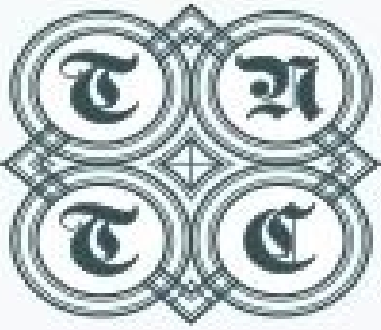
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Tyndale New Testament Commentaries

TNTC

2 Corinthians

Revised Edition



Colin G. Kruse

TYNDALE NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 8

SERIES EDITOR: ECKHARD J. SCHNABEL
CONSULTING EDITOR: NICHOLAS PERRIN

2 CORINTHIANS

AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY

COLIN G. KRUSE

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This revised and expanded edition is dedicated to
students of Ridley College
and the Melbourne School of Theology
who studied 2 Corinthians with me over the years.

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GENERAL PREFACE

The Tyndale Commentaries have been a flagship series for evangelical readers of the Bible for over sixty years. The original New Testament volumes (1956–1974) as well as the new commentaries (1983–2003) rightly established themselves as a point of first reference for those who wanted more than is usually offered in a one-volume Bible commentary, without requiring the technical skills in Greek and in Jewish and Greco-Roman studies of the more detailed series, and with the advantage of being shorter than the volumes of intermediate commentary series. The appearance of new popular commentary series demonstrates that there is a continuing demand for commentaries that appeal to Bible study leaders in churches and at universities. The publisher, editors and authors of the Tyndale Commentaries believe that the series continues to meet an important need in the Christian community, not least in what we call today the Global South, with its immense growth of churches and the corresponding need for a thorough understanding of the Bible by Christian believers.

In the light of new knowledge, new critical questions, new revisions of Bible translations, and the need to provide specific guidance on the literary context and the theological emphases of the individual passage, it was time to publish new commentaries in the series. Four authors will revise their commentary that appeared in the second series. The original aim remains. The new commentaries are neither too short nor unduly long. They are exegetical and thus root the interpretation of the text in its historical context. They do not aim to solve all critical questions, but they are written with an awareness of major scholarly debates which may be treated in the Introduction, in Additional notes or in the commentary itself. While not specifically homiletic in aim, they want to help readers to understand the passage under consideration in such a way that they begin to see points of relevance and application, even though the commentary does not explicitly offer these. The authors base their exegesis on the Greek text, but they write for readers who do not know Greek; Hebrew and Greek terms that are discussed are transliterated. The English translation used for the first series was the Authorized (King James) Version, while the volumes of the second series mostly used the Revised Standard Version; the volumes of the third series use either the New International Version (2011) or the New Revised Standard Version as primary versions, unless otherwise indicated by the author.

An immense debt of gratitude for the first and second series of the Tyndale Commentaries was owed to R. V. G. Tasker and L. Morris, who each wrote four of the commentaries themselves. The recruitment of new authors for the third series proved to be effortless, as colleagues responded enthusiastically to be involved in this project, a testimony both to the larger number of New Testament scholars capable and willing to write commentaries, to the wider ethnic identity of contributors, and to the role that the Tyndale Commentaries have played in the church worldwide. It continues to be the hope of all those concerned with this series that God will graciously use the new commentaries to help readers understand as fully and clearly as possible the meaning of the New Testament.

Eckhard J. Schnabel, Series Editor
Nicholas Perrin, Consulting Editor

AUTHOR’S PREFACE

I want to express my thanks to Inter-Varsity Press and to Professor Eckhard Schnabel, the Series Editor of the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, for their invitation to upgrade my commentary on 2 Corinthians, first published in 1987. This provides an opportunity to thoroughly revise, expand and update it in the light of more recent studies, and so enhance its value for present-day readers. The new commentary is based on the latest edition of the widely used New International Version (2011). It is my hope and prayer that this new edition will also assist readers to understand better Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians so as to appreciate the incredible grace of the God whom he served.

Colin G. Kruse

CHIEF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992)
ABR	*Australian Biblical Review*
ANF	The Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff
BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
BDAG	*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, 3rd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BR	*Biblical Research*
BSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
DPL	*Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin and D. G. Reid (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993)
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
EKK	Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
EQ	*Evangelical Quarterly*
ET	English translation.
Hag.	*Hagiga*
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Int	*Interpretation*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*

JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
LSJ	*A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. H. G. Liddell, R. Scott and H. S. Jones, 9th edn, with rev. supplement by P. G. W. Glare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)
LXX	Septuagint (pre-Christian Greek version of the Old Testament)
mg.	Margin
MM	*The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources*, ed. J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1930–1982)
MNTC	Moffatt New Testament Commentary
MT	Masoretic Text
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NewDocs	*New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, ed. G. H. R. Horsley and S. R. Llewelyn (Macquarie University, 1981–2002)
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NLC	New London Commentary
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements series
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NTD	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
pace	with peace, i.e. no offence to (Latin)
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
P. Oxy.	*Oxyrhynchus Papyrus*, ed. B. P. Grenfell, A. S. Hunt, et al.
RestQ	*Restoration Quarterly*
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology

Str-B	[H. L. Strack and] P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (München: Beck, 1922–1961)
s.v.	*sub voce* (under the word)
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976)
TMSJ	*The Master's Seminary Journal*
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*

Bible versions

ESV English Standard Version, published by HarperCollins Publishers © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

GNB Good News Bible (Today's English Version, 2nd edn) Copyright © 1992 American Bible Society. All rights reserved.

KJV Authorized (King James') Version (1901).

NJB New Jerusalem Bible, copyright © 1985 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd and Doubleday, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group Inc.

NRSV New Revised Standard Version, Anglicized edition, copyright © 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA.

NIV New International Version, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica Inc.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The importance of 2 Corinthians

Our 2 Corinthians is the last of the extant letters Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth. These letters provide us with more insight into the condition of this church and Paul's relationship with it than is available regarding any of the other churches he founded. 2 Corinthians reflects a community under siege from false apostles and still struggling with moral issues, and also Paul's commitment to ensure its members' continued devotion to Christ. It contains the most developed treatment of the motivation for Christian giving in the New Testament. It provides insight into the nature and authority of apostolic ministry, including its authenticating marks, and the importance of disciplining and restoring offenders. God's power in the midst of human weakness, the source of ministerial effectiveness, is a pervading theme. All these things make 2 Corinthians an important resource for those in pastoral ministry.

2. Historical matters

a. The city of Corinth

The ancient city of Corinth lay upon the narrow isthmus connecting the Peloponnese with the Greek mainland. Situated about three and a half miles south-west of present-day Corinth, the ancient city was built on a trapezium-shaped terrace at the foot of a large rocky hill known as Acrocorinth. This hill rises to a height of 1,886 feet above sea level and dominates the surrounding landscape.

The isthmus upon which Corinth was built separates the waters of the Gulf of Corinth in the north-west from those of the Saronic Gulf in the south-east. On the north-western side of the isthmus, bordering the Gulf of Corinth, was the port of Lechaeum, and on the south-eastern side, bordering the Saronic Gulf, lay the port of Cenchreae (the port used by Paul when travelling to or from Corinth by ship; cf. Acts 18:18). The overland journey between the two ports was approximately ten miles, while the journey by sea around the southern tip of the Peloponnese (Cape Maleae) was about 200 miles. The Cape Maleae region was notorious for its violent storms and treacherous currents, so that ancient mariners used to quote the proverb, recorded for us by Strabo: ‘But when you double Maleae, forget your home’ (*Geography* 8.6.20). Instead of undertaking the dangerous journey around Cape Maleae, ancient sea captains could unload their cargo on one side of the isthmus and have it transported overland to the other side where it could be loaded on to another ship. If their ships were not too large, they could be strapped on to a wheeled vehicle and hauled the four miles across the narrowest part of the isthmus on a stone-paved road known as the Diolkos (from the verb *dielkō*, ‘to haul across’). Because of the danger of the voyage around Cape Maleae, and because of the expense of off-loading and reloading cargo and hauling ships across, plans were made as early as the time of Periander (d. c. 586 BC) to cut a channel through the isthmus. A serious attempt to do this was begun by the Emperor Nero in AD 67, but was discontinued when he died. Work on the canal was only resumed in 1887 and completed in 1893.

Ancient Corinth, then, lay at the crossroads of two important trade routes. The first was the route via the isthmus between Attica and the Peloponnese; the second was the route across the isthmus between Lechaeum and Cenchreae. Ships from the western end of the Mediterranean filled the harbour in Lechaeum, while those from Asia and the eastern end of the Mediterranean sailed into the

port of Cenchreae. Corinth, being so strategically located, grew wealthy on the taxes levied on the movement of goods which it controlled. The wealth of ancient Corinth is reflected in its magnificent buildings and infrastructure, temples, fountains, gymnasia, baths, a theatre, basilicas, an odeon, and paved roads, the remains of which can still be seen today.

However, ancient Corinth was renowned not only for its wealth and commercial importance, but also because it was responsible for the organization of the biennial Isthmian Games which attracted many visitors to the area, whose spending added to the prosperity of the city. In addition to this, Corinth had gained a certain notoriety because of its worship of Aphrodite. A temple for Aphrodite stood on the highest point of Acrocorinth, the hill at whose base the city was located. Strabo tells us that so wealthy was the cult of Aphrodite that it boasted a thousand courtesans dedicated to the goddess. Many sea captains, he says, squandered their money paying for the services of these cult-prostitutes, so that the proverb, 'Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth', was in use among them.[1]

In 146 BC the city was overrun by a Roman army under the leadership of Lucius Mummius. He had the city razed to the ground. Many of its treasures were carried away to Rome or destroyed. The inhabitants, the old Corinthians, were either killed or sold into slavery. The city lay in ruins and was uninhabited for more than a hundred years, until 44 BC when Julius Caesar had it rebuilt and named it *Laus Iulia Corinthiensis*. Roman freedmen as well as others from the eastern Mediterranean, including Syrians, Jews and Egyptians, were sent to occupy it. The Corinth of Paul's day was not a Greek city like the older Corinth, but a Roman colony whose official language was Latin, even though the common spoken language was Greek. Pausanias, writing about AD 174, says that 'Corinth is no longer inhabited by any of the old Corinthians, but by colonists sent out by the Romans.'

By Paul's time, the location of Corinth and the opportunities to prosper as a result of the control of the trade routes attracted many people of different nationalities to the new city. The existence of a Jewish community in Corinth, attested by Philo (*Embassy to Gaius*, 281), is confirmed by the discovery of a stone bearing the clear remains of an inscription, '[syn]agogue of Hebr[ews]'. It is impossible to ascribe an exact date to this inscription,[2] but it does confirm that fairly early on the Jewish community had a meeting-place in Corinth. According to Acts 18:4, Paul preached in a synagogue in Corinth when he first arrived in the city.

From Pausanias' description it is clear that the new Corinth became a centre for the worship of many of the old Greco-Roman gods. He refers to temples or

altars dedicated to Poseidon, Palaemon, Aphrodite, Artemis, Dionysus, Helius, Hermes, Apollo, Zeus, Isis, Eros and others. Strabo records that in his time there was a small temple to Aphrodite on the summit of Acrocorinth, while by the time Pausanias wrote, the ascent to Acrocorinth was punctuated by places of worship dedicated to various other deities, including Isis, Helius, Demeter and Pelagian. On the summit there was still found the temple of Aphrodite with images of Helius, Eros and Aphrodite herself.

Clearly, then, the new Corinth of Paul's day was still a centre for the worship of Aphrodite, as the old city had been prior to its destruction in 146 BC. But it is a mistake to apply to it Strabo's description of the worship of Aphrodite with its thousand cult-prostitutes which relates to the Corinth of the earlier period. We should think of Corinth in Paul's day as similar to any other cosmopolitan Roman trade centre, no worse but no better.

There is no doubt that Corinth was regaining its wealth and prestige in Paul's time. It was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. Responsibility for the organization of the Isthmian Games (which had been assumed by the city of Sicyon when Corinth was destroyed in 146 BC) was restored to Corinth when the city was rebuilt in 44 BC by Julius Caesar. By the second century AD, Corinth was probably a leading city in Greece, rivalling Athens. As Corinth was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia, it was the seat of the Roman Proconsul who, when Paul first visited the city, was Lucius Iunius Gallio (Acts 18:12).

Another matter of interest related to Paul's contacts with Corinth is the discovery during excavations of the remains of a large speaker's platform or rostrum. This is most likely to be the tribunal (*bēma*) at which Paul was arraigned before Gallio (Acts 18:12–17). It was built around AD 44 from blue and white marble and consisted of a high, broad rectangular platform, originally carrying a superstructure and provided with benches at the back and along the two sides. However, in more recent times the identification of this structure with the tribunal at which Paul was arraigned has been questioned. It is argued that the *bēma* was reserved for major official occasions, and that minor matters, such as the Jewish complaints against Paul, were more likely to have been heard in one of the basilicas which were used for administrative purposes. However, the fact that Paul was arraigned before Gallio, the governor of the province, and not before city magistrates, suggests this was not a minor matter, and therefore supports the view that it was at the *bēma* that Paul was arraigned. No matter at which exact spot Paul was arraigned, the whole episode seems to have provided him with the imagery for his statement in 2 Corinthians 5:10 that 'we must all appear before the judgment seat [*bēma*] of Christ'.

About 500 yards north of the centre of ancient Corinth are the remains of the

shrine of Asklepios. According to Greek mythology, Asklepios was the son of the god Apollo and a human mother. He was regarded as a renowned healer. Shrines to this divine healer were found in many places, including Rome, Pergamum, Cyrene, Athens and Corinth. Cures were said to be effected when, after bathing in the sea, the patients underwent token ablutions at the shrine, and then made offerings of honey cakes at the altar. Further ablutions followed before the patients entered the main hall of the shrine, where they were urged to sleep. While they slept, Asklepios is believed to appear to them in a dream and exercise his medical arts upon them. When worshippers awoke, they might find themselves cured. Votive thank-offerings in the form of life-size terracotta models of the patients' affected parts were then presented to the god at the shrine (though it has been suggested that these may have been offerings made to the god in the hope of receiving healing). Many such terracotta models have been found at the Asklepieion in Corinth (e.g. hands, feet, legs, arms, eyes, ears, breasts, genitals), and are on display in a special room at the museum at ancient Corinth.[3]

If such cures were being claimed by those seeking healing at the shrine of Asklepios in ancient Corinth, we can appreciate the Corinthians' tendency to be impressed by anyone who came to them claiming to be able to perform cures. Paul's opponents in Corinth claimed such powers and implied that Paul was lacking in this area. In response, the apostle had to remind his audience that 'I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles' (2 Cor. 12:12).

Ancient Corinth was subject to repeated earthquakes in the late fourth century AD, and in AD 521 a major earthquake severely damaged the city. In 1858 another major earthquake destroyed the city, whereupon the site at the base of Acrocorinth was abandoned and the modern city built about three and a half miles to the north-east.

b. Paul and the Corinthians

Paul's relationship with the Corinthian Christians, which stretched over a period of several years (c. AD 50–57), was a very complex affair. The apostle made three visits to Corinth. Emissaries of Paul made visits to Corinth, and members of the Corinthian congregation visited Paul when he was ministering in Ephesus. In addition, Paul sent several letters to the Corinthians during this period, and received at least one from them.

Due to the fragmentary nature of the information available to us, it is very difficult to reconstruct the details of the historical relationship between Paul and

the Corinthians with certainty. Both our primary sources (extant letters of Paul) and the major secondary document (the Acts of the Apostles) provide only partial information. To add to the difficulty, our main primary sources (1 and 2 Corinthians) present us with some puzzling literary problems which need to be resolved before a compelling historical reconstruction can be made, but the literary problems themselves can be resolved properly only by recourse to an adequate historical reconstruction.

In order to provide a framework for understanding 2 Corinthians, a suggested reconstruction of the sequence of events in Paul's relationship with the Corinthians is provided below. This reconstruction assumes certain decisions regarding the literary and historical problems involved. However, in the interests of a clear statement of the suggested sequence of events, the discussion of these critical issues is omitted from the reconstruction, and taken up later (pp. 36–66), where reasons for the decisions taken are provided.

i. Paul's pioneer mission in Corinth

According to the Acts of the Apostles, Paul's first visit to Corinth was made in the last phase of his second missionary journey. After leaving Athens he came to Corinth, where he met up with a Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla, recently arrived in the city after being evicted from Rome. They, along with all other Jews, had been commanded to leave the imperial city under an edict of Claudius (generally believed to have been promulgated in AD 49). Paul plied the same trade of tentmaking (or leatherworking) as this couple, so he worked with them, and every Sabbath argued and persuaded Jews and Greeks in the synagogue (Acts 18:1–4).

After some time it appears that the majority of the Jews in Corinth rejected Paul's message, opposed and reviled him. Paul thereupon turned his attention to the Gentiles, many of whom believed and were baptized. The apostle apparently felt vulnerable and afraid, for we are told, 'One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." ' Following this, he stayed a year and a half longer, teaching in Corinth (Acts 18:9–11).

Eventually the Jews brought Paul to the tribunal (*bēma*) where he was arraigned before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, accusing him of teaching people to worship God in ways contrary to the law. But Gallio drove the Jews from his tribunal, refusing to judge in matters related to Jewish law. After that, Paul continued to minister in Corinth 'for some time' (Acts 18:18).

