as much, and we know from 1 Corinthians that the Corinthian church valued highly the more sensational kinds of spiritual experiences. The ecstatic experience that Paul chooses to recount occurred some fourteen years prior, and it occurred to someone Paul does not name but says he knew. It soon becomes clear that this person of whom Paul speaks is Paul himself,

¹⁰² Furnish, “Corinth,” *BAR* (May/June 1988) 20-21.

since, still in the same context, he shifts from “the man” to “me” (12:7). This device adds a further irony to the story, and at the same time, it helps distance Paul from his own experience, which is a way of implying that such experiences prove little.

There is no way to directly identify this experience with any known occasion recorded in the Acts or in Paul’s correspondence. Some have suggested his vision on the Damascus Road as a possibility (Ac. 9:3-6), others his trance in the Jerusalem temple (Ac. 22:17-21), and still others his near death in Lystra (Ac. 14:19-20). None of these have any undeniable claims, and some of them are unlikely due to chronological reasons. Paul himself seems unsure as to whether he was bodily caught up into the heavens or was involved in a kind of out-of-body experience.

In this ecstatic experience, Paul was caught up to the “third heaven,” to “Paradise.” Both of these terms are known from the Jewish and Christian Pseudepigrapha. Heaven, the abode of God, was depicted as multi-layered, usually in a sevenfold way.¹⁰³ By entering the third heaven one could stand near the Lord.¹⁰⁴ Paradise was a Persian loanword meaning “garden,” and in Jewish apocalyptic literature, it represents the home of the departed righteous.¹⁰⁵

The irony of this ecstatic experience is sharply upheld in that in it Paul heard things that were impossible to describe and not permissible to repeat.¹⁰⁶ Given Paul’s strong contention that only intelligible words can be uplifting to a church (1 Co. 14:1-19), the fact that no intelligible communication issued from this experience proves its emptiness as a ground for boasting. It is even a further irony for Paul to say, “I will boast about a man like that, but not about myself,” since that man was, in fact, Paul himself. Instead, Paul contents himself to boast of his weaknesses. If he wished to follow the lead of his opponents in boasting of such spiritual experiences, he could do so truthfully. However, like all private religious experience, private reality is not proof of anything except to the person who experiences it. Because it is subjective and personal, it cannot be universalized.

Paul adds one clinching remark, that is, that he will refuse to boast of such spiritual experiences, preferring instead to be judged by his actions and teachings (lit., “sees or hears”). The real test of character is to be found in concrete, objective things, not in mystical and private ecstasies.

¹⁰³ *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* 6:13; 7:13ff. and 2 *Enoch* 3-20.

¹⁰⁴ *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Testament of Levi* 2: 7ff.

¹⁰⁵ V. Gordon, “Paradise,” *ISBE* (1986) 111.661.

¹⁰⁶ The first expression, *arreta rhemata* (= unspeakable words), is an oxymoron suggesting that what Paul heard he could not adequately express. This inability to describe such a profound experience would not be unusual for transcendent ecstasy, cf. R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. J. Harvey (rpt. New York: Oxford University, 1977) 37-38. The second expression, *ouk exon lalesai* (= not permissible to speak), indicates that like Daniel and John (Da. 12:4; Re. 10:4) Paul was not allowed to repeat it.

The Sequel (12:7-10)

Paul saw an inner connection between the ecstatic experience he had just recounted and another personal situation, this time a debilitating one. Paul suffered from some deep personal affliction, so deep that he compares it to a *skolops* (= thorn, splinter), which he says was *te sarki* (= in the flesh). While Paul is obviously using a metaphor, it is not immediately clear whether or not the phrase “in the flesh” is part of the metaphor. Paul may mean that the affliction from which he suffered was a physical affliction, probably a recurring illness of some kind (so Tertullian, Jerome, NEB, TEV, Phillips). If not, then the affliction can be interpreted more broadly to refer to anything from persecution to temptation (so Chrysostom, Augustine, Luther, Calvin). Most modern scholars opt for the first possibility, and arguments have been put forth in favor of migraines, epilepsy, convulsions, ophthalmia, malaria, speech impediment, rheumatism, fever, and even leprosy.¹⁰⁷ While all of these are speculations, there are some reasons that tip the balance in favor of a physical weakness. First, Paul calls this affliction a “messenger of Satan,” a description that probably is intended to recall the physical afflictions of Job. Second, Paul also uses the word *astheneia* (= sickness, weakness, disease) to describe his affliction, a term that more naturally seems to suggest a physical malady.