He reminded the Corinthian believers that ‘not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential, not many were of noble birth’ (1 Cor. 1:26). However, ‘not many’ does not mean ‘not any’. So, for example, Crispus the ruler of the synagogue was one of those who believed (Acts 18:18; cf. 1 Cor. 1:14). The tentmakers, Priscilla and Aquila, would not have been poor artisans, but were probably traders and are known to have travelled between Corinth, Rome and Ephesus. They hosted the church that met in their home in Ephesus (Acts 18:1–3, 18; Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19). Gaius was sufficiently well off to own a villa capable of hosting ‘the whole church’ (Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 14:23). Stephanas and Chloe both had households, the members of which travelled from Corinth to Ephesus to bring news to Paul (1 Cor. 1:11; 16:15–18). Phoebe, who is described as the benefactor of the church in Cenchreae as well as Paul himself, was clearly a woman of substantial means (Rom. 16:1–2). Erastus who was the ‘city’s director of public works’ (Rom. 16:23; NRSV: ‘the city treasurer’) was obviously an important public figure.[4] The membership of the infant Corinthian church, then, represented a cross-section of the city’s population.

At the conclusion of his pioneering mission in Corinth, Paul set sail from Cenchreae en route to Syria. He called in at Ephesus and spoke in the synagogue there, but declined a request to stay longer, promising to return if God willed (Acts 18:19–21).

ii. Paul’s contacts with Corinth during his Ephesian ministry

After spending some time in (Syrian) Antioch, Paul set out again, travelling ‘from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples’ (Acts 18:23). He then made his way across to Ephesus, arriving just after Apollos, an outstanding Alexandrian Jew, had crossed from there to Corinth (Acts 18:24 – 19:1).

When Paul arrived in Ephesus, he entered the synagogue and ‘spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God’ (Acts 19:8). Once again he was opposed by some of the Jews and so withdrew, taking the disciples with him. Then for two years he argued daily in the hall of Tyrannus, and ‘all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord’ (Acts 19:10). Probably at this time the churches of Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis were established by Paul, his colleagues or converts. During Paul’s time in Ephesus extraordinary miracles were wrought through him (healings and exorcisms), leading to many conversions and a mass burning of magical books. These conversions disturbed the guild of silversmiths

in Ephesus who earned their living making shrines of Artemis, the god of the Ephesians, and led by one Demetrius they precipitated a great riot (Acts 19:8–41). Paul's ministry in Ephesus, then, was marked by great success and much opposition. It was during this tumultuous period that many of Paul's contacts with the Corinthian church which form the historical background to 2 Corinthians took place. The various contacts during this period are described below.

(a) Paul's 'previous letter'

Paul wrote a letter (now lost) to the Corinthians in which he urged them 'not to associate with sexually immoral people'. What Paul wrote in this letter was misunderstood by the Corinthians to mean that they should cut themselves off from social contact with the non-Christian world (1 Cor. 5:9).

(b) Visitors from Corinth

While at Ephesus, Paul was visited by Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:15–18), and also by those referred to as 'Chloe's household', who reported to Paul the quarrelling and division which was occurring in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 1:11–12).

(c) The Corinthians' letter to Paul

Also during his Ephesian ministry, Paul received a letter, sent by the Corinthians themselves, raising a number of issues to which Paul would respond, including marriage and singleness (1 Cor. 7:1, 25), food offered to idols (1 Cor. 8:1), spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:1), and the collection (1 Cor. 16:1, 12).

(d) Tension between Paul and the Corinthians

A close reading of 1 Corinthians reveals that the acute tension in the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians reflected in 2 Corinthians 10 – 13 was already beginning to emerge during the early stages of Paul's Ephesian ministry. Hints of this are found throughout 1 Corinthians. Three statements will serve as examples: 'Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have' (1 Cor. 4:18–19); 'This is my defence to those who sit in judgment on me. Don't we have the right to food and drink?' (1 Cor. 9:3–4); 'If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am

writing to you is the Lord's command. But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored' (1 Cor. 14:37–38).

(e) The writing of 1 Corinthians

It was to clarify the intention of his 'previous letter', respond to news brought by Chloe's people, deal with issues raised in the Corinthians' letter, and head off some emerging criticisms of his own person and ministry that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians during his time in Ephesus. He took the opportunity also to give instructions about the 'collection for the Lord's people' (a collection that was being taken up among the Gentile congregations to assist poor believers in Jerusalem), and to advise the Corinthians of his intended visit. Paul planned to travel via Macedonia to Corinth and, after spending some considerable time there, to journey on to Jerusalem, accompanying the bearers of the collection, if that seemed desirable (1 Cor. 16:1–9; cf. Acts 19:21–22; Rom. 15:25–26).

(f) Timothy's visit to Corinth

Paul sent Timothy to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10–11), but we have no explicit information concerning what transpired when he was there. However, it is clear that Paul eagerly awaited his return (1 Cor. 16:11). It seems that when Timothy arrived back in Ephesus, he brought disturbing news of the state of affairs in Corinth. This made Paul change the travel plans he had outlined in 1 Corinthians 16:5–9. Instead of journeying through Macedonia to Corinth and then on to Jerusalem, he sailed directly across to Corinth. It was now his stated intention, after visiting the church there, to journey north into Macedonia and then return again to Corinth on his way to Jerusalem. By so doing he hoped that the Corinthians 'might benefit twice' (2 Cor. 1:15–16).

(g) Paul's 'painful visit'

However, when Paul arrived in Corinth from Ephesus, he found himself the object of a hurtful attack (2 Cor. 2:5; 7:12) made by an individual, while no attempt was made by the congregation as a whole to support him (2 Cor. 2:3). It proved to be a very painful visit, and one which the apostle did not wish to repeat. Once again he changed his travel plans. Instead of travelling to Macedonia and then returning to Corinth as previously promised, he made his way straight back to Ephesus (2 Cor. 1:23; 2:1).

(h) Paul's 'severe letter'

Once back in Ephesus, Paul wrote his so-called 'severe letter' to the Corinthians. This letter is probably no longer extant, though some have suggested that it is preserved in whole or in part in 2 Corinthians 10 – 13 (see pp. 39–40). In it Paul called upon the Corinthian church to discipline the one who had caused him such hurt, and in this way to demonstrate their innocence in the matter and their affection for him (2 Cor. 2:3–4; 7:8, 12). It is not clear who carried the 'severe letter' to Corinth. It may have been Titus. In any case it was from Titus, returning from Corinth, that Paul expected news of the Corinthians' response to this letter. Paul had expressed his confidence in the Corinthians to Titus before the latter left for Corinth (2 Cor. 7:14–16) and he may have even asked Titus to take up with the Corinthians the matter of the collection (2 Cor. 8:6). Plans had been made for the two to meet in Troas. So Paul left Ephesus and made his way to Troas. He found there a wide-open door for evangelism, but because Titus had not yet come, and because he was so anxious to meet him, he left Troas and crossed over into Macedonia hoping to intercept Titus on his way through that province to Troas (2 Cor. 2:12–13).

iii. Paul's contacts with Corinth while in Macedonia

When Paul reached Macedonia, he found himself embroiled in the bitter persecution which the churches of Macedonia themselves were experiencing (2 Cor. 7:5; 8:1–2), and this only compounded his anxiety.

(a) Titus' arrival in Macedonia and Paul's letter of relief

When Titus finally arrived, Paul found great consolation (2 Cor. 7:6–7), the more so when he heard from him of the Corinthians' zeal to demonstrate their affection and loyalty to their apostle by punishing the one who had caused him such hurt. Paul responded to this good news by writing another letter, 2 Corinthians 1 – 9 (see pp. 40–45). He said how glad he was that their response to the 'severe letter' and Titus' visit had justified his confidence in them, especially seeing that he had boasted about them to Titus before sending him to Corinth (7:4, 14, 16). He also went to great lengths to explain the changes to his travel plans (1:15 – 2:1) and why, and in what frame of mind, he had written them previously such a 'severe letter' (2:3–4; 7:8–12). Although Paul was pleased when he heard that the Corinthians had acted vigorously to clear themselves by disciplining the one who had hurt him, nevertheless he urged them now to forgive and restore the one who had caused the pain, 'in order that Satan might not outwit us' (2:5–11). While it is not stated, it would appear that the one guilty of the hurtful attack on Paul had been moved to repentance as a

result of the disciplinary action taken against him by the Corinthians.

This letter of relief deals with two other subjects at some length. First, there is a long explanation of the way in which Paul's apostolic ministry was upheld and empowered in the midst of the many afflictions and anxieties which he experienced both in Asia (Ephesus) and Macedonia (1:3–11; 2:12–14). Second, there are detailed instructions and exhortations about the collection for the saints in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8 – 9). The Corinthians had made a beginning 'last year' (8:10) when they wrote to Paul, and he had replied giving basic directions about this matter (1 Cor. 16:1–4). In fact, Paul had actually boasted to the Macedonians about the Corinthians' readiness to contribute to the collection, and was now becoming anxious lest they fail to vindicate his boasting (9:1–4).

(b) Titus returns to Corinth

Paul wanted to ensure that neither he nor the Corinthians would be embarrassed because of their lack of readiness in the matter of the collection. So he sent Titus and two others to Corinth to make sure matters were finalized before he arrived. They were possibly accompanied by some of the very Macedonians to whom he had boasted of the Corinthians' readiness to contribute to the collection (8:16 – 9:5).

However, when Titus and the others arrived in Corinth, they found a situation which had seriously deteriorated. Men whom Paul called 'false apostles' were levelling all sorts of accusations against him. Apparently, the Corinthian church had been deeply influenced by these men, had accepted their 'gospel' (11:1–4) and submitted to their overbearing demands (11:16–20). Titus brought back news of this terrible situation in Corinth to Paul, who was still in Macedonia.

(c) Paul's final letter to Corinth

In response to this major crisis situation, Paul wrote his most severe and apparently final letter to the Corinthians, our 2 Corinthians 10 – 13 (see pp. 45–46). It was written to answer the accusations of the 'false apostles' and to dispel the suspicions they had raised in the minds of the Corinthians. It reads like a last desperate attempt to bring the Corinthians to their senses, to secure again their pure devotion to Christ and to revive once more their loyalty to Paul, their spiritual father. In it Paul foreshadowed his third visit when, he warned them, he would demonstrate his authority, if need be, though clearly he hoped the Corinthians' response to this final letter would make that unnecessary (12:14; 13:1–4, 10).

(d) Paul's third visit to Corinth

According to Acts 20:2–3, Paul did travel to Greece after his time in Macedonia, and spent three months there. We may assume that at this time he made his promised third visit to Corinth. Apparently, either as a result of his letter or because of his own presence in Corinth for the third time, the problems in the Corinthian church were settled for the time being. This can be inferred from Paul's letter to the Romans, written from Corinth during these months, in which he stated, 'Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem' (Rom. 15:25–26). If the Achaeans (who must, for the most part, have consisted of the Corinthians) had now contributed to the collection, obviously their misgivings about Paul and his ministry reflected in 2 Corinthians 11:7–11 and 12:13–18 had been overcome. And if Paul spent three months in Greece in a frame of mind that allowed him to write Romans (with its sustained exposition and defence of the gospel), the situation in Corinth must have improved markedly.

It would be gratifying to be able to say that after all these things the Corinthian church went from strength to strength. Unfortunately this was not the case. Evidence from the First Epistle of Clement (written c. AD 95) indicates that disharmony had become a problem once more (cf. 1 Clem 47:1–7).

3. Literary matters

Valuable as they are, Paul's letters to the Corinthians present modern interpreters with a range of literary problems that are discussed below.

a. Paul's Corinthian correspondence: how many letters?

One of the most perplexing problems related to Paul's relationship with the Corinthians concerns the number of letters he wrote and whether or not all those letters have been preserved (in whole or in part). Views vary widely. The viewpoint underlying the reconstruction of events adopted in this commentary is that he wrote five letters to the church in Corinth. The first was the 'previous letter' (now lost) mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9, then followed our 1 Corinthians. The third was the 'severe letter' spoken of in 2 Corinthians 2:3–4; 7:8, 12, while the fourth letter was our 2 Corinthians 1 – 9. The fifth and final letter is that preserved substantially in 2 Corinthians 10 – 13.[5]

However, there are a number of other views. Some argue that there were only three letters: the 'previous letter' (now lost), then 1 Corinthians (which is to be identified as the 'severe letter' of 2 Cor. 2:3–4; 7:8, 12) and finally 2 Corinthians.[6] Others assume four letters were written: the 'previous letter' (2 Cor. 6:14 – 7:1 is sometimes regarded as a fragment of this letter), 1 Corinthians, the 'severe letter' (largely preserved in 2 Cor. 10 – 13) and 2 Corinthians 1 – 9.[7] In addition to these major and more or less 'straightforward' viewpoints, there are suggestions that fragments of at least four (or as many as six) letters, including the 'previous letter' and 'severe letter', can be found scattered throughout our 1 and 2 Corinthians. Such views are based upon the recognition of apparent points of discontinuity in 1 and 2 Corinthians.[8] As mentioned above, the viewpoint adopted in this commentary is that Paul wrote five letters to Corinth. In what follows, each of these letters is discussed in turn and reasons given for the stance adopted.

i. The 'previous letter'

The fact that Paul wrote a letter prior to the writing of 1 Corinthians is uncontested. Such a 'previous letter' is implied by 1 Corinthians 5:9. The letter dealt, at least in part, with the matter of association with Christians who behaved

immorally. Many commentators believe that this letter has been lost; however, some argue that part of it is preserved in 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1.[9] This passage does appear to interrupt the flow of thought in its present context, and for that reason it has been regarded by some as an interpolation and identified as a fragment of Paul's 'previous letter' (see pp. 50–52). However, there is a major difficulty involved with this suggestion. While it is true that Paul's 'previous letter' had been misunderstood by the Corinthians to mean that they should have no contact with anyone who was immoral, Paul responds in 1 Corinthians 5:9–13 by saying that his remarks applied only to 'anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler'. He did not intend them to apply to unbelievers. Yet the passage in 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1, which some claim to be a fragment of the 'previous letter', clearly refers to contact with *unbelievers*: 'Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.' If this were a fragment of the 'previous letter', Paul would be guilty of a blatant contradiction.

ii. 1 Corinthians

The great majority of scholars accept the unity of 1 Corinthians, and agree that it is the second of the letters sent by Paul to Corinth. A small number do question its unity and suggest that several sections belonged originally to the 'previous letter'.[10] However, their arguments have not been found convincing, and as the whole matter does not impinge directly upon the exegesis of 2 Corinthians, it may be left aside.

iii. The 'severe letter'

That Paul wrote a 'severe letter' is clearly implied by 2 Corinthians 2:3–4; 7:8, 12. The view adopted in this commentary is that this letter is no longer extant. The older traditional view, still supported by some scholars, is that the 'severe letter' to which Paul refers is in fact 1 Corinthians.[11] The writing of that letter, it is argued, both caused Paul many tears and produced grief in the recipients. Paul had to reprimand his converts for a number of reasons, but especially because of their lax attitude towards immoral practices indulged in by certain members of the congregation. One factor supporting the traditional view is that 1 Corinthians does contain a demand for disciplinary action against an offender (1 Cor. 5:3–5, 7, 13), and the one thing we know about the contents of the 'severe letter' is that it contained such a demand, to which the apostle expected his audience to be obedient (2 Cor. 2:5–11). However, the majority of commentators today reject the view that 1 Corinthians is to be identified as Paul's 'severe letter'. The

reason is that, despite the demand for disciplinary action against the incestuous person, and some strong words about party-spirit, libertarianism and disorder in public worship, 1 Corinthians just does not read like a letter written 'out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears' (2 Cor. 2:4). It does not seem to be a letter which Paul would have regretted writing and that would have caused such grief to its recipients (2 Cor. 7:8–9).

The dominant view for many years was that the 'severe letter' has survived, in part at least, and is preserved in 2 Corinthians 10 – 13.[12] In support of this, it is argued first that it would have been psychologically impossible for Paul to have written 2 Corinthians 1 – 9 and 10 – 13 at the same time to the same people. The change in tone from warm encouragement to his audience to complete what they had begun in the matter of the collection found in chapters 8 – 9 to the strident rebukes and impassioned personal defence in chapters 10 – 13 is just too great. Second, it is asserted that a number of passages in chapters 1 – 9 refer to statements made *previously* in chapters 10 – 13 (cf. 1:23/13:2; 2:3/13:10; 2:9/10:6; 4:2/12:16; 7:2/12:17), and this shows that chapters 1 – 9 were written after chapters 10 – 13. Third, in 10:16 Paul says he is looking forward to preaching the gospel 'in the regions beyond you'. This, it is argued, could not have been written from Macedonia to Corinth (as would have to be the case if 2 Corinthians were a unity), but could have been written quite appropriately from Ephesus (the probable place of writing of the 'severe letter'). Fourth, it is argued that if 2 Corinthians were a unity, Paul would be guilty of making contradictory statements within the one letter (cf. 1:24/13:5; 7:16/12:20–21).

The positive aspects of the view that chapters 10 – 13 constitute the greater part of Paul's 'severe letter' are that it offers an explanation for the dramatic change in tone that occurs at 10:1. The content of these chapters is such that they could have been written 'out of great distress and anguish of heart', and it would no doubt have caused much pain to the audience. However, this view does have a number of weaknesses. First, chapters 10 – 13 do not contain the one thing which we know was found in Paul's 'severe letter': the demand to discipline the offender. Second, in 12:17–18 Paul asks, 'Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent to you? I urged Titus to go to you and I sent our brother with him. Titus did not exploit you, did he?' This seems to refer *back* to arrangements mentioned in 8:6, 16–24 and 9:3–5. If we accept that chapters 8 – 9 belonged originally with chapters 1 – 7 (as do most, but not all, proponents of the view that chapters 10 – 13 constitute Paul's 'severe letter'), then it seems that chapters 10 – 13 were written *after* chapters 1 – 9. Third, Paul wrote his 'severe letter' instead of making the return visit to Corinth which he had promised earlier, and so as not to cause his audience pain (1:23–24), whereas chapters 10 – 13 were

written when the apostle was ready to make a visit (12:14) and threatening strong disciplinary action (13:1–4).

The view adopted in this commentary, then, is that the ‘severe letter’ is to be found neither in 1 Corinthians nor 2 Corinthians 10 – 13, but that it is no longer extant.

iv. 2 Corinthians 1 – 9

There appeared to be an emerging consensus in recent works on 2 Corinthians that chapters 1 – 9 constitute Paul’s fourth letter to the church in Corinth.[13] Such a consensus rests upon the acceptance of two propositions: first, that chapters 8 – 9 belong together with chapters 1 – 7; and second, that chapters 1 – 9 and 10 – 13 could not have been written at the same time to the same people.

The first proposition has been questioned by a number of scholars. It has been variously suggested that either chapter 8 was originally a separate letter, and that it was chapter 9 that followed chapter 7, or that chapter 9 was originally a separate letter and only subsequently added in after chapter 8.[14] There are three main arguments supporting this line of questioning. First, the wording of 9:1, with its introductory formula, *peri men gar* (lit. ‘for concerning . . . ’), and full description of the subject matter, ‘this service to the Lord’s people’, reveals that Paul is taking up a new subject, rather than continuing one already broached in chapter 8. While it is true that Paul uses similar (but not identical) formulae elsewhere when taking up new subjects (e.g. 1 Cor. 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1), this does not mean that wherever such formulae are found we must assume the introduction of a new subject. Also the use of the full description, ‘this service to the Lord’s people’, where we might expect something briefer if chapter 9 continues the treatment begun in chapter 8, does not compel us to regard chapter 9 as a letter originally separate from chapter 8. The use of a full description in 9:1 is understandable following the large amount of material set down after the first mention of the collection in 8:4.[15]

Second, Paul’s appeal to the example of the Macedonians to stir up the Corinthians in 8:1–5 and his reference to the example of the Corinthians which he used to stir up the Macedonians in 9:1–2 are seen to be in contradiction if chapters 8 and 9 belong together. However, such a contradiction is more apparent than real. In chapter 8 Paul tells of a completed action by the Macedonians to stimulate the Corinthians to finish what they had only begun. In chapter 9 Paul tells how earlier on he had used the readiness of the Corinthians to be involved in providing relief to stir the Macedonians to the action they had now taken. There is no inherent contradiction here.

Third, chapters 8 and 9 present different purposes for sending the ‘brothers’ on ahead to Corinth. In chapter 8 Paul says he is sending highly accredited envoys so as to avoid accusations of impropriety as far as the collection is concerned. In chapter 9 the purpose of their being sent is to ensure everything is ready when Paul himself arrives. In response, it can be said that these two purposes are complementary and do not demand a separation of chapters 8 and 9.

In favour of the unity of chapters 8 and 9, it can be shown that there is a discernible progression in the argument begun in chapter 8 and carried through chapter 9. In chapter 8 Paul begins to stimulate the Corinthians to action by citing the example of the Macedonians (vv. 1–7) and the example of Christ’s self-giving (vv. 8–12), while assuring them that he was not seeking to burden them so that others might be eased (vv. 13–15). He then describes the arrangements that have been made for receiving and transporting the collection, so that the whole project will be seen clearly to have been carried out in an exemplary fashion (vv. 16–24). In chapter 9 the apostle continues to stir the Corinthians to action by stressing how embarrassed they would feel if, after all, they proved unprepared when some of the Macedonians arrived, for Paul had earlier boasted to them about the Corinthians’ readiness (vv. 1–5). He strengthens his appeal for action by emphasizing that God loves the cheerful giver and ‘whoever sows generously will also reap generously’ (vv. 6–7). Finally, Paul reminds his audience that God is able to provide them with every blessing so that they may abound in their generosity, and by responding positively they will demonstrate their obedience to the gospel (vv. 8–15).

It can be further argued in favour of chapters 8 and 9 belonging together that Paul’s reference to ‘sending the brothers’ in 9:3 presupposes some knowledge of who they are, such as is provided in 8:16–24. In addition, 9:3–5 implies that the Corinthians understood the obligation resting upon them to contribute to the collection, an obligation Paul had stressed to them in 8:6–15. All in all, there seem to be insufficient reasons to overthrow the conclusion that chapters 8 and 9 belong together in their present position, and this is supported by the fact that there is no known manuscript in which these chapters are found anywhere but in their traditional location.

The second proposition rests upon the belief that the change in tone which occurs at 10:1 is so great that it is psychologically improbable that chapters 1 – 9 and 10 – 13 were written at the same time to the same people. In the earlier chapters, especially chapters 7 – 9, the apostle expressed his joy and relief upon hearing how the Corinthians had shown their loyalty to him by disciplining the offender (7:6–11), affirmed his confidence in the Corinthians (7:14–16), and felt free to raise once more the matter of the collection with his hearers (chs. 8 – 9).

At 10:1 the tone of the letter changes dramatically. Paul proceeds to warn of disciplinary action he may have to take (10:2, 5–6; 13:2–4, 10), counters accusations made against him and entertained by his audience (10:9–11; 11:7–11; 12:16–18), expresses his dismay at the Corinthians' readiness to accept another gospel (11:3–4), and attacks vigorously the integrity of those who are seeking to turn his converts against him (11:12–15). What we see then in chapters 1 – 9 is basically Paul's response to a crisis resolved (a crisis that was precipitated by the action of one individual), whereas in chapters 10 – 13 we find the apostle's reaction to a fresh crisis, one that was far from resolution at the time of writing (and that was brought on by a group of intruders whom Paul calls 'false apostles'). These facts, it may be argued, are best accounted for by regarding chapters 1 – 9 as Paul's response to the good news which Titus brought of the Corinthians' reaction to the 'severe letter', and by seeing chapters 10 – 13 as a subsequent letter written by the apostle when news reached him of a far more serious crisis precipitated by the activities of the 'false apostles' in Corinth.

There are, however, scholars who reject this view and argue for the unity of the letter.[16] They too recognize the change of tone at 10:1, but suggest that this can be understood without postulating two letters. Some suggest that while the apostle was in the process of writing his letter of relief and joy, he received further news from Corinth saying that a fresh crisis had been precipitated, and so he responded by adding chapters 10 – 13 to what he had already written. Others argue that the change in tone at 10:1 is not as great as has been suggested. They point to a common theme of strength through weakness running through both parts of the letter. They point out also that the apostle indulges in personal defence in both parts of the letter. Others argue that the change in tone can be accounted for in terms of Paul's rhetorical strategy – chapters 10 – 13 function as a concluding *peroration* in which Paul gathers points made earlier in the letter and makes a strong emotional appeal to his audience to make a judgment in his favour. Finally, it is noted that there are no existing manuscripts which reproduce 2 Corinthians in any other form than that in which we know it today. Another view is that change of tone reflects the fact that in chapters 1 – 9 Paul encourages a faithful majority, whereas in chapters 10 – 13 he addresses a minority who still reject his ministry.

These are important considerations and need to be taken seriously. In response, it must be said first that it is possible the change in tone that occurs at 10:1 is to be accounted for by the apostle receiving fresh disconcerting news from Corinth while in the process of writing his letter of relief, or that he was addressing a minority recalcitrant group. However, if this were the case, we

would expect Paul to have written something to the effect that, while he had just been commending them for their loyalty, in the light of the latest news he was forced now to rebuke them for their disloyalty to him and his gospel, or that he was now focusing his comments on a minority group.

Second, it is true that the theme of strength through weakness is present in both chapters 1 – 9 and chapters 10 – 13, and that there is personal defence in both as well. But the intensity of the defence in the latter is far greater than in the former, and the reason for the incorporation of the theme of strength through weakness in chapters 1 – 9 is different from the reason for its incorporation in chapters 10 – 13. In the former, Paul included it to show how, despite all his apostolic privations and difficulties, the power of God was still at work through his ministry. In the latter, he included it as part of his deliberate inversion of his opponents' criteria for evaluating apostleship.

Third, it is true that there are no extant manuscripts supporting the division of the letter as suggested, but this could be accounted for if we envisage two originally separate letters being copied on to one scroll very early in the history of the transmission of the text.

If we accept these two propositions (that chs. 8 and 9 belong together and with chs. 1 – 7, and that chs. 10 – 13 represent a letter written some time after chs. 1 – 9 were sent to Corinth), then chapters 1 – 9 might be regarded as Paul's fourth letter to Corinth.

v. 2 Corinthians 10 – 13

The arguments against the view that chapters 10 – 13 belonged originally with chapters 1 – 9 have been set out above (pp. 43–45), as also have the arguments against seeing in chapters 10 – 13 Paul's 'severe letter' (pp. 39–40). The view adopted by a number of recent interpreters is that chapters 10 – 13 constitute the major part of a fifth letter which Paul wrote to Corinth after the writing of chapters 1 – 9.[17] This is the approach assumed in this commentary. However, the detailed exegesis that follows does not depend on this assumption.

One advantage of this view, as we have seen, is that it accounts better for the marked change in tone that takes place at 10:1. A second advantage is that it takes better account of the fact that in chapters 10 – 13 Paul is preparing the way for his imminent third visit. Thus in 12:19 – 13:10 he shows that the purpose of all he has written was for the Corinthians' strengthening, in the hope that when he makes his third visit he will not have to be severe in the use of his authority. Such a declared purpose fits in well with the content of chapters 10 – 13 so long as they are not regarded as belonging with chapters 1 – 9, for the latter bear no

hint of a threat of imminent disciplinary action. Further, this declared purpose is also understood better when chapters 10 – 13 are not identified with Paul's 'severe letter'. Paul wrote the 'severe letter' *instead of* making another visit, not to *prepare the way* for another one.

A third advantage of this view is that it makes better sense of Paul's references to Titus' behaviour in 12:17–18. There Paul asks whether Titus and the others whom he sent to Corinth on the business of the collection had been instrumental in Paul's taking advantage of the Corinthians. This question implies that chapters 10 – 13 were written *after* chapters 1 – 9, in which Paul tells his audience he is about to send these men to them (8:6, 16–24; 9:3–5).

Finally, this view recognizes the difference in the nature of the opposition to Paul that is reflected in chapters 1 – 9 and 10 – 13 respectively. In the former the opposition emanated from an individual (the offender of 2:5; 7:12), and it had been dealt with already by the Corinthians. In the latter the opposition came from a number of intruders whom Paul called 'false apostles', and this opposition, while present earlier, was at its height when these chapters were written. Furthermore, the outcome of the crisis precipitated by this opposition was by no means certain.

b. The genre and rhetorical nature of 2 Corinthians

When seeking to understand a book of the Bible, it is important to be aware of its genre, the type of literature it is, for that determines the way we should interpret it. In the case of 2 Corinthians, the genre is that of an ancient Greco-Roman letter. However, it differs in nature from common personal letters insofar as it is addressed to a Christian community, not an individual, and is written by one claiming apostolic authority. Nevertheless, it follows the broad structure of ancient letters: it opens with the traditional address and greetings, followed by a thanksgiving section, the body of the letter, and concludes with final greetings.

There were three main forms of rhetoric taught in the Greco-Roman world: judicial rhetoric by which a speaker sought to convince an audience to make a judgment about past events; deliberative rhetoric by which a speaker sought to motivate an audience to adopt a course of action in the future; and epideictic rhetoric by which a speaker sought to reinforce adherence to agreed values.[18] Caution needs to be exercised in applying to Paul's letters the categories of ancient rhetorical handbooks that were intended to provide guidance for those constructing speeches,[19] but it is clear that he employed rhetorical techniques when communicating with his audience through his letters. In 1 Corinthians, for example, he employs deliberative rhetoric when urging the audience to act in

certain ways in the future, and in 2 Corinthians, particularly in chapters 1 – 7; 10 – 13, he makes use of judicial rhetoric to defend his own actions as an apostle and to call upon his audience to make informed judgments regarding the 'false apostles'. In chapters 8 – 9, however, Paul uses deliberative rhetoric to urge his audience to complete what they began in respect of the collection for the poor believers in Jerusalem.

c. Interpolations in 2 Corinthians?

There are two passages in 2 Corinthians which on first reading appear to interrupt the flow of Paul's letter. Because of this, a number of scholars have suggested that these passages did not originally occupy their present position within the letter. The passages which concern us here are 2:14 – 7:4 and 6:14 – 7:1.

i. 2:14 – 7:4

Paul brings the first part of the letter (1:1 – 2:13) to a close by telling how his anxiety while awaiting Titus' arrival had prevented him from taking full advantage of an open door to preach the gospel in Troas; indeed, he had left that work and crossed over to Macedonia (2:12–13). At this point there is an abrupt change in the letter. What follows in 2:14 – 7:4 is an extended description of the way God had enabled him to carry on an effective ministry despite many difficulties and criticisms. It is only at 7:5 that Paul returns once again to the matter of the meeting with Titus. In fact, if the whole of 2:14 – 7:4 is omitted and in reading the letter we jump from 2:13 directly to 7:5, it still makes good sense. Various explanations have been offered for this phenomenon.

First, there are those who argue that 2:14 – 7:4 is definitely an interpolation, being either the whole or a portion of a separate letter written by Paul and included here by an editor of his letters. Accordingly, some suggest that 2:14 – 7:4 along with chapters 10 – 13 constitute the 'severe letter' mentioned in 2:3–4,[20] while others say it is an interim letter, penned earlier than the 'severe letter', at a time before the Corinthians had fallen prey to Paul's opponents.[21] There are serious problems with these views. The view which connects 2:14 – 7:4 with chapters 10 – 13 fails to take sufficient note of the very different attitude adopted by Paul in the two blocks of material. In 2:14 – 7:4 he expresses great confidence in the Corinthians' loyalty (7:14, 16), whereas in chapters 10 – 13 he is convinced that they had capitulated to his opponents (11:2–4, 19–20). And both views fail to explain adequately the close connection between 7:4 and 7:5–7. In the latter the idea of affliction is taken up again and related to 7:2–4 by the

use of the word ‘for’ (*gar*). Also, both views take insufficient account of the repetition in 7:5–16 of ideas found in what precedes it (e.g. 7:4: ‘I take great pride in you’; 7:14, 16: ‘I had boasted to him about you … our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well’; ‘I am glad I can have complete confidence in you’).

Second, and in contrast, there are those who regard 2:14 – 7:4 as an integral part of 2 Corinthians. To maintain this position they have to account for the rough transition from 2:13 to 2:14. Numerous explanations have been offered:

(a) In 2:14 – 7:4 Paul makes a conscious digression to express his gratitude to God for the relief from anxiety experienced when he finally met with Titus, a digression evoked by the mention of his name in 2:13.[22]

(b) In 2:14 Paul refers all his journeyings to God, to counterbalance his earlier acknowledgments (1:8–11; 1:23 – 2:1; 2:12–13) that the ‘compulsion of affairs’ had frustrated his desire either to journey or to tarry.[23]

(c) The contrast of human weakness and the power of God found in 1:8–11 is repeated when, following the admission of his weakness in 2:12–13, Paul strikes the note of triumph again in 2:14.[24]

(d) Paul was eager to prevent misunderstanding following his acknowledgment of acute anxiety while in Troas (2:13), so he either stresses there was no spiritual defeat involved for him personally,[25] or claims that his preaching had proved successful everywhere (including Troas),[26] as God always led him in triumph.

(e) The mention of Titus in 2:13 prompted Paul to leap forward, overlooking for the present the intermediate stages which are disclosed in 7:5–7, and expound the theological basis upon which his restored relationship with the Corinthians now rested.[27]

(f) A more recent suggestion is that, while a break between 2:13 and 2:14 is acknowledged, this is not evidence for an interpolation, but rather is occasioned by Paul’s introduction of a second traditional thanksgiving period (2:14–16). This thanksgiving period foreshadows, as most of Paul’s thanksgivings do, what is to be argued in detail in what follows.[28]

The major argument in favour of the view that 2:14 – 7:4 is an integral part of 2 Corinthians is the presence of the idea of comfort in affliction which is found in 1:1 – 2:13; 7:5–16 and 2:14 – 7:4 (compare 1:3–11; 7:3–7, 12–13 with 4:7 – 5:8; 6:1–10; 7:4). This idea runs as a thread throughout the first seven chapters. In addition, this view takes proper notice of the logical connection between 7:4 and 7:5. In both these matters, then, the view that 2:14 – 7:4 is not an interpolation is to be preferred, so long as some adequate explanation for the abrupt transition from 2:13 to 2:14 can be found. Suggestions, as we have seen,

are not lacking, and so long as we can see possible ways of negotiating the transition, we ought not to accept too easily the idea that 2:14 – 7:4 is an interpolation.

ii. 6:14 – 7:1

It is quite easy to see why these six verses have been regarded by many as an interpolation (within the larger interpolation 2:14 – 7:4). In 2:14 – 6:13 Paul stresses the nature and conduct of his apostolic ministry, apparently defending himself against the accusations that had been voiced by the offender and entertained by the congregation. He follows this defence with a heartfelt plea: 'We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you . . . As a fair exchange – I speak as to my children – open wide your hearts also' (6:11–13). This plea is then abruptly broken off and an exhortation to have no contact with pagans follows (6:14 – 7:1). At 7:2 the plea to the Corinthians to open their hearts to Paul is taken up once more.