Whatever the case, Paul certainly understands his experience in a Job-like context. Just as Job’s affliction was dealt by Satan but permitted by God, so Paul understands his own affliction to be a “blow with the fist” (*kolaphizo* = to strike with the fist) from his archenemy, yet at the same time, to be allowed by God so as to prevent any conceit on his part. If ecstatic experiences might tend toward conceit, the direct refusal by God to answer Paul’s prayer for healing drove him toward humility. Three times he prayed for deliverance, but God declined, only letting Paul know that saving grace was enough and that divine power is brought to perfection in human weakness.

Because of this divine “no”, Paul understood more clearly the nature of God’s power. If his opponents boasted of spectacular things, Paul was obliged to boast of his weaknesses, not because weakness itself was glorious, but because it was the arena in which Christ’s power was most clearly displayed. Another way of putting it would be that Christ’s power is not most clearly evident in sensational works, but rather, in humble faithfulness and dependence upon God in the midst of weakness. “Therefore,” Paul says, “I delight in *astheneia* (sickness, weakness), *hybris* (= insult, shame), *anankaios* (= things necessary, pressing need), *diogmos* (= persecution), *stenochoria* (= distress, anguish, trouble).” His final summation is without question one of the most “quotable quotes” in the Bible: “When I am weak (in myself), then I

¹⁰⁷ P. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 441-448; R. Lenski, *I and II Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963) 1302; Bruce, *I & 2 Corinthians*, 248; Furnish, 547-550.

am strong (in the Lord)!” By suggestion, it portrays his opponents’ misguided philosophy as being, “When I am strong (in personal power), then I am strong (in spiritual things).”

Paul, the Apostle, and his Corinthian Relationships: 12:11-21

Now that Paul has concluded his tongue-in-cheek boast to the Corinthians, he returns to the issue of his mercurial relationship with them. He is anticipating another visit, but he remains uncertain as to how he may be received when he arrives. Thus, in his concluding remarks, he hopes to prepare the way for an amiable visit rather than a humiliating one.

A Desire for Mutual Respect (12:11-13)

One final time Paul labels his previous boasting as foolish. In no less than eleven distinct statements, Paul has described the worthlessness of such boasting, which he regards as the activity of fools (10:12; 11:1, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21b, 23; 12:1, 6, 11). He never would have started such a ploy except for the gullibility and credulity of the Corinthians, who drove him to it by their uncritical acceptance of his opponents’ braggadocio. Paul ought to have been defended and recommended¹⁰⁸ by the Corinthians instead of being devalued by them.

Paul, here, plays upon the idea that letters of recommendation were normally expected when Christians were visiting congregations where they were not known. Apparently, there were many traveling evangelists who were “huckstering the word of God” (2 Co. 2:17, AB). Following the model of secular letters of recommendation, which were common in the Greco-Roman as well as the Jewish culture (cf. Ac. 9:2; 22:5),¹⁰⁹ Paul’s churches wrote similar letters of character reference for traveling Christians (Ro. 16:1-2; 1 Co. 16:3; 2 Co. 3:1). The interlopers who had come to Corinth had not brought any such letters of recommendation; they had merely recommended themselves (10:12, 18). Paul, since he was the founder of the church, certainly needed no such letters; the Corinthians knew him personally (2 Co. 3:1-3). Inasmuch as they knew him so well, they in turn should have been able to defend him against his detractors, men who came from the outside without any recommendation at all, except their own.

It should have been well known in Corinth that Paul was not inferior to such “super-apostles” (again, the sarcastic twist, cf. 11:5). He had certainly displayed among them the marks of missionary apostleship--signs, wonders and miracles (cf. Ac. 2:43; 5:12; 14:3, 14; 15:12; Ro. 15:18-19; He. 2:3-4). Nevertheless, Paul speaks

¹⁰⁸ The verb *synistemi*, which originally meant “to put together,” carries the connotation of a togetherness which is based upon the recommendation of one person for another, *TDNT*.(1971) VII.897.