All modern commentators recognize the abrupt changes in subject matter at 6:14 and 7:2. Several different explanations for these have been made. Some suggest that 6:14 – 7:1 is a non-Pauline interpolation.[29] The apocalyptic dualism (righteousness/iniquity; light/darkness; Christ/Belial) reminiscent of the Qumran Scrolls, the use of *hapax legomena* (words found only here in Paul's writings), the incompatibility of Paul's exclusivism here with his more liberal approach in 1 Corinthians 5:9–10, and the unusual conjunction of 'body' (*sarx*, lit. 'flesh') and 'spirit' (*pneuma*) which are usually contrasted by Paul, are all cited as evidence that this passage is not of Paul's composition. Such arguments have not proved compelling for most scholars. The unusual apocalyptic vocabulary can be accounted for by the nature of the exhortation, as can the use of *hapax legomena.* The so-called exclusiveness of 6:14 – 7:1 is not necessarily in conflict with the so-called liberalism of 1 Corinthians. Even in the latter, Paul is quite adamant about the need to avoid compromise with idolatrous worship (1 Cor. 10:14–22). He distinguishes between social contact with pagans and involvement in idol worship. Finally, it is true that Paul does, in theological argument, place 'flesh' and 'spirit' over against one another where 'spirit' refers to the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:16–25), but in the present passage the expression 'body [lit. flesh] and spirit' stands as a designation for the whole person.

Most modern scholars, then, accept 6:14 – 7:1 as Pauline. However, many still regard it as an interpolation into the text of 2 Corinthians made by a later redactor. Most of those who do so identify it as a fragment of the lost 'previous letter' mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9.[30] One problem with this view is that 6:14

– 7:1 calls for a separation of believers from *unbelievers* in the matter of idolatrous worship, whereas Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 5:9–13 indicate that in the 'previous letter' his concern was that the Corinthians should avoid contact with *believers* who were behaving immorally. Another problem is the very difficulty of explaining *why* any later redactor would deliberately interpolate such a passage into this context (accidental insertion is ruled out when it is recalled that first-century copies of Paul's letters were written on papyrus scrolls, not on leaves of a codex which could have been accidentally displaced).[31]

In the light of all this, there are many scholars who, while recognizing the rough transitions (6:13 to 6:14 and 7:1 to 7:2), still argue that 6:14 – 7:1 has always been an integral part of 2 Corinthians and located in its present position.[32] They, of course, have to explain why there are such abrupt changes in subject matter at both 6:14 and 7:2. A number of suggestions have been made:

(a) There was a pause in dictation of the letter at 6:13.[33]

(b) Having established his spiritual authority in the preceding chapters, Paul boldly warns against the ever-present threat of paganism, but not in a spirit of censoriousness, as 6:11–13 (which precedes) and 7:2–4 (which follows) indicate.[34]

(c) Paul, knowing that the Corinthians were having dealings with other apostles who proclaimed a different gospel, opens his heart to reveal his longing for a restored relationship with his converts, and urges them to reciprocate. However, he reminds them: 'If you turn to God and to me his messenger, it means a break with the world.'[35]

(d) Paul's main concern is for a restored relationship, as is evidenced by the thrust of 6:11–13 which is resumed again in 7:2–4. However, he realized that the main hindrance to the relationship was the Corinthians' unwillingness to renounce all compromise with paganism, and this fact accounts for the inclusion of 6:14 – 7:1 between 6:13 and 7:2.[36]

An interesting suggestion has been made by N. A. Dahl. He argues that 6:14 – 7:1, with its marked parallels with certain features of the Qumran Scrolls, was originally a non-Pauline composition, but was included by Paul (or less probably by some later redactor) in its present context as part of the apostle's warning to the Corinthians not to side with the false apostles. To join them 'in their opposition to Paul would mean to side with Satan/Belial in his opposition to Christ'.[37] While Dahl's view of the original composition of 6:14 – 7:1 is problematical, the explanation he gives concerning the interrelation of the passage and its present context has the advantage of relating the passage to the undercurrent of opposition to Paul reflected in chapters 1 – 7 which had become overt by the time Paul wrote chapters 10 – 13.

d. Date and provenance

Assigning dates to the various points in Paul's career and to the time of writing of his letters is fraught with difficulties. In the case of his relationship with the Corinthians, we do have a couple of possible reference points which may help. First, Acts 18:2 tells us that when Paul arrived in Corinth on his first visit, 'There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome.' This edict of Claudius is generally held to have been promulgated in AD 49.[38] Second, in Acts 18:12–17 we read that during Paul's first visit to Corinth he was brought before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia. Fragments of an inscription found during excavations at Delphi contain a reproduction of a letter from the Emperor Claudius from which it can be inferred that Gallio held office in Corinth from the spring of AD 51 to the spring of AD 52. However, a statement made by Seneca, the Stoic philosopher and brother of Gallio, informs us that Gallio did not complete his term of office, and it is therefore impossible to date Paul's encounter with him in the latter part of his term of office. It must have taken place then between July and October AD 51.[39]

Working from these reference points and taking note of the information provided about Paul's movements in the Acts of the Apostles (and assuming that this is essentially compatible with what may be inferred from Paul's letters), the following chronology for Paul's contacts with the Corinthians can be suggested. He arrived in Corinth for his first visit early in AD 50. After spending eighteen months there, he was arraigned before Gallio (latter half of AD 51). He stayed on in Corinth 'for some time' after the arraignment, then sailed for Antioch. After spending 'some time' there, Paul travelled through Galatia to Ephesus, where he spent two years and three months (AD 52–55). Quite possibly, during his stay in Ephesus the apostle wrote the 'previous letter', and towards the end of his time there (AD 55) he wrote 1 Corinthians, made the 'painful visit', and wrote the 'severe letter'. Paul then left Ephesus, travelling via Troas to Macedonia, where he met Titus, and from there he wrote 2 Corinthians 1 – 9, and shortly afterwards 2 Corinthians 10 – 13 (AD 56). He then made his third visit to Corinth and spent three months in Greece before setting out with the collection to Jerusalem, hoping to arrive there in time for Pentecost AD 57.[40]

4. Opposition to Paul in Corinth

In our reconstruction of the events involved in Paul's relationship with the church in Corinth above, it was suggested that the opposition had two phases. In the first phase the opposition emanated primarily from one individual. It was news that the church had taken disciplinary action against the offending individual that produced in Paul the relief and joy which are expressed in chapters 1 – 7. While the opposition in this first phase was concentrated in one individual, there are hints even in chapters 1 – 7 of an undercurrent of opposition from another source in the background.

The second phase of opposition is reflected in chapters 10 – 13. Here Paul responds vigorously to the attacks of those whom he calls 'false apostles'. According to our suggested reconstruction of events, this only became overt after Paul had succeeded in having disciplinary action taken against the individual offender mentioned above. The 'false apostles' may have been in Corinth during the first phase of opposition, and criticisms emanating from them may have strengthened the attacks of the offending individual. However, it was only after disciplinary action had been taken against this offender, and after Paul had urged members of the church to reinstate this person in their affections, that the opposition of the 'false apostles' moved from the background into the foreground.

The purpose of this section of the Introduction is to discuss the identity of the opposition to Paul in Corinth, and this can be done conveniently under two main headings.

a. The opposition reflected in chapters 1 – 7

As described above (pp. 33, 54), when Paul made his second visit to Corinth, he became the object of a bitter personal attack mounted by a particular individual (the one who 'caused grief', 2:5; 'the one who did the wrong', 7:12). The church as a whole did not defend the apostle Paul as one might have expected (2:3), and he felt forced to withdraw, but not before uttering dire warnings of disciplinary action he would take subsequently (cf. 13:2).

Traditionally the offending individual was identified as the incestuous person referred to in 1 Corinthians 5,[41] and then accordingly Paul's second visit to Corinth was believed to have taken place *before* the writing of 1 Corinthians, which then came to be regarded as the 'severe letter'.[42] However, this view has

been abandoned by most recent commentators on two major grounds: (a) Paul, having in 1 Corinthians 5 called so strongly for the excommunication of the incestuous person, could hardly then turn around and plead for his reinstatement in 2 Corinthians 2. This is not a compelling objection, because it underestimates the effects of the gospel of forgiveness in the apostle's own life; (b) the offence Paul alludes to in 2 Corinthians 2 is not immoral behaviour, but rather a personal attack upon himself and his apostolic authority. This is a far more weighty objection.

Other commentators have identified the individual who mounted this attack against Paul as one of the 'false apostles' whom he castigates in 11:12–15,[43] but this identification is also problematic. It would seem unreasonable for Paul to expect the church to exercise discipline against someone who was not one of its members, and one whom the church had accepted as an apostle of Christ on the strength of letters of recommendation (from Jerusalem). He has also been identified as one of the leaders in the Corinthian church,[44] though there is little evidence to support this view. Others have been content to leave aside the question of the offender's actual identity, simply regarding him as an unknown person who, for some unknown reason, mounted a personal attack against Paul.[45]

Thrall suggests that the offender was one of the Corinthians who stole some of the collection money that had been handed over to Paul. This person denied he was responsible, claiming that Paul was the thief. Paul's inability to convince members of the Corinthian congregation of the guilt of the person responsible and his own innocence in the matter meant he had to withdraw humiliated and hurt from Corinth and return to Ephesus where he wrote the 'severe letter'. She offers several pieces of evidence in support of this hypothesis,[46] to which might be added the fact that some in Corinth were suspicious about Paul's motives for his involvement in the collection (2 Cor. 12:16–18). However, this suggestion has not received wide acceptance.

It is possible to offer further evidence in support of the traditional view that the offending individual was the incestuous person against whom Paul previously demanded disciplinary action, *provided that this person is now understood to be guilty of an additional offence, that of a personal attack against Paul*. In support of this view, the following sequence of events may be suggested. In the libertarian and status-conscious atmosphere which pertained in Corinth (1 Cor. 5 – 6),[47] one of the church members of possibly high social status had committed incest with his stepmother (1 Cor. 5:1). Hearing of this, Paul was scandalized and demanded that disciplinary action be taken by the church against the offender and that they 'hand this man over to Satan for the

destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord' (1 Cor. 5:1–5). This demand was heard by the church when 1 Corinthians was received and read. Some time afterwards, Timothy, sent by Paul (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10–11), arrived in Corinth and discovered that all was not well in the church. Paul's demand for disciplinary action had not been complied with, and the incestuous person himself was resisting the apostle's authority. Timothy returned to Ephesus, where he informed Paul of this state of affairs. The apostle then made his second and 'painful visit' to Corinth (2 Cor. 2:1), during which he expected to resolve the problem with the support of the church. However, the incestuous man, far from being brought to repentance or intimidated, mounted a personal attack against Paul and questioned his credentials and authority. The church members did not come to Paul's defence as he expected they would (2 Cor. 2:3).

This questioning of Paul's credentials and authority was not done in a vacuum. Even at the time of writing 1 Corinthians, Paul was aware that his apostolate was being criticized in Corinth (1 Cor. 4:3–5), and that questions were being asked by some who felt an antipathy towards him (1 Cor. 4:18–21). It is possible that Peter may have visited Corinth, and afterwards there emerged a Cephas party (1 Cor. 1:12). While it is unlikely that Peter himself would have raised questions about Paul's credentials, the Cephas party, which claimed him as their patron, may have done so. However, there seem to have been others lurking in the background as well, those to whom Paul refers later as peddlers of God's word (2 Cor. 2:17), whose underhand ways the apostle refused to imitate (2 Cor. 4:1–2). These people came to Corinth armed with letters of recommendation and criticized Paul's lack of the same (2 Cor. 3:1–3). While they would hardly support the incestuous man in his sin, their own muffled criticisms of Paul could have been used by the offender as extra ammunition when he mounted his attack against him. If this was the case, and admittedly this is speculative, we would have a clue as to the reason why the Corinthian church as a whole did not spring to Paul's defence. Though they may have agreed with Paul that the offender ought to be disciplined, they were at the same time dealing with questions about his authority, questions raised by others but taken up and used against Paul by the offender. While the members of the church were dealing with these questions, they would have felt pulled in two directions, and so were rendered powerless in the situation with the result that they did not support Paul as he expected they would have done (2 Cor. 2:3).

Paul thus found himself without support in Corinth, and was forced to withdraw without resolving the problem, but not before uttering dire warnings of the action he intended to take subsequently (2 Cor. 13:2). He returned to Ephesus

where he wrote the ‘severe letter’ ‘out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears’ (2 Cor. 2:4). It was a letter Paul regretted writing, and which caused much grief to the Corinthian believers. In it he apparently rebuked them sternly for their failure to act against the offender and support their apostle (2 Cor. 2:1–4; 7:8). However, the letter had the desired effect. The Corinthians were stung into action. They took vigorous disciplinary action against the offender. He was excommunicated and handed over to Satan, as Paul had demanded (1 Cor. 5:3–5, 13; cf. 2 Cor. 7:6–13). When he heard from Titus that the offender had been disciplined by the Corinthians, he was relieved and overjoyed because his confidence in them had been vindicated (2 Cor. 7:6–16). At the same time he became concerned for the well-being of the one who had been disciplined and had now presumably repented, fearing that he might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Paul was also concerned for the well-being of the church, fearing it may be disadvantaged by Satan through the permanent loss of one of its members. He therefore urged members of the church to reaffirm their love for the repentant offender and comfort him (2 Cor. 2:6–11).

In support of the suggested identification of the offender as the incestuous person of 1 Corinthians 5:1 *who was also guilty of a personal attack against Paul*, several points can be made. First, it is clear that the general problem of immorality persisted throughout the period of Paul’s written communications with Corinth. The ‘previous letter’ contained an exhortation to avoid contact with immoral people, by which Paul meant ‘anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler’ (1 Cor. 5:9–11). When the apostle wrote 1 Corinthians, the problem of immorality was manifesting itself in both the behaviour of the incestuous man (1 Cor. 5:1–2) and the use of prostitutes by others (1 Cor. 6:15–20). When Paul wrote his final letter to Corinth, he was still concerned about the problem of immorality in the church (2 Cor. 12:21). The persistence of the general problem of immorality in the church before and after the mention of the sin of incest shows that the atmosphere was present in which the incestuous person could have opposed rather than submitted immediately to the discipline Paul demanded.

Second, it needs to be realized that there are *no* indications that 1 Corinthians, which contained the demand for disciplinary action against the offender, actually persuaded the church to carry through that action.

Third, it is possible, therefore, that when Timothy arrived in Corinth, he faced an unrepentant offender and a church still hesitating to carry through the action Paul had demanded.

Fourth, 2 Corinthians 2:5 describes the offender as the one who has grieved

‘all of you’. In 1 Corinthians 5:6–8, where Paul speaks about the effect of the incestuous man’s sin, he reminds his audience that ‘a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough’. It was impossible for the church to allow the continued presence of the incestuous person in its midst without all its members being harmed as well. There is, then, this possible link between the leavening of the whole batch of dough which Paul warned of in 1 Corinthians 5:6–8 and the grief caused to all members of the church by the offender spoken of in 2 Corinthians 2:5.

Fifth, once Paul knew the church had taken severe disciplinary action against the offender, he became concerned that the individual involved might be overwhelmed with excessive sorrow. Therefore, he urged the Corinthians to reaffirm their love for the offender, forgiving and comforting him, ‘in order that Satan might not outwit us’ (2 Cor. 2:6–11). It will be remembered that in Paul’s original demand for disciplinary action he called upon the church to ‘hand this man over to Satan’. There is here another possible link, suggesting that the offender of 2 Corinthians 2:5; 7:12 is to be identified with the incestuous man of 1 Corinthians 5:1. Paul, who had demanded that the man be handed over to Satan in the first place, now, presumably seeing that he had been brought to repentance, wanted him forgiven and restored so that at the end of the day ‘Satan might not outwit us’ (by depriving the church of one of its members indefinitely).

b. The opposition reflected in chapters 10 – 13

The second phase of the opposition involved a personal attack upon Paul by those whom he called ‘false apostles’, and this is the opposition that Paul confronts in chapters 10 – 13. As noted above, the influence of these men may have already been felt at the time he wrote 1 Corinthians, and their muffled criticisms may have provided some of the ammunition used against Paul by the incestuous offender who attacked him during his ‘painful visit’. If so, we can understand why, in responding to the challenges of this man, Paul had to defend the fact that he carried no letters of recommendation as others did (2 Cor. 3:1–3). Also, knowing that the ‘false apostles’ laid great store by their Jewish connections (2 Cor. 11:22), we can understand the significance of Paul’s comparison and contrast between the glory of ministry under the new covenant and that under the Mosaic covenant (2 Cor. 3:4–18).

i. The ‘false apostles’ and their attack against Paul

The nature of the attack made by the ‘false apostles’ upon Paul is reflected in his

spirited response to it in chapters 10 – 13. They accused him of being ‘bold’ when absent and at a safe distance, but of being ‘timid’ when present (10:1). They said he ‘lived by the standards of this world’ (10:2), and that he used to ‘frighten’ people with his letters from afar, ‘but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing’ (10:9–10). They criticized Paul’s apostolate, saying it was inferior to their own, because he was unskilled in speaking (11:5–6) and, they implied, his ministry lacked apostolic signs (12:11–12). And, perhaps most cruelly, they attacked Paul’s personal integrity in financial matters. They insinuated that his refusal to accept financial support from the Corinthians (as they themselves obviously did) was evidence that Paul did not really love them (11:7–11) and that it was a smokescreen behind which he intended to extract an even greater amount for himself through the collection ploy (12:14–18).