¹⁰⁹ Furnish, 180.

of these signs in a guarded way, especially since the Corinthians had a compulsive tendency to over-evaluate such sensational phenomena. In the first place, Paul qualifies his own claim to equality by stressing that he is, in himself, nothing. Secondly, he speaks of signs, wonders and miracles in the passive voice (i.e., “were done among you” rather than “I performed such and such among you”), and in this way, he attributes their manifestation to the sovereignty of God rather than to his own power and discretion. Thirdly, such signs were performed in the context of *pase hypomene* (= utmost endurance) that is, in the face of severe afflictions and trials,¹¹⁰ a context completely foreign to his opponents. The only ground for accusing Paul of inferiority was in the fact that he did not take the Corinthians’ money, a matter which he already explained (cf. 11:7-12), and with another sarcasm, Paul exclaims, “Forgive me this wrong!”

Paul’s Pastoral, Parental Concern (12:14-18)

Paul now anticipates a third visit to Corinth. He had visited the first time when he had established the church, and he had stayed a full eighteen months (Ac. 18:11). His second visit had been a disaster, a visit that he could only describe as “painful” (2 Co. 2:1). On this visit he apparently had been publicly humiliated (2 Co. 12:21), quite possibly by a personal confrontation with an individual in the congregation who had opposed him (2 Co. 2:5; of. 7:12). His subsequent stinging letter had left the congregation with the assessment that he was weak when personally present but that he took advantage of his absence to be harsh in his letters (2 Co. 10:1, 10-11). Now Paul was writing again, this time to a church that had been accepting a steady diet of anti-Pauline defamation. How he might be received in a proposed third visit was, at the very least, unclear.

Though the Corinthians had been deeply offended by Paul’s refusal to accept their financial help, a refusal that struck a nerve in their pride of patronage, Paul still intended to maintain his personal ethic. He would continue to refuse financial assistance from them when he came, and in fact, even though he encouraged the Corinthians to participate in the relief offering for Palestine (2 Co. 8-9), his standard policy was apparently that no such offerings should be taken while he was actually there (cf. 1 Co. 16:1-2). This personal ethic, Paul explained, arose out of his parental concern for the Corinthians. If earlier Paul described himself as the father of the bride (11:2), now he describes himself as the parent who saves up for his children, freely spending his own resources for their benefit. His real object was to win the Corinthians’ hearts, not their money. The question, “If I love you more, will you love me less,” is posed against the background of this controversy over money. It seemed that the more Paul demonstrated his love for the Corinthians out of his sacrificial

¹¹⁰ Hughes, 457

ministry to them, the less appreciative they became.

The statement, “Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I caught you by trickery,” could perhaps be set off in quotation marks in the translation since it reflects the accusation made by the Corinthians against Paul.¹¹¹

Paul, of course, does not use such tactics (of. 2 Co. 4:2), but his enemies are accusing him of such. His further question, “Did I exploit you through any of men I sent you,” is intended to be answered negatively.¹¹² Certainly Titus and the unnamed brother who came to Corinth representing Paul in behalf of the relief fund had not exploited the church.¹¹³ Paul was firmly against soliciting money through compulsion, especially if it meant that the giver then would be hard pressed financially (2 Co. 8:13; 9:5, 7). Just as Titus and the other brothers refused to make strident demands of the Corinthians, so also did Paul.

Anticipating the Third Visit (12:19-21)

Whether the initial sentence of 12:19 is translated as a statement or a question,¹¹⁴ Paul wishes to assert that his words have been more than simply an exhibition of defensiveness. He has been carefully writing under God’s scrutiny as well as appealing to the Corinthians’ sense of fairness, and it was to God alone that he was ultimately accountable. Everything he has said has been for building up the Corinthians, not building up himself (of. 10:8). His greatest fear, of course, was that if he visited Corinth a third time, the visit might turn out like the second one. Paul might find the Corinthians still enmeshed in their recurring relational problems. This, in turn, would force Paul into disciplinary action, action which he would take if necessary but that he would prefer to avoid (cf. 10:6). The worst possible scenario would be another public confrontation and humiliation such as happened on his previous visit.