What have just been listed are criticisms levelled against Paul by the ‘false apostles’. However, it is important that we also try to understand what these people stood for positively, so that we can fill in as far as possible the background to what the apostle says in chapters 10 – 13. Once again we are dependent upon hints available in Paul’s response to them which are found in chapters 10 – 13. From his response, we can deduce the following. They were proud of belonging to Christ (10:7). They preached a gospel different from the one Paul preached (11:4) and prided themselves on their speaking ability (11:6). They presented themselves in Corinth (perhaps only initially) as those who carried out their mission on the same basis as Paul did (11:12). They adopted an authoritarian stance and succeeded in imposing their authority upon the church (11:19–21). They were proud of their Jewish ancestry and that they were servants of Christ (11:21–23). They stressed the importance of having experienced visions and revelations from God (12:1), as well as the performance of signs and wonders, which they regarded as the marks of a true apostle (12:11–13). They also emphasized the need for evidence that Christ spoke through anyone who claimed to be his emissary, evidence that consisted of displays of power (13:3).

From the various hints provided in chapters 10 – 13, it emerges that Paul’s opponents were Jewish Christians who were proud of their Jewish credentials and that they were servants of Christ. If, as suggested above (p. 60), the demand for letters of recommendation to which Paul responded in 3:1–3 emanated originally from these men, it seems reasonable to assume that they themselves bore such commendatory letters, most likely from Jerusalem. If so, they would have had a natural affinity with the Cephas party, which had already formed in Corinth and which would have favoured the Jewish form of Christianity

associated with Peter.

As far as Paul was concerned, these men were not true apostles of Christ at all. In fact, he accused them of preaching another Jesus and a different gospel (11:4), and this reminds us of what he wrote in the letter to the Galatians when attacking others who proclaimed another gospel (Gal. 1:6–9). In that case, Paul's opponents were Judaizers, a name coined to describe Jewish Christians who sought to impose upon Gentile converts the obligation to obey the Jewish law and to make them submit to circumcision. That Paul's opponents in Corinth were also Judaizers is a view adopted by a number of scholars.[48] However, there are no indications in 2 Corinthians that Paul's opponents in Corinth were trying to impose circumcision and submission to the Mosaic law as did the Judaizers in Galatia.

There are, in addition to the demand for submission to the law and circumcision, other significant differences between the Judaizers of the Galatian letter and the opponents Paul confronts in chapters 10 – 13. Paul's Corinthian opponents laid great stress upon rhetorical skills (11:5–6), not something predicated of the Jerusalem hierarchy (Acts 4:13), nor presumably of the Judaizers who represented them. In addition, the 'false apostles' at Corinth stressed the importance of visions and revelations (12:1), displays of power to prove that Christ spoke through them (13:3), and the so-called apostolic signs (12:11–13). These things also, as far as we know, did not feature as part of the Judaizers' ministry. In the Hellenistic world there was great emphasis upon the importance of rhetorical skills and a fascination with wonder-workers who sought to demonstrate their validity by appeals to visions and revelations (cf. Col. 2:18) and by the performance of mighty works (cf. Acts 8:9–13). Perhaps the Jewish Christian opposition to Paul in Corinth had borrowed something from the Hellenistic world, or even accommodated their approach to the Corinthian outlook. It is clear from 1 Corinthians that the believers in Corinth were fascinated by such things and needed to be warned by Paul against placing too much importance upon them (1 Cor. 1:5; 4:8–10; 13:1–2).

It would seem, then, that Paul's opponents were either Jewish Christians who had themselves been influenced by exposure to the Hellenistic world and had incorporated into their own understanding of apostleship certain Hellenistic ideas, or that they were Jewish Christians from the mother church in Jerusalem who had accommodated themselves to ideas prevalent among the Corinthians so as to more easily influence the latter against Paul.[49]

ii. 'False apostles' and 'super-apostles'

Up until this point in the discussion we have assumed that Paul has only one group in mind throughout chapters 10 – 13, where he attacks his opponents and compares and contrasts himself with them. Thus it has been assumed that those whom Paul calls ‘false apostles’ (11:12–15) and those to whom he refers as ‘super-apostles’ (11:5; 12:11) are one and the same. However, not all commentators agree with this assumption. Barrett argues that the expression ‘false apostles’ refers to Paul’s opponents active in the church in Corinth, but the expression ‘super-apostles’ does not. The latter denotes the leadership of the Jerusalem church, the Jerusalem apostles including Peter. Even though Paul admits no inferiority vis-à-vis these ‘super-apostles’, he will not criticize or attack them as he does the ‘false apostles’.[50]

One positive feature of this view is that it makes it possible for us to see parallels between the problems Paul was confronting in Corinth and those he faced in Galatia. Paul’s converts in Galatia were troubled by Judaizers who demanded that Gentile converts take upon themselves the yoke of the law and submit to circumcision. At the time when this issue was being debated in the early church, things were made more difficult by Peter’s ambivalence in Antioch (Gal. 2:11–21). If Paul’s opponents in Corinth were appealing to the example and teaching of the ‘super-apostles’ including Peter, then Paul would have been caught on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, he needed to attack the views advocated by his opponents, but on the other hand, he would be reticent to criticize Peter or the other ‘super-apostles’, for they were the ‘pillars’ of the Jerusalem church who had recognized the validity of his mission and gospel, and given to him the right hand of fellowship (Gal. 2:1–10). Thus Paul, though forced to claim that he was in no way inferior to the ‘super-apostles’ so that he could strengthen his position against those who were appealing to them against him, refused to criticize or attack them as he did the ‘false apostles’.

While this view which distinguishes ‘false apostles’ and ‘super-apostles’ in chapters 10 – 13 is quite attractive, there are a couple of factors which militate against it. First, in 11:1–6, where Paul first uses the term ‘super-apostles’, he does so in the context of reproaching the Corinthians for receiving a different Jesus, a different spirit and a different gospel. It is unlikely that Paul would so describe the content of the preaching of the ‘pillars’ of the Jerusalem church, for he and they had reached an accord recognizing the gospel they each proclaimed, as well as the mission areas for which they were each primarily responsible (Gal. 2:6–9). Second, in the same context (11:1–6) Paul concedes that he may be less skilled in speaking than the super-apostles, but claims that he is in no way deficient in knowledge. It is highly unlikely that Paul would need to concede any inferiority in speaking ability when comparing himself with the ‘super-apostles’

if the latter are to be identified with the Jerusalem apostles. None of them had received a formal education as far as we know (cf. Acts 4:13), whereas Paul, though possibly not highly skilled in the rhetoric of the Hellenistic world, had had the advantage of training under a famous Jewish rabbi (Acts 22:3). Therefore, when Paul concedes inferiority to the 'super-apostles' in speaking ability, he cannot be referring to the Jerusalem apostles. It is more likely he is referring to his opponents in Corinth, men who had gained some skill in the rhetorical arts as taught in the Hellenistic world.

Seeing that Paul connects the 'super-apostles' with a different gospel, a different Jesus and a different spirit, and concedes inferiority to them in speaking ability, the identification of the 'super-apostles' with the Jerusalem 'pillars' is unlikely. It is better to regard 'super-apostles' and 'false apostles' as two designations for the one group, those whom Paul opposed in Corinth and whom he accused of leading his converts astray from their devotion to Christ (11:2–6).[51]

iii. Theological differences between Paul and the 'false apostles'

If we bring together the scraps of information which Paul provides about the teaching of his opponents, two major areas of theological disagreement between these men and the apostle Paul may be discerned. The first relates to the gospel itself, and we have seen that Paul regards theirs as a different gospel in which a different Jesus is preached and by which a different spirit is received (see Introduction, pp. 35, 61, and Commentary, pp. 241–243).

The second area of disagreement relates to the whole matter of apostleship and the criteria for evaluating claims people make to be apostles of Christ. Such criteria were necessary, for the title 'apostle' was claimed by individuals other than the Twelve in the early church, and Christians needed to be able to evaluate their claims. Paul's opponents, at least as far as Paul lets us see them through his letter, embraced what may be called a triumphalist viewpoint. They expected apostles to be personally impressive, have a commanding presence and good speaking ability (10:10). They will be authoritative in their dealings with those under them (11:20–21). Their claims to be apostles will rest upon visions and revelations (12:1), and will be supported by the performance of apostolic signs (12:11–13). They will act as spokespersons of Christ and be known as such because of the manifestations of power in their ministry (13:2–4). And on the more formal side, apostles of Christ will have proper Jewish connections (11:21–22) and bear letters of recommendation (3:1), most likely from the mother church in Jerusalem.

For the sake of the Corinthian church, Paul felt obliged to answer his opponents according to their folly. So he points out that his own ministry does not lack commendation (3:2–3), nor does he lack knowledge (11:6) or authority (11:20–21; 13:10). He points out also that he has experienced visions and revelations (12:1–5), that he does perform the signs of an apostle (12:11–13) and that he can show evidence that Christ speaks through him (13:3–4). However, it is patently clear that Paul rejects this whole approach to evaluating claims to apostleship, and the triumphalist criteria involved. For him, the marks of true apostolic ministry are its fruit (3:2–3), the character in which it is carried out, that is, in accordance with the meekness and gentleness of Christ (10:1–2), and the sharing of Christ's sufferings (4:8–12; 11:23–28). He who preaches the gospel of Christ crucified as Lord will exemplify in his ministry both the weakness in which Christ was crucified and the power exercised by Christ as the risen Lord (4:7–12; 12:9–10; 13:3–4).

We have here, then, two quite different ways of evaluating authentic ministry. The one is triumphalist and stresses the manifestations of power and authority, without any place for weakness and suffering. The other, while also affirming the importance of power and authority, insists that these do not inhere in the apostle, but depend wholly upon the activity of God, who chooses to let that power rest upon his servants in their weakness and to manifest his power through the folly of gospel preaching (12:9–10; 1 Cor. 1:17 – 2:5).

5. Theology and major themes

a. God the Father

Paul depicts God as ‘the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1:3; 11:31), ‘the Father of compassion’ (1:3; cf. 4:1), ‘the God of all comfort’ (1:3; cf. 1:4; 7:6) and the God who loves a cheerful giver (9:7). He further depicts the nature of God by describing what he does: he raises the dead (1:9); he said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness’ (4:6); he causes believers to ‘stand firm’ in Christ and anoints them, giving them his Spirit as a ‘deposit’, so guaranteeing their full salvation (1:21–22). He leads Paul in triumphal procession and through him spreads abroad the aroma of the knowledge of Christ (2:14), and enables his servants to become competent ministers of the new covenant (3:5). He shines into people’s hearts to give ‘the light of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ’ (4:6) and he gives believers his Spirit guaranteeing their resurrection to immortality (5:5). He brings in the ‘new creation’ (5:17), he is the primary agent of the reconciliation effected through Christ (5:18–19) and he committed to Paul the message of reconciliation, thus making his appeal to humanity to be reconciled to him through the apostle’s ministry (5:19–20). He comforts the downcast (7:6), he motivates believers to care for one another (8:16), he provides his people with blessings in abundance so that they can contribute to fellow believers in need (9:8), he assigns to his servants the ‘sphere of service’ in which they are to exercise their ministry (10:13), and above all he gave the ‘indescribable gift’, a reference to the giving of his Son (9:15; cf. 8:9).

b. Jesus Christ

Paul refers to Jesus as the Son of God (1:19), the image of God (4:4) and the one in whose face the glory of God is displayed (4:6). He refers to Christ’s humility and gentleness (10:1) and his generosity in becoming ‘poor’ so that believers might become ‘rich’ (8:9). He speaks of Christ authoring a ‘letter’ of recommendation for his ministry, a letter inscribed with the Spirit in human hearts through the apostle’s own ministry (3:3). He says the life of Jesus is revealed in his body (4:10–11), that the power of Christ rests on him, making him strong despite his weakness (12:9–10), that the love of Christ compels him (5:14) and that Christ speaks through him (13:3). He teaches that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (5:19), that because Christ has died for all, God regards them all as having died (5:14), and that all must appear before

the judgment seat of Christ to receive recompense for what they have done ‘while in the body’ (5:10).

c. The Holy Spirit

The Spirit is given by God to believers as a guarantee of their full salvation when they will be clothed with immortality (1:21–22; 5:4–5). It is by means of the Spirit that Christ authors a letter of recommendation for Paul’s ministry, a letter inscribed in human hearts through the apostle’s own ministry (3:3). The work of the Spirit comes to the fore in Paul’s treatment of ministry under the new covenant: the Spirit gives life, in contrast to the ‘letter’ that kills (3:6), and the ministry of the Spirit that brings righteousness is attended with greater glory than ministry under the old covenant that brings condemnation (3:8–10). Under the new covenant people experience the Lord as the Spirit, and where the Spirit is the operative power there is freedom (3:17). When people turn to the Lord, the veil over their minds is removed so that they see the glory of the Lord and by the Spirit they are transformed from one degree of glory to another (3:18).

d. The atonement

Paul does not expound a doctrine of atonement in 2 Corinthians (as e.g. he does in Rom. 3:21–26), but there are a couple of places where he makes significant statements about it while dealing with other matters. In 5:14 he says, ‘we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.’ This is best understood to mean that Christ died ‘instead of all’, in a way similar to his statement in Galatians 3:13: ‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.’ In that context, Christ clearly endures God’s curse instead of us, as there was absolutely no reason for him to endure God’s curse otherwise. It is most likely, therefore, that in 5:14 the words ‘one died for all’ mean that Christ died instead of the ‘all’. This interpretation preserves the logical connection with what follows: ‘therefore all died’. If Christ did not die instead of the ‘all’, then the ‘all’ cannot be said to have died.

In 5:21 Paul writes, ‘God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.’ Various interpretations have been suggested for the statement that God ‘made him . . . to be sin’, and these are discussed in the commentary on 5:21 below. Our preferred interpretation is that Christ was made to bear the consequences of our sins. This is supported by the fact that in Galatians 3:13 Paul interprets the work of Christ in terms of his bearing the consequences of our sins: ‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the

law by becoming a curse for us.' This interpretation is further supported by the fact that 'God made him who had no sin to be sin' (v. 21a) is balanced in antithetical parallelism by the words, 'so that in him we might become the righteousness of God'. The former must be construed in such a way that the latter is understood as its antithetical counterpart. If becoming the righteousness of God means God has adjudicated in our favour and put us in a right relationship with himself, then to become sin, being the antithetical counterpart of this, will mean that God adjudicated against Christ because he took upon himself the burden of our sins (cf. Isa. 53:4–6, 12), with the result that his relationship with God was (momentarily, but terribly and beyond all human comprehension) severed (see fuller discussion in the commentary on 5:21 below).

A final but oblique reference to the atonement is found in 8:9: 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.' This has often been interpreted in relation to his incarnation, but it should probably also be seen as an allusion to his death providing salvation for those who believe.

e. Reconciliation

Paul insists that in the matter of reconciliation it was God himself, not humanity, who took the initiative: '*God* was reconciling the world to himself in Christ' (5:19). It is important to note that there is no suggestion that Christ is the gracious one who had to overcome unwillingness on God's part to be reconciled with sinful humanity. God initiated and effected the reconciliation through Christ. This he did 'not counting people's sins against them' (5:19), something he could only do because he 'made him [Christ] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (5:21).

While God took the initiative in reconciling the world to himself, for it to be effective in human experience people must respond. Accordingly, Paul says God entrusted him with the message of reconciliation, and through him God is making his appeal to people to be reconciled to God (5:19–20). Paul's involvement in the ministry of reconciliation, while primarily expressed in his proclamation of the gospel, was also conveyed in the efforts he made to bring about reconciliation when relationships between himself and his converts were strained (6:11–13; 7:2–3) and when he urged them to reinstate the presumably repentant offender who had caused hurt and distress to both Paul and the Corinthian congregation (2:3–11).

f. Personal eschatology

In 4:14 Paul speaks with assurance of the resurrection: ‘We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself.’ But because of the wear and tear upon his body as a result of his present sufferings, Paul says he was ‘wasting away’, but adds, ‘our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all’ (4:16–17). Then, speaking metaphorically of his present body being replaced by a future resurrection body, he says, ‘For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands’ (5:1). He makes it plain that his first preference is not to be ‘unclothed’ (i.e. to be without a body), but rather he longs to be ‘clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling’ (i.e. to have a resurrection body, 5:4), and his confidence that he will experience this blessed state is expressed when he says, ‘the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come’ (5:5). Then, apparently realizing that he might die before the general resurrection, he speaks of his present existence and an intermediate existence prior to the resurrection: ‘For we live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord’ (5:7–8). Of course, his ultimate desire is to be away from his (mortal) body and present with the Lord in his resurrection body. Ever the one who seeks to be a faithful servant of God, he adds, ‘So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it’ (5:9).

g. Ministry

In 2 Corinthians we have a rich source of information of both Paul’s own ministry experience and practice and what he regarded as the marks of authentic ministry.

i. Paul’s ministry experience and practice

Paul received consolation from God in the midst of his afflictions and he believed this was intended in part to enable him to console others experiencing affliction (1:3–7). He claimed to carry out his ministry with ‘integrity and godly sincerity’, eschewing earthly wisdom and shameful practices that he might have used to impress people (1:12; 4:2; 7:2). He sought rather to commend himself to his hearers’ consciences in the sight of God by ‘setting forth the truth plainly’ and being careful not to put obstacles in anyone’s way (4:2; 6:3–10). He resisted

the temptation to ‘lord it over’ the faith of his converts, seeing his role rather as working for their joy (1:24). He was open in declaring the depth of his love for them and how his heart was wide open towards them (2:4; 6:11; 7:3). The apostle was willing to exercise ‘tough love’ with his converts, even causing them grief when necessary with a strongly worded letter, but that in the end had the positive effect of leading them to repentance (7:8–9). An important part of Paul’s ministry was initiating a collection among the Gentile churches for the relief of members of the Jewish church in Jerusalem, something that would also enhance the bonds of fellowship between these churches (8 – 9).

In spite of the many afflictions and disappointments he experienced, Paul was confident that God was leading him in ‘triumphal procession’ and spreading abroad through him the ‘aroma of Christ’, an aroma of life to those being saved and an aroma of death to those who are perishing (2:14–15). To be faithful in this ministry was a weighty responsibility. He had to reject the temptation to ‘peddle the word of God for profit’ (2:17), and his competency to carry out such a ministry came from God (3:5–6). It was a ministry of the new covenant, one that he contrasted with the ministry of Moses under the old covenant. It was a ministry of the Spirit not the letter, it was accompanied with greater glory than Moses’ ministry, it was a ministry that brings righteousness not condemnation, and one that enabled him to act with much greater boldness than Moses had done (3:6–13). Paul did not proclaim himself, but ‘Jesus Christ as Lord’ and himself as a ‘servant’ of those he ministered to for Jesus’ sake (4:5). In this ministry he says he was ‘hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed . . . always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you’ (4:8–12). Two things motivated Paul: a sense of accountability before the judgment seat of Christ (5:9–11) and a deep awareness of the love of Christ who died for all so that those who live might live for him (5:14–15).

Employing military metaphors, Paul claimed that in his ministry he did ‘not wage war as the world does’, that is, he did not use ‘worldly wisdom’ or practise cunning by inappropriate use of rhetorical techniques or falsify God’s word in order to manipulate people. Instead, as he clearly proclaimed and defended the gospel, his ‘weapons’ had ‘divine power’ and were aimed at demolishing ‘arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God’ so as to ‘take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ’ (10:3–5). He kept within the ‘sphere of service’ assigned to him by God and had a desire to extend his work into areas as yet untouched by other missionaries (10:13–16).

Paul spoke of his pastoral responsibilities for the Corinthian believers using

betrothal/marriage imagery. Through his proclamation of the gospel and their response to it, he betrothed them, as it were, ‘to one husband’, to present them ‘as a pure virgin’ to Christ. Thereafter he felt responsible to ensure their thoughts would not be ‘led astray from [their] sincere and pure devotion to Christ’ as a result of the machinations of Satan operating through the false apostles who preached a different gospel (11:2–4). At the risk of seeming to reject tokens of friendship and be seen not to love the Corinthian believers, Paul did not accept their offers of support while ministering among them, even though he accepted support from other churches at that time. This he did so that he might proclaim God’s good news ‘free of charge’ (11:7–12; 12:13–15).

ii. Marks of authentic ministry

Because of the criticisms of the false apostles, Paul had to argue for the authenticity of his ministry as an apostle and a true servant of Christ. They claimed his ministry lacked what they regarded as the marks of authentic ministry and had persuaded his converts to judge Paul in the light of their criteria. Paul responded by defending his ministry in the light of their criteria, even though he did not agree with them. In responding, he also showed that what he regarded as true marks of authenticity were present in his own ministry.

What the false opponents regarded as marks of authentic ministry can be inferred by a judicious ‘mirror-reading’ of 2 Corinthians: they emphasized the importance of letters of recommendation (3:1–3), impressive speaking ability and an imposing presence (10:10), Jewish ancestry (11:22), having experienced visions and revelations (12:1), the performance of signs and wonders (12:11–13) and displays of power as evidence that Christ spoke through one who claimed to be his emissary (13:3).

In response, Paul says he did not need to carry letters of recommendation to Corinth, because the very existence of the church there was testimony to the authenticity of his ministry. In fact, Christ himself was the author of a letter of recommendation for him, a letter ‘inscribed’ in the hearts of the Corinthian believers by the work of the Spirit through Paul’s own ministry (3:2–3). While conceding that he might be ‘untrained as a speaker’ and therefore could be regarded as inferior to the false apostles in this regard, he insisted that he was certainly not lacking in the far more important matter of knowledge, and this had been evident in his ministry among the Corinthian believers (11:5–6). As to the false apostles’ claims to Jewish ancestry, Paul insisted his own ancestry was just as impressive: ‘Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I.’ He claimed that he was a better servant

of Christ than they were (11:22–23). To support this claim he pointed to the many sufferings, afflictions and humiliations he had experienced in service of Christ. In all this, he was boasting not of his strengths, but his weakness (11:23–33). In the matter of visions and revelations, he says that, while there was nothing to be gained by it, he could point to revelatory experiences of a far more exalted nature than others might claim: he had been caught up into the third heaven, into paradise, and heard things no-one is permitted to repeat (12:1–4). But he immediately diverted attention away from these experiences to the thorn in the flesh that he was given to keep him from being too elated, and how the Lord would not remove it despite his repeated prayers, so that he might learn that God's power was made perfect in human weakness (12:8–9). As to the performance of signs and wonders, Paul reminded his converts that 'the marks of a true apostle' had been performed among them, 'signs, wonders and miracles', and they should have commended him rather than he having to commend himself (12:11–12). Finally, seeing they wanted proof that Christ was speaking through him, Paul told them he would not be lenient when he came next time. Just as Christ 'was crucified in weakness yet he lives by God's power', so while Paul was 'weak in him,' he says, 'by God's power we will live with him in our dealing with you' (13:2–4). Summing up, what Paul regarded as primary marks of authenticity were the fruit of his labours, the existence of his converts, and the coincidence of weakness and the power of God in his ministry, as was the case in the ministry of Christ. Far from his sufferings being regarded as something which invalidated his claim to apostleship, they were in fact legitimizing evidence (cf. Gal. 6:17).

h. The collection

In 2 Corinthians 8 – 9 Paul urges his converts to follow through on their earlier intention to contribute to the collection being taken up among Gentile churches to alleviate the hardships being experienced by Jewish believers in Jerusalem. It must be remembered that this collection was a one-off 'inter-church' event, and therefore caution should be exercised when applying Paul's teaching about it to regular Christian giving in the context of a local congregation. Nevertheless, there is much to learn from what the apostle had to say.

Paul regarded the call to participate in the collection as a test of the genuineness of people's love (8:8; 9:13), and when they rose to the occasion he recognized it as evidence of God's grace operating in their lives (8:1–5; 9:14). As a primary motivation for them to participate, he pointed to the example of Christ, who 'though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you

through his poverty might become rich' (8:9). In addition, Paul pointed out how humiliated both he and the Corinthians would be if they were not ready to contribute when those to whom he had boasted about their eagerness in the matter arrived in Corinth (9:1–5). He also spoke of how the bonds of affection between the Gentile churches and the Jewish church in Jerusalem would be strengthened by their gift and how this would result in much thanksgiving to God (9:11–14).

Paul made a point of emphasizing that his call to share in this ministry was advice, not a command (8:8). The Corinthians should not act under a sense of compulsion, but only as they had made up their own minds to do so, because 'God loves a cheerful giver' (9:7). He also made it clear that they were not being asked to do more than their resources allowed (8:12), nor to relieve others at the expense of undue pressure upon themselves, but only that their present relative abundance might assist those in need, so there might be 'equality' (8:13–15).

To encourage generosity, Paul reminded them that God is able to bless us so that we have enough for our needs and be able to help others in greater need (9:8–10). He also reminded them that in this matter, 'Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously' (9:6). Finally, Paul went to great lengths to ensure that the administration of the collection was above board, that all was done in a way that was right both in the sight of God and in the sight of others, by including representatives of the churches in the arrangements for its reception and conveyance (8:18–22).

i. Satan

In several places Paul speaks of the activities of Satan (also referred to as 'the god of this world' or 'the serpent'). Satan blinds the eyes of unbelievers 'so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ' (4:3–4). He 'masquerades as an angel of light' and in like manner, his servants, the false apostles, disguise themselves 'as apostles of Christ' and 'servants of righteousness' (11:13–15). He seeks to lead believers astray from their 'sincere and pure devotion to Christ' through the work of the false apostles who preach a different Jesus and 'a different gospel' which Paul's converts appeared to accept readily enough (11:3–4). He was allowed to afflict Paul with a 'thorn' in the flesh, but under God's sovereign authority this was used to prevent Paul from becoming too elated as a result of the exceptional revelations that were given to him by God (12:7). And when Paul prayed repeatedly that the thorn be removed, God apparently did not do so, but said to him that his grace was sufficient for him and that his power is made prefect in weakness (12:7–9).

ANALYSIS

1. PAUL'S RESPONSE TO A CRISIS RESOLVED (1:1 – 9:15)

A. Preface (1:1–11)

   i. Greeting (1:1–2)
   ii. Benediction (1:3–11)

B. The body of the response (1:12 – 7:16)

   i. Personal defence (1:12–24)

      a. General defence of integrity (1:12–14)
      b. Defence of changed travel plans (1:15–24)

   ii. The 'severe letter': its purpose and aftermath (2:1–13)

      a. The purpose of the 'severe letter' (2:1–4)
      b. Forgiveness for the offender (2:5–11)
      c. Waiting for Titus (2:12–13)

   iii. Competency in ministry (2:14 – 4:6)

      a. Led in triumph (2:14–17)
      b. Letters of recommendation (3:1–3)
      c. Ministers of the new covenant (3:4–6)
      d. The greater glory of new covenant ministry (3:7–11)
      e. The greater boldness of new covenant ministers (3:12–18)
      f. The conduct of Paul's ministry (4:1–6)

   iv. Present suffering and future glory (4:7 – 5:10)

      a. Treasure in jars of clay (4:7–15)
      b. We do not lose heart (4:16–18)

c. The heavenly dwelling (5:1–10)

v. The ministry of reconciliation (5:11–21)

a. Defence of his ministry (5:11–15)
b. God's reconciling act in Christ (5:16–21)

vi. Reconciliation practised (6:1 – 7:4)

a. An appeal for reconciliation (6:1–13)
b. A call for holy living (6:14 – 7:1)
c. A further appeal for reconciliation (7:2–4)

vii. Paul's joy after a crisis resolved (7:5–16)

a. Paul's relief when Titus arrived (7:5–7)
b. The 'severe letter' and its effects (7:8–13a)
c. Titus' happiness and affection for the Corinthians (7:13b–16)

C. The matter of the collection (8:1 – 9:15)

i. The example of the Macedonians (8:1–6)
ii. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to finish what they began (8:7–15)
iii. Commendation of those who will receive the collection (8:16–24)
iv. Be prepared and avoid humiliation (9:1–5)
v. An exhortation to be generous (9:6–15)

2. PAUL RESPONDS TO A NEW CRISIS (10:1 – 13:14)

A. Paul's exercise of apostolic authority (10:1–18)

   i. Paul responds to criticisms (10:1–11)
   ii. Boasting within proper limits (10:12–18)

B. Paul's plea for tolerance and condemnation of his opponents (11:1–15)

   i. The Corinthians' gullibility (11:1–6)
   ii. The matter of financial remuneration (11:7–15)

C. The fool's speech (11:16 – 12:13)

   i. Accept me as a fool (11:16–21a)
   ii. Paul's Jewish ancestry (11:21b–22)
   iii. A better servant of Christ (11:23–33)
   iv. Visions and revelations (12:1–10)
   v. Signs of an apostle (12:11–13)

D. Paul's planned third visit (12:14 – 13:10)

   i. Paul refuses to burden the Corinthians (12:14–18)
   ii. The real purpose of Paul's fool's speech (12:19–21)
   iii. Paul threatens strong action on his third visit (13:1–10)

E. Conclusion (13:11–14)

   i. Final exhortations and encouragement (13:11–13)
   ii. Benediction (13:14)

COMMENTARY

1. PAUL'S RESPONSE TO A CRISIS RESOLVED (1:1 – 9:15)

A. Preface (1:1–11)

Context

Ancient Greek letters generally opened with an introductory greeting, followed by a short expression of praise and prayerful concern or thanksgiving for the recipients. Paul's letters usually begin in the same way. However, this letter is unusual in that what follows the greeting is a benediction in which he blesses God, not for grace evident in the lives of his audience, as is the case in most of his other letters, but rather for the comfort he and his colleagues experienced in the midst of great affliction. Paul tells his audience that his afflictions are for their comfort and salvation, and that he hopes that as they share in the suffering, they will share in the comfort he has experienced as well. It has been suggested that Paul's failure to bless God for the progress of his audience's faith reflects the strained relationship between them, though this is by no means certain. In fact, while Paul sees himself as a 'broker' of God's comfort to the Corinthians, he also looks to them to be 'brokers' of God's grace to him through their prayers.[52]

Despite the unusual nature of this section, it performs the usual function, that is, to establish rapport with the audience and foreshadow major themes which are taken up later in the letter, including those of affliction and comfort, life and death, and the purpose of apostolic sufferings (4:7–18; 6:3–10; 7:4–7; 11:23 – 12:10; 13:3–4).

Comment

i. Greeting (1:1–2)

Paul's opening words follow the formula found at the beginning of many ancient Greek letters: 'A to B, greeting'. But Paul has expanded the formula with words that emphasize his apostolic authority (which had been called into question at Corinth), and by the inclusion of specifically Christian sentiments dominated by references to God: 'by the will of God', 'the church of God' and 'God our Father'.

1. Paul describes himself as *an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God*. For Paul, an apostle was one who had seen the risen Lord (1 Cor. 15:3–10; Gal. 1:15–16), had been entrusted with the gospel by him (Gal. 1:11–12; 2:7), and in whose ministry the grace of God was evident (Rom. 1:5; 15:17–19; Gal. 2:8–9). It was on the Damascus road that Jesus Christ apprehended Paul, entrusted him with the gospel, and commissioned him 'to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake' (Rom. 1:5). While Paul describes himself as an apostle of Christ, he insists that he was so *by the will of God*. There is a distinct parallel between the authority that Paul claimed and that exercised by the Twelve whom Jesus sent on the Galilean mission. To them Jesus said, 'Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me' (Matt. 10:40). Paul's commission to be Christ's emissary was backed by the will of God the Father. Paul needed to emphasize his authority at the beginning of the letter because it had been called into question at Corinth.

Included with Paul in the opening greeting is *Timothy our brother*. According to Acts 16:1–3, it was at Lystra, while on his second missionary journey, that Paul met Timothy. He was the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father. Paul saw Timothy's potential and recruited him as a member of the small missionary band. During Paul's extended ministry in Ephesus on his third missionary journey, he sent Timothy to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17 mg.; 16:10), possibly as the bearer of 1 Corinthians. If Timothy was the bearer, we may assume he did in fact reach Corinth, though there is no explicit evidence that he did so, or of what transpired there if he did. What we do know is that Titus subsequently replaced Timothy as Paul's emissary to that city. In any case, by the time Paul dictated the opening greeting of 2 Corinthians, Timothy had rejoined him in Ephesus. That his name is included with Paul's in the address does not necessarily imply that Timothy was party to 'the vigorous and passionate interchange with the Corinthian believers that is the chief subject of the letter' (Barnett, p. 58), though it would seem Paul did not think Timothy was averse to being associated with the contents of the letter.

The letter is addressed *to the church of God in Corinth.* Paul frequently describes the churches as God's possession (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:16, 22;

15:9; 1 Thess. 2:14; 2 Thess. 1:4). This reminds us that, properly understood, Christian churches are more than just civil assemblies as commonly regarded in the ancient world, or merely groupings of like-minded individuals with a religious bent, but communities which belong to God and enjoy a special relationship with him. Because the church at Corinth was God's possession, any threat to its purity or its devotion to Christ was a matter of deep concern to the apostle (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16–17; 5:6–8; 2 Cor. 11:2). Some scholars argue that *the church of God in Corinth* implies that the worldwide yet heavenly church finds expression in local congregations of believers (cf. e.g. Harris, p. 133).

Included with the Corinthian church in the address are *all his holy people throughout Achaia*. The word translated *holy people* (*hagiois*) carries none of our twenty-first-century ideas, but reflects the fact that all believers are chosen and called by God to be his special possession.

The Roman province of Achaia covered the southern half of present-day Greece, and included, as well as Corinth, the port-city of Cenchreae and also Athens. However, what Paul means by the whole of Achaia may not be coextensive with this Roman province. In 1 Corinthians 16:15–18 he referred to the household of Stephanas (of Corinth) as the first converts in Achaia. We know Paul made converts in Athens (Acts 17:34) before coming to Corinth, so it would seem that the region he speaks of as Achaia may not include Athens,[53] and was therefore not coextensive with the Roman province so named. We know there were believers in Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1), and these are probably included among Paul's addressees.