If another confrontation occurred, Paul might be forced to excommunicate the offender. This possibility of excommunication is probably what he means when he

¹¹¹ Note Furnish’s translation in the *AB* “Nevertheless (you say), since I am crafty I have taken you in by deceit,” or in *TCNT*, “But you say that I was ‘crafty’ and caught you ‘by a trick’” (cf. Knox, Williams, Phillips, Weymouth, *NEB*, *TEV*).

¹¹² The use of the interrogative *me* in the indicative mood introduced a question to which a negative answer is expected, and thus the question might be translated, “Certainly I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I?” (*NASB*), of. E. Goetchius, *The Language of the New Testament* (New York: Scribners, 1965) 229-230.

¹¹³ Two brothers accompanying Titus were mentioned in 8:18-23, one as a representative chosen by the churches (*synekdemos* = “a traveling companion,” 8:19) and one as another personal representative of Paul (*ton adelphos hemon* = “our brother,” 8:22). In 12:18 Paul omits mention of the one who was chosen by the churches, since he was not a personal representative.

¹¹⁴ Translators are divided here, and grammatically, the sentence may be taken either way. As a statement, see *ASV*, *JB*, *NEB*, *TEV*, *AB*. As a question, see *KJV*, *RSV*, *NIV*, *NAB*.

says, “I will be grieved over many who have sinned and not repented.” He used the same language when he recommended excommunication for the man living in incest who refused to rectify his immoral lifestyle (1 Co. 5:2) as well as for the man who had defiantly opposed him on his second visit (2 Co. 2:5-7).¹¹⁵ Paul fears for the Corinthians that the same kinds of problems that plagued them all along, such as, disunity (1 Co. 1:10-13; 3:1-4) and moral laxity (5:1, 9; 6:13-18; 10:8), still would be uncorrected.

Paul’s Concluding Admonition: 13:1-10

Paul is now ready to conclude his final correspondence with the Corinthians. He obviously is concerned about his proposed visit and even more concerned about the Corinthians’ faith.

Weakness, Power and Church Discipline (13:1-4)

Once again, Paul asserts his intention to make a third visit to Corinth. His purpose in quoting the Deuteronomic code regarding two or three witnesses is not immediately clear. Originally, the code was given in Torah regarding witnesses in a criminal examination (Dt. 19:15). It could be that Paul intends to initiate specific disciplinary action against his opponents when he arrives, and if so, he may be affirming his intention to follow the judicial requisites of Torah (cf. Mt. 18:16, 19-20; 1 Ti. 5:19; He. 10:28). Certainly he has hinted toward disciplinary action earlier with his loaded words, “I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented” (12:21; cf. 10:6, 11), and he repeats this warning here (13:2). Alternatively, he could be quoting the Deuteronomic code in the sense of an advance warning, so that he would not take any disciplinary action without at least three preliminary cautions, the first being on his second visit, the second being the present letter, and the third being his upcoming third visit.¹¹⁶ Whatever the exact point of this quotation, Paul certainly intends to act with firmness on his arrival, both toward those who had sinned prior to his second visit and had not stopped sinning (cf. 12:21) as well as toward anyone else in the congregation who was sinning. Previously, Paul had avoided a disciplinary visit as a gesture of leniency (1:23; 2:1), a decision for which he had received heavy criticism (1:15-17). Not this time, however! The relationship had

¹¹⁵ Older commentators identified both of these individuals as being one and the same, though such a view was rejected in the ante-Nicene period by at least Tertullian, cf. *On Modesty*, XIII-Xv. It must be granted that there are similarities between the two accounts, but on the whole, the differences outweigh the similarities, making it unlikely that the same person is intended in both cases (see extensive discussion in Furnish, 163-168). The consensus of modern scholarship is that they are different.

¹¹⁶ Another variation of this interpretation is that Paul’s three visits themselves constitute three witnesses, though it is difficult to see how his first visit, on which he founded the church, could suffice as either a warning to or a witness against the Corinthians.

eroded so severely that the Corinthians were even demanding that Paul “prove” himself -- that he provide some verification of his apostleship as a spokesman for Christ.