2. In ancient Greek letters the word 'greeting' (*chairein*) was used in the introductory formula, 'A to B, greeting'. In New Testament epistolary contexts *chairein* is found only in Acts 15:23; 23:26 and James 1:1. In Paul's letters *chairein* is replaced by the uniquely Christian word *charis* (grace), and in most cases this is expanded, as here: *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. The word *charis* itself is used extensively in the LXX to translate the Hebrew word *hen*, which is often found in expressions such as 'to find favour in someone's eyes'. When people found favour, it usually meant that the one showing favour acted to meet their needs or deliver them from their troubles (cf. e.g. Gen. 6:8; 39:4; Exod. 12:36; Num. 11:15; 32:5; 1 Sam. 20:29; Jer. 31:2). When Paul speaks of God's grace, it often refers to God's love shown in the sending of his Son into the world to effect salvation for humankind (cf. Rom. 5:8; 2 Cor. 8:9), but that having been done, it is now shown by repeated gracious acts of love, help and provision (cf. Rom. 8:32). In the context of opening greetings, as here, Paul is invoking God's favour and loving care for his audience.

Peace translates *eirēnē*, which in classical Greek had a predominantly negative meaning (absence of hostility). But in the LXX *eirēnē* was used as an equivalent for the Hebrew word *shalōm* which carried positive notions of well-being, wholeness and prosperity enjoyed by those who were the recipients of God's grace (cf. Num. 6:22–27). It is this positive idea that *eirēnē* bore for New Testament writers and especially for Paul. The peace which Paul invoked for his audience is primarily that objective peace with God won through Christ's death (cf. Eph. 2:13–18), the realization of which produces in believers the subjective awareness of peace and well-being.

The source of the grace and peace which Paul invokes is *God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. This reflects Paul's understanding of God as Father – predominantly Father of Jesus Christ (cf. v. 3). Referring to Jesus as *Christ*, Paul uses the Greek word *Christos*, which translates the Hebrew word *māšîaḥ* ('messiah') and means 'anointed one'. In the Old Testament it refers most often to Israel's kings. In the New Testament Jesus is the Messiah, God's anointed one to bring salvation to his people (cf. Luke 4:16–21). When describing Jesus as *the Lord*, Paul employs the word *kyrios*, the term used for God (Yahweh) in the LXX, and by so doing he ascribes to Jesus a rank equal to that of God the Father, something that is evident when the following texts are compared:

> Turn to me and be saved,
> all you ends of the earth;
> for I am God, and there is no other.
> By myself I have sworn,
> my mouth has uttered in all integrity
> a word that will not be revoked:
> *before me every knee will bow*;
> by me every tongue will swear.
> *(Isa. 45:22–23, italics added)*

> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
> and gave him the name that is above every name,
> that *at the name of Jesus every knee should bow*,
> in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
> and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
> to the glory of God the Father.
> *(Phil. 2:9–11, italics added)*

While Paul uses the title 'Lord' (*kyrios*) for Jesus, indicating his true deity, he rarely uses the word 'God' (*theos*) for him, thus maintaining the distinction of persons in the Godhead, something that found expression later in the doctrine of the Trinity.

ii. Benediction (1:3–11)

3. *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Old Testament ascriptions of praise to God (e.g. Exod. 18:10; Ruth 4:14; 1 Kgs 1:48; Pss 28:6; 41:13) as well as first-century Jewish liturgies (e.g. the eighteen benedictions of the synagogue service) often began with the words 'Blessed be God', which closely parallel the words that open Paul's benediction here. Paul identifies himself with his audience when he describes God as the Father of *our* Lord Jesus Christ, and indicates that God, who in Old Testament times was known as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is now more perfectly revealed as *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* (cf. Gal. 4:4). As it stands, this description of God could be taken to mean that he whom Paul praises is not only the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, but also his God. In his incarnate state, Christ spoke of God the Father as 'my God' (cf. Matt. 27:46; John 20:17). All this suggests, as Harris (p. 142) notes, 'a duality of relation' between the Father and the Son.

When Paul describes God as *the Father of compassion*, he is again drawing upon his Jewish literary heritage in which the compassion/mercies of God are frequently celebrated and invoked (e.g. Neh. 9:19; Ps. 51:1; Isa. 63:7; Dan. 9:9; Wis. 9:1). However, Paul's appreciation of the compassion of God had been deepened by an understanding of God's saving action in Christ (Rom. 12:1 uses the expression 'God's mercy' to denote the great saving acts of God in Christ as described in Rom. 1 – 11). It is noteworthy that the apostle uses both the noun, 'mercy', and the verb, 'to have mercy', more than any other writer in the New Testament, and this reflects how important the mercy/compassion of God was to him.

The God of all comfort. With this added description of God, Paul introduces the main theme of the benediction and foreshadows much of what is to follow later in the letter. The word translated *comfort* (*paraklēsis*) belongs to an important word group which also includes *parakaleō* (to ask, exhort or to encourage, comfort) and *paraklētos* (advocate or comforter). Significantly, the use of *parakaleō* meaning 'to exhort', which was common in both the Greek and Hellenistic Jewish worlds, is almost completely absent from the LXX. On the other hand, the use of *parakaleō* meaning 'to comfort', which is rare in writings from the Greek and Hellenistic Jewish worlds, is common in the LXX. Outstanding examples of the use of this word in the LXX are found in Isaiah 40:1; 51:3; 61:2; 66:13, where the comfort spoken of is God's deliverance of his people.[54] The word *paraklēsis* is used by Luke in his Gospel when describing those who, like the aged Simeon, were 'waiting for the consolation/comfort [*paraklēsin*] of Israel' (Luke 2:25). The consolation expected was the

deliverance which God would provide through the coming of the Messiah. For Paul, the messianic age had already begun, albeit while the present age was still running its course, and it is the overlapping of the ages which accounts for the surprising coincidence of affliction and comfort of which he speaks in the present passage. The final consolation of the children of God awaits the day of the revelation of Jesus Christ in glory. But because the messianic age has been inaugurated by Jesus, Israel's Messiah, at his first coming, believers experience comfort in the present time as a foretaste of that final consolation.

4. In this verse Paul moves from the general description of the 'God of all comfort', to speak of him as the one *who comforts us in all our troubles*. There are two things we need to know. What were the troubles, and what was the nature of the comfort? It is fairly easy to identify what Paul meant by *troubles*. In 2 Corinthians itself there are a number of references to the troubles he experienced (1:8–10; 4:7–12; 11:23–29). These included the physical hardships, dangers, persecutions and anxieties he experienced as he carried out his apostolic commission.

The answer to the second question is not so easily determined. On the one hand, it is true that sometimes the comfort which Paul received was deliverance *out of* troubles. In verses 8–11 he speaks of deliverance *from* deadly peril, and in 7:5–7, where he describes the events immediately preceding the writing of this letter, he speaks of the release *from* anxiety experienced when Titus rejoined him in Macedonia. However, it is clear that Paul was not delivered from all persecution and affliction as a result of receiving comfort from God. The references to troubles in 2 Corinthians mentioned above are enough to show that. Nevertheless, it is obvious that up to the time of writing, God had delivered Paul out of all his troubles in the sense that none of them had proved fatal (vv. 8–11; cf. Acts 9:23–25; 14:19–20; 16:19–40).

On the other hand, it is equally true that Paul understood comfort in the sense of encouragement and strengthening in the midst of troubles. This is evident when in this verse he explains to his audience one of the positive aspects of Christian suffering. It is allowed *so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.* One human being cannot effect divine deliverance *from* troubles for another, but it is possible to share with another sufferer the encouragement received in the midst of one's own troubles. The testimony of God's grace in one's life is a forceful reminder to others of God's ability and willingness to provide the grace and strength they need. It is this that Paul has in mind when he says to his audience in verse 6 that the comfort he received was 'for your comfort'. (For unambiguous references to Paul's being assured that God's grace is sufficient to enable him to cope with

weakness, suffering and persecution, and being encouraged by God to stand firm in the face of opposition, see 12:8–10 and Acts 18:9–11 respectively.)

5. Because the old age still persists, Paul says *we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ.* The idea of Christ's sufferings being abundantly shared by Paul or believers has been variously interpreted: (a) Paul experienced suffering in his apostolic work just as Christ did in his work as Messiah.[55] (b) The sufferings experienced by Christ are extended so as to reach and be shared by others (Barrett, p. 61). (c) To share the sufferings of Christ is an allusion to Christian baptism (Thrall, pp. 107–110). (d) The sufferings of Christ experienced by believers are not special sufferings, but those experienced by humankind in general, but Christians experience and understand them in a new way (Bultmann, p. 24). (e) Paul's Jewish contemporaries expected the messianic age to be preceded and ushered in by a period of suffering. These were known as the messianic woes or birth pangs of the Messiah/Christ.[56] (f) 'Christ, who suffered personally on the cross, continues to suffer in his people' while the old age lasts (Bruce, p. 178; Harris, p. 146; cf. Acts 9:4–5).

Evaluating the various suggestions, we can say the view that to share the sufferings of Christ is related to Christian baptism has found few supporters. Bultmann's suggestion that it refers to humankind's experience in general lacks cogency in the light of the lists of affliction in 2 Corinthians, all of which are related to Paul's ministry as an apostle. On the other hand, some of the remaining suggestions could be combined. We could say that the sufferings of Christ refer to sufferings endured on behalf of Christ and experienced as a part of what the Jews called the birth pangs of the Messiah, while at the same time seeing some closer identification between Christ and the Christian sufferer. We could, for instance, say that while Christians endure the messianic woes for the sake of Christ, he at the same time suffers in his people (cf. Acts 9:4–5), or that united with Christ, they too fulfil the role of the Suffering Servant, and share his afflictions.[57]

As Paul shared abundantly in the sufferings of Christ because the old age is still running, so also his *comfort abounds through Christ* because the new messianic age had already begun (though it had not yet been fully brought in). As we have seen, this comfort can take the form of either deliverance *out of* affliction or encouragement *in the midst of* affliction which enables one to endure. This comfort can be mediated providentially through fellow believers, as was the case with Paul when Titus met him in Macedonia (7:6–7).

6. In verse 4 Paul indicated one positive outcome of the endurance of affliction: the ability to comfort others who are in affliction. Here in verse 6 he mentions a second positive aspect: *If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and*

salvation. There was a benefit to be received by the Corinthians as a result of Paul's afflictions. Through his preaching ministry, which was accompanied by many sufferings, Paul made it possible for the Corinthians to share in this comfort. The comfort was understood to include both the firstfruits of salvation which are experienced in the present time, and final salvation at the last day. For this reason, Paul could say his afflictions were for their comfort and salvation. Later in the letter he says, 'death is at work in us, but life is at work in you' (4:12).

Not only Paul's affliction, but also the comfort he received in the midst of it, was for the benefit of others: *if we are comforted, it is for your comfort*. What he stated in general terms in verse 4, he now applies specifically to the Corinthians. It is true to say (but of course it is not the whole truth) that Paul was comforted *for* his converts' comfort (i.e. that he might comfort them with the comfort he himself received from God). He goes on to describe this comfort as that *which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer*. Two aspects of this statement call for comment.

First, we must admit that we can only guess what the *same sufferings* of the Corinthians might have been. It is unlikely that they were the same as those experienced by Paul in the course of his apostolic mission, many of which he documents in 11:23–33. Allo (p. 10) may be right when he suggests that the sufferings the Corinthians experienced were the conflicts among families and relatives, the painful problems and the small everyday vexations which living out the gospel would give rise to in the midst of a town submerged in paganism and its licentiousness. If so, Paul is recognizing that the afflictions experienced by the Corinthians, while not of the same order as his apostolic sufferings, may still be said to be a sharing in the sufferings of Christ (cf. v. 5; Phil. 1:29–30).

Second, the *comfort* which the Corinthians received may not have been only the encouragement of Paul's testimony, but, perhaps awakened to the possibility by Paul's testimony, they recognized that they too could experience similar encouragement and strengthening grace from God. Calvin (p. 11) comments, 'Paul's personal consolation flowed out to the whole church, because from it believers learnt that the God who had sustained Paul, and renewed him in his time of necessity, would never fail them. Thus their salvation was advanced both by his sufferings and by his being comforted.'

7. Despite the tension in the relationship between Paul and his converts after the writing of 1 Corinthians (see Introduction, pp. 32–34), he concludes this benediction section with the affirmation: *And our hope for you is firm*. Up until and including the time of writing chapters 1 – 9, Paul had not lost confidence in his audience (cf. 2:3; 7:4). Even when he wrote the 'severe letter', he was still

sure that they would respond positively, and he had expressed to Titus his confidence that they would do so (7:12–16). Undergirding Paul's confidence in them was the knowledge that God himself encouraged and strengthened them: *because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.* Literally translated, the statement would read: 'knowing that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also of the comfort'. Two matters call for comment.

First, Paul speaks of 'the' sufferings and 'the' comfort, not 'our' sufferings and 'our' comfort. This suggests that the meaning is not that the Corinthians share the sufferings and comfort of Paul and his colleagues (as the NIV and NRSV translations imply), but rather that they all (Paul, his colleagues and the Corinthians) share 'the' sufferings (i.e. the sufferings of Christ; see commentary on v. 5) and 'the' comfort of God.

Second, in the original language the latter clause lacks a verb (lit. 'so also of the comfort'), and this has to be supplied in translation. It would be possible to provide a verb either in the present tense (as in the NIV) or the future tense (as in the NRSV). As the verb in the first clause is in the present tense (*you share*), it is better to supply a present tense verb in the second clause, as does the NIV. In fact, to do so provides a translation of the clause which fits better with the context, where Paul says that his hope for his audience is firm because he knows that as they are sharing 'the' sufferings, they are also sharing 'the' comfort.

8. In verse 7 Paul told his audience that as they share in 'the' sufferings, they also share in 'the' comfort. In this verse, introduced with the formula, *We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters*, he moves from the general to the particular and informs them *about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia*, an experience in which he was comforted by God. This experience was still fresh in Paul's memory. We lack sufficient information for a positive identification of what these Asian troubles were. A number of suggestions have been made (see 'Additional note: Paul's troubles in the province of Asia', below pp. 94–96), of which Jewish opposition stirred up against the apostle in Ephesus commends itself the most. In any case, encountering these troubles proved to be a devastating experience for Paul. He says, *We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.*

9. Adding a further explanation of the seriousness of the situation he faced, Paul says, *Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death* (lit. 'Indeed, we ourselves have received the sentence of death in ourselves'). This statement is difficult to interpret. Two factors are determinative: the meaning of the Greek word translated *sentence* (*apokrima*), and the significance of the words 'in

ourselves' (*en heautois*). Paul's reference to having received the sentence 'in ourselves' suggests that a subjective experience was involved. It was not so much a verdict pronounced by some external authority, but rather a perception in the heart and mind of the apostle himself. It follows then that the *sentence* (*apokrima*) was probably not one pronounced by some magistrate. It was more likely either the conclusion reached by Paul himself as he realized the dire straits he was in (so most commentators), or possibly the 'answer' (*apokrima* can mean either 'answer', 'decision' or 'verdict') given by God to the apostle's prayer about this situation.[58] In any case, he was in a hopeless situation, and humanly speaking there was no escape.

Paul says he experienced this despair so *that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead*. Reliance upon God rather than upon one's own ability is of fundamental importance in the Christian life, yet such an attitude does not come naturally. Very often, as in the case of the apostle Paul, facing impossible situations is necessary so that *we might not rely on ourselves but on God*. Paul perceived that one of the divine purposes involved when Christians are plunged into afflictions is to teach dependence on God.

For Paul, the deadly peril he faced in Asia must have been most distressing. Not only was the prospect of death involved ('we despaired of life itself', v. 8), but it appeared that his missionary career was to be cut short and urgent projects be left undone. The problems in Corinth had not been resolved, the collection for the saints at Jerusalem (cf. chs. 8 – 9) had not been completed, and his own ambition to evangelize the western part of the empire would not come to fruition (cf. Rom. 15.22–29). As Hughes (p. 20) observes, 'His feelings must have been not unlike those of Abraham when faced with the offering of Isaac . . . But he learnt also to have a faith similar to that of Abraham, who accounted "that God could even raise the dead" ' (cf. Rom. 4:17; Heb. 11:19). When Paul faced death, he learnt to rely upon God who raises the dead. He already knew God had raised Christ from the dead and would also raise up with Christ those who trust in him (1 Cor. 15:20–23; 1 Thess. 4:13–18). However, he seems to have learnt something more personal through his experience in Asia, that is, reliance upon God as the one who would raise him personally from the dead.

10. Paul testifies that God *delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again*. If the deadly peril from which Paul was delivered was a concerted attack by the Jews in Ephesus, then just possibly it was through the heroic intervention of Priscilla and Aquila that divine deliverance for Paul was effected. According to Acts 18:24 – 19:1, this couple was resident in Ephesus just before Paul arrived there on his third missionary journey, and probably continued to be there during his Ephesian ministry, though by the time Paul

wrote Romans the couple had moved to Rome (Rom. 16:3). If they were in Ephesus during his ministry there, and if our preferred identification of Paul's affliction in Asia is correct, then they would have been present when Paul faced his *deadly peril* in Ephesus. In Romans, Paul says, 'Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me' (Rom. 16:3–4). These words, written shortly after the writing of 2 Corinthians, could refer to the couple's part in Paul's deliverance, provided of course that the rest of the reconstruction suggested above is correct.

Having experienced a divine deliverance in the immediate past, Paul was encouraged to believe God would act on his behalf again: *On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us*. Paul was ever conscious of threats to his safety which emanated from his fellow countrymen (Rom. 15:30–31; 1 Thess. 2:14–16), and according to Acts there were to be yet further attempts made by them to kill him (Acts 20:3; 21:10–14; 23:12–15). Nevertheless, here Paul expresses his confidence that God will continue to deliver him. Some have suggested that this future deliverance which Paul anticipated was not from temporal dangers, but rather the final great deliverance of the last day. However, this is unlikely – the solicitation for his audience's prayers in the next verse suggests that deliverance from present perils was uppermost in Paul's mind.