This demand for proof of apostleship would indeed be forthcoming! It would not be in Paul’s leniency, however, but in Christ’s powerful discipline, who himself would vouch for his appointed leader. The Corinthian challenge toward Paul was nothing less than a challenge toward Christ, and the Corinthians already were aware of how powerful Christ’s discipline could become, since some of them had incurred divine judgment in their abuse of the Lord’s Table. Some Corinthians had suffered the divine disciplines of both sickness and death (1 Co. 11:29-30). Paul’s weakness was like Christ’s weakness, and in his imitation of the crucified life, Paul lived out the weakness of the cross. At the same time, Paul shared in the resurrection power of the Christ who arose from the tomb to be the Lord of the living and the dead, and it was in this power that he would fulfill his service to the Corinthians.

The Test (13:5-10)

As a final warning to these Corinthians who had put their missionary-apostle on trial, Paul challenges them to put themselves on trial to see if they are genuine. Since they had demanded proof from him, they ought to look to themselves to see if they were *adokimos* (= counterfeit, disqualified). This challenge is in keeping with Paul’s general perspective that the ultimate test of Christian faith is perseverance (1 Th. 3:5; Ga. 4:8-11; Col. 1:23). To be *adokimos* might mean that they had never truly been believers in the first place, though they may have exhibited the appearance of such, or alternatively, it might mean that they had disqualified themselves from their Christian reward (cf. 1 Co. 9:27). Paul’s dominant concern is that the Corinthians will be approved by God, not that he should be personally vindicated (cf. 10:17). In this self-effacing counsel, Paul hopes that the Corinthians will correct their ways before he arrives¹¹⁷ so that, as he says, he will not have to be “harsh” in church discipline. Paul’s authority includes the tearing down of oppositions to God (cf. 10:4-5), but his authority is ultimately for building up the community of faith (cf. 10:8).

Final Greetings: 13:11-14

As a final word, Paul gives five imperatives: “Rejoice,¹¹⁸ restore yourselves,

¹¹⁷ The rendering of *katartisis* should carry the idea of “restoration” or “reformation” (so Conybeare, Phillips, Moffat) rather than “perfection” (KJV, NIV), the latter of which might lend itself to a theology of perfectionism, whereas Paul has in mind Christian maturity.

¹¹⁸ Some translators take the form *chairete* to mean “goodbye” (NIV, RSV), which is appropriate on some occasions. In this series of imperatives, however, it seems better to give it a normal imperatival force with a normal meaning.

¹¹⁹listen to my appeal, ¹²⁰be of one mind, and be at peace.” The *philema* (= kiss), which is cognate with the verb *phileo* (= to love), carried the meaning of affection and close relationship in the Greco-Roman world, but it did not have the later romantic or erotic connotations.¹²¹ This gesture of acceptance and greeting is mentioned frequently enough in the New Testament (Ro. 16:16; 1 Co. 16:20; 1 Th. 5:26; 1 Pe. 5:14), and later in Christian history, it developed into a liturgical form called the “kiss of peace.” As early as the mid-second century, Justin Martyr described the kiss as a sequel to the eucharist: “Having ended the prayers, we salute one another with a kiss.”¹²² After sending greetings from the Christians in Macedonia from where he was writing, Paul closes with what has become a well-known trinitarian benediction, referring to God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Sequel

It seems that Paul’s promise of a third visit was kept, if we assume that his visit to Greece for three months included a stop in Corinth (Ac. 20:1-3a). It is not unlikely that Corinth was the site from which Paul composed his Roman letter, and the Gaius he mentions in the letter (Ro. 16:23) is probably the same Gaius whose home was in Corinth (1 Co. 1:14). We also know from the Roman letter that Christians in Achaia contributed generously toward the relief fund for the Palestinian Christians (Ro. 15:25-27), and these donors must surely have included the Corinthians who lived in the capital of Achaia and from whom Paul so tactfully solicited funds (2 Co. 8-9).

As to exactly what response Paul received on this third visit, we have no knowledge. Forty years later, when another Christian letter was written to the Corinthians, we find that they still were plagued with headstrong members and a spirit of partyism.¹²³

¹¹⁹ *Katartizo* = to reform, restore; cognate with *katartisis* (cf. 13:9)

¹²⁰ *Parakaleisthe* can be taken as either a middle or a passive voice. If middle, then “admonish yourselves” is adequate; if passive, then “pay attention to my appeal” is better (so NIV, AB).

¹²¹ G. Stahlin, *TDNT* (1974) IX.119-120.

¹²² Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 65.

¹²³ *Clement* 46-48.