11. *As you help us by your prayers*. Paul was convinced of the efficacy of intercessory prayer and repeatedly solicited the prayers of his friends (cf. Rom. 15:30–32; Eph. 6:18–20). But characteristic of the apostle was his concern not only for personal deliverance, but that *many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favour granted us in answer to the prayers of many.* He wanted thanks to be given to God who had granted him deliverance. The expression *the prayers of many* translates *pollōn prosōpōn* (lit. 'many faces'). This is probably a figurative use of *prosōpōn*, meaning simply 'persons' or 'people', and the text can accordingly be rendered: 'so many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us in answer to the prayers of many people'. In the present context of prayer, it is possible that *prosōpōn* was used to give the idea of people's faces upturned in prayer to God. Then the text could be rendered: 'so that thanksgiving be made through many people for the blessing granted to us because of many faces upturned in prayer'.

Additional note: Paul's troubles in the province of Asia

Numerous attempts have been made to identify Paul's troubles in Asia. While none of these can be regarded as conclusive due to lack of concrete evidence, nevertheless some commend themselves more than others:

(i) Denny suggests that it was the imminent danger of drowning implied in 2 Corinthians 11:25,[59] but this is unlikely, not being the sort of experience one would describe as occurring 'in Asia'.

(ii) A view adopted by several more recent commentators (e.g. Barrett, p. 64; Harris, pp. 170–172) is that the trouble Paul suffered was a grave illness. In favour of this view is the fact that it makes good sense of the perfect tense in 'we felt we had received [*eschēkamen*] the sentence of death' (v. 9). If Paul had been afflicted with a grave illness, then he might have felt as though he had received the sentence of death, and that it was only the life-giving power of God which could prevent that sentence from being carried out. However, the view is not without its problems. It entails a highly unusual (though not unique) use of the word translated 'trouble' (*thlipsis*), which is rarely used to describe illness. Also, if it is accepted that verses 8–11 are illustrative of the general truth of sharing comfort while sharing Christ's sufferings (vv. 5–7), it is unlikely that Paul's troubles 'in the province of Asia' were the result of a grave illness. Elsewhere when the apostle speaks of his troubles in such terms, they are best understood as persecutions and sufferings encountered in the course of his apostolic ministry (cf. Gal. 6:17; Col. 1:24).

(iii) Tertullian identified Paul's troubles in Asia with the fighting with 'wild beasts in Ephesus' mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:32[60] (so too Plummer, pp. 15–17). Against this it is objected that the way Paul speaks of his troubles in 2 Corinthians 1:8 ('We do not want you to be uninformed . . . about the troubles we experienced') suggests that this was the first time he had mentioned it to the Corinthians, and that it must therefore have occurred after the writing of 1 Corinthians. Further, the statement, 'I fought wild beasts in Ephesus', should not be taken literally, for that would imply a death sentence which he would not have survived.

(iv) It has been suggested that during an Ephesian imprisonment Paul had been exposed to 'such a deadly a peril' (Furnish, p. 123). While there is no explicit information about an Ephesian imprisonment of Paul in the New

Testament, some scholars argue that references Paul makes in verses 8–10 to despairing of life and deadly peril experienced in Asia imply an Ephesian imprisonment. Provided we accept the case for an Ephesian imprisonment, it is an attractive explanation of Paul's troubles in Asia, more especially if along with it we also accept an Ephesian provenance for Philippians, in which there are allusions to an imminent death anticipated by Paul (Phil. 1:20–23; 2:17–18).

(v) Other commentators (e.g. Calvin, p. 11; Lietzmann, p. 100) identify the troubles in Asia with the tumult in Ephesus following the charges brought against Paul by the guild of silversmiths led by Demetrius, a tumult in which the Jewish opposition to Paul was also mobilized (cf. Acts 19:23–41). Yates draws attention to the possible leading role played by Alexander in stirring up the Jews (Acts 19:33), for one by the same name is mentioned again in 2 Timothy 4:14 as having done Paul 'a great deal of harm'. Also, in the address to the Ephesian elders, Paul refers to the 'severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents' (Acts 20:19). Further, according to Acts, it was 'Jews from the province of Asia' who stirred up the crowd in the temple at Jerusalem so that rough hands were laid upon Paul (Acts 21:27). Had these Jews travelled from Asia to carry through in Jerusalem the persecution they had begun in Ephesus?[61] Against this view it is argued that according to Acts 19 Paul does not appear to have been in such deadly peril or despair of his life as 2 Corinthians 1:8–11 implies, having been dissuaded by the disciples and some of the provincial officials (Asiarchs) (Acts 19:30–31) from venturing into the theatre during the tumult. This is a weighty objection, but can be largely neutralized when it is recognized that the writing of Acts was probably some thirty years removed from the events described, whereas when Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 1:8–11 these events were still fresh in his memory.

It is the last of these suggestions that commends itself most to the present writer. However, as mentioned at the beginning of this note, none of the suggestions can be conclusive because of the paucity of concrete evidence available. While we cannot be certain about the nature of Paul's troubles, we may be sure about the lesson he wished to draw from it: the importance of dependence upon God who raises the dead.

Theology

The introductory greeting reflects a number of matters of theological significance. First, Paul was commissioned as an apostle by Jesus Christ (an allusion to his encounter with him on the Damascus road), and this commission was by the will of God, indicating that those who received Paul and his message

received Christ, and to receive Christ is to receive God who sent him (cf. Matt. 10:40). Second, the addressees are described as ‘the church of God that is in Corinth’, an indication that the church is not just a social organization, but is God’s possession in which God himself is pleased to be present (cf. 1 Cor. 14:24–25). Third, God, who was previously known as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is now described as ‘the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’. That Jesus Christ is named as ‘the Lord’ implies the closest possible identification with Yahweh. God revealed himself fully in Christ, as Paul says in Colossians 1:19: ‘For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.’ God is also described as ‘the Father of mercies’. In the Old Testament, God’s mercies were revealed to Israel when he rescued them from their enemies, but it was through his great saving acts in Christ that God’s mercies were fully revealed. Paul describes God as ‘the God of all comfort’, the one who delivers his people from their enemies and strengthens them in the midst of afflictions. God’s comfort finds its ultimate expression in the saving work of Christ.

A major theme of the benediction is consolation in the midst of troubles. Paul’s experience of afflictions and the consolation he received from God were intended to enable him to comfort others who were afflicted in similar ways. This can be true in the case of all God’s children. The sufferings that Paul and his converts experienced are described as sharing in the sufferings of Christ, by which is probably meant suffering endured on behalf of Christ, or perhaps a share in the ‘messianic woes’, or even an allusion to the fact that Christ suffers as his people suffer (cf. Acts 9:4–5). Paul’s afflictions were for the salvation of his converts, in the sense that he endured the inevitable sufferings involved in apostolic ministry so as to bring the message of salvation to them. It was a matter of ‘death is at work in us, but life is at work in you’.

As a result of his being exposed to ‘deadly peril’ and being in despair of life itself, believing he had, as it were, received ‘the sentence of death’, Paul came to understand another important reason why God allows his children to suffer. Through such experiences, he teaches them to rely not on themselves, but on God who raises the dead. Such reliance is learned more in the midst of affliction than when things are going well.

B. The body of the response (1:12 – 7:16)

This long section forms the body of Paul's response to news received from Titus that the 'severe letter' had been instrumental in resolving the crisis precipitated by the offender's attack on Paul during his 'painful visit' to Corinth. In his response he defends his personal integrity and provides reasons for changes to his travel plans (1:12–24), explains his purpose in writing the 'severe letter', calls for the reinstatement of the presumably repentant offender and tells of his disappointment at not meeting Titus in Troas (2:1–13). He then describes how God enables him to exercise a competent ministry (2:14 – 4:6) and that it involves present suffering on the way to future glory (4:7 – 5:10). There follows a description of the ministry of reconciliation (5:11–21) and his appeal to the Corinthians for reconciliation (6:1 – 7:4). The body of the response concludes with an expression of joy, having received news from Titus of the resolution of the current crisis (7:5–16)

i. Personal defence (1:12–24)

Context
Paul was aware of criticisms of his character and actions entertained by some in Corinth. So, even while responding to the good news Titus brought regarding changes for the better there, he felt it necessary to defend his personal integrity before dealing with matters related to the 'severe letter', the reinstatement of the offender, and the nature of his apostolic ministry. In this section, then, he defends his integrity in general terms (1:12–14) and then specifically in relation to changes to his travel plans (1:15–24).

Comment

a. General defence of integrity (1:12–14)
Paul concluded the previous section (1:3–11) with a request for prayer. It may be that the general defence of his integrity in 1:12–14 is intended as a justification of this request, but it is more likely that it looks forward and paves the way for the specific defence of his integrity in relation to his travel plans and the writing of the 'severe letter' in 1:15 – 2:4.

12. *Now this is our boast: our conscience testifies that we have conducted*

ourselves in the world . . . with integrity. Paul uses the concept of boasting more than any other New Testament writer. Essentially to boast means to take pride in something or someone, and in Paul's writings it is used both negatively and positively. Used negatively, it refers to an unwarranted pride in one's own merits, but used positively, it denotes legitimate pride based upon what God has done and enabled one to do (cf. Rom. 15:17–19).

The word 'conscience' (*syneidēsis*) is found more often in the Pauline corpus than in the rest of the books of the New Testament put together. Unlike the Stoics, Paul did not regard conscience as the voice of God within, nor did he restrict its function to a person's past acts (usually the bad ones), as was the case in the secular Greek world of his day.[62] For Paul, conscience is a human faculty whereby people either approve or disapprove of their actions (whether already performed or only intended) and those of others.[63] The conscience is not to be equated with the voice of God or even the moral law; rather, it is a human faculty which adjudicates upon human action in the light of the highest standard a person perceives, a standard that in the case of the Jews could be the norms of the Mosaic law and halakhic tradition, and in the case of Christians the norms of God's past and present revelation.

Seeing that all of human nature has been affected by sin, both a person's perception of the standard of action required and the function of the conscience itself (as a constituent part of human nature) are also affected by sin. For this reason, conscience can never be accorded the position of ultimate judge of one's behaviour. It is possible that the conscience may excuse one for that which God will not excuse, and conversely it is equally possible that conscience may condemn a person for that which God allows. The final judgment therefore belongs only to God (cf. 1 Cor. 4:2–5). Nevertheless, to reject the voice of conscience is to court spiritual disaster (cf. 1 Tim. 1:19). We cannot reject the voice of conscience with impunity, but we can modify the highest standard to which it relates by gaining for ourselves a greater understanding of the truth.

In this verse Paul explains the nature of his boasting: *our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity* [64] *and godly sincerity.* Paul behaves in this way *in the world* (i.e. wherever he carries out his mission), but he says he does so *especially in our relations with you*. He spent eighteen months with the Corinthians on his first visit to their city, and during that time, and in his subsequent contacts with them, he had been especially careful to act in an exemplary way. We can only guess at the reason why Paul was so careful in Corinth. Perhaps the Corinthians were more critical than most of the behaviour of itinerants (whose methods were not always exemplary) and Paul wanted it to be abundantly clear that as a

messenger of the gospel he renounced all such questionable methods.

He says, *We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace.* The contrast between operating *with integrity and godly sincerity* and *relying . . . on God's grace* on the one hand, and with *worldly wisdom* on the other, is one which surfaces frequently in Paul's letters. For instance, later in this letter Paul asserts, 'Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God' (2:17; cf. 4:2). *Worldly wisdom* resorts to cunning (cf. 4:2) or cleverness with words (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1) to impress an audience. A ministry by the grace of God is one which relies upon the power of God (cf. Rom. 15:17–19; 1 Cor. 2:2–5; 2 Cor. 12:11–12). If God by his grace chooses to manifest his power, then the ministry will be effective; if not, then Paul will not seek to produce results by questionable means.

13a. Paul continues his general defence: *For we do not write to you anything you cannot read or understand*. One particular aspect of his integrity that had been called into question by the Corinthians related to what he had written. Paul responds to insinuations that in his letters he wrote one thing but intended another. Various suggestions concerning what letter(s) this might relate to include: the 'previous letter' (1 Cor. 5:9), the 'severe letter' (2 Cor. 2:3–4; 7:8–12), or parts of 1 Corinthians in which he wrote about refusing support (1 Cor. 9:12–18) and his travel plans (1 Cor. 16:5–7). The last of these is most likely as he proceeds to explain the reasons why he changed those plans (2 Cor. 1:15 – 2:4). In any case, Paul firmly denies that he wrote in a way other than a perfectly straightforward manner.

13b–14. Here Paul directs his audience's attention to the day of the Lord, that day when every person's life and work will be subject to divine scrutiny. In that connection he says, *And I hope that, as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.* Paul speaks elsewhere of the pride and joy in his converts that he will have at the coming of the Lord (Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19), but only here of the pride he expects his converts to have in him on that day. For his part, Paul will feel pride in his converts because they are the seal of his apostleship, the proof that he has faithfully carried out his commission as apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:5). His converts will feel pride in their apostle when on that day they realize all they owe him. Then they will understand fully what heretofore they have only understood in part.

b. Defence of changed travel plans (1:15–24)

From the general defence of his integrity Paul now turns to address the specific matter of changes to his travel plans, which the Corinthians took as evidence of insincerity in his dealings with them.

15–16. *Because I was confident of this*. Paul explains that it was with a sense of confidence in their pride in him and of his in them that he wanted to visit them. In 1 Corinthians 16:5 he promised to visit them *after* passing through Macedonia. But, as he explains here, he made a change to those plans so as to visit them *before* going to Macedonia: *I wanted to visit you first so that you might benefit twice.* The apostle explains how his change in plans was to result in a double benefit for the Corinthians: *I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea.* By so doing, he intended to make two visits instead of the one he had promised in l Corinthians 16:5–7.

The word *benefit* (*charis*) may simply denote the joy Paul hoped would be experienced by the Corinthians when he visited them again. However, because Paul no longer thought of his relationship with others in purely human terms (cf. 5:16) – that is, apart from the significance of Christ – it is more likely that the benefit Paul had in mind should be understood in terms of the effects of his spiritual ministry among them (cf. Rom. 1:11–12).[65]

The word translated *send me on my way* (*propemphthēnai*) carries the sense of providing a person with things necessary for a journey. When Paul wrote of his intended journey to Judea, he had in mind his trip to Jerusalem with the collection taken up among the Gentile churches for the poor believers there (cf. Acts 20:1 – 21:17; Rom. 15:25–27).

17. The confidence with which Paul spoke in verse 15 was to a certain extent misplaced, for criticism of him had been entertained among the Corinthians. It was criticism of his changed travel plans that forced him to ask, *Was I fickle when I intended to do this?* The form of the question in Greek indicates that a negative answer is required. In effect, Paul says, 'You do not think I was changing my plans in an off-hand manner, do you?' The next question relates to Paul's personal integrity: *Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say both 'Yes, yes' and 'No, no'?* Again the question expects a negative answer. To *make my plans in a worldly manner* (lit. 'according to [the] flesh') would in this context imply a readiness to renege on commitments if they no longer suited him, with little concern for how this would affect the Corinthians. As if he would change his *'Yes, yes'* to a *'No, no'* without any compunction if it so suited him. Paul's question is meant to evoke from his audience an emphatic denial that their apostle would act in such a way.

Paul's expression, *'Yes, yes' and 'No, no'* (*to nai nai kai to ou ou*), echoes

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:37: 'All you need to say is simply "Yes," or "No" ' (*estō de ho logos hymōn nai nai, ou ou*; lit. 'let your word [be] "yes yes", "no no" ') and is repeated in James 5:12: 'All you need to say is a simple "Yes" or "No" ' (*ētō de hymōn to nai nai kai to ou ou*). James uses the expression, 'Yes, yes, no, no', in the same way as Jesus did, to teach the importance of straightforward truthfulness and to warn against the (inappropriate) use of oaths. Paul, on the other hand, uses it to deny that he was fickle when making his plans, being prepared to say 'yes, yes' and 'no, no' in the same breath.[66]

18. *But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not 'Yes' and 'No'.* This sentence constitutes an assertion under oath[67] that Paul's word to them was consistent with his firm intentions. He had not said one thing to them while being ready, without any compunction, to do something quite different if it suited him. Paul used oaths quite often in his letters (cf. Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; 11:10, 31; Gal. 1:20; Phil. 1:8; 1 Thess. 2:5, 10) when he wanted to defend or lay heavy stress upon the truth of his assertions. This suggests that in the early church Christ's words against swearing in Matthew 5:33–37 were understood as a criticism of the improper use of oaths, rather than their complete prohibition. According to Matthew 26:63, Christ himself was prepared to be placed under oath when answering the question of the high priest.

What Paul asserts with an oath is that his *message* (*logos*) to the Corinthians has not been inconsistent. In the immediate context, this *message* relates to his travel plans. However, elsewhere he frequently uses the word 'message' (*logos*) to denote his preaching of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:18; 2:4; 1 Thess. 1:6), and therefore it might also carry this sense here, especially in the light of the next verse in which he speaks about consistency in preaching the gospel.

19. To support the assertion that his message was not inconsistent, he now connects it with the consistency of Christ himself: *For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us – by me, Silas and Timothy – was not 'Yes' and 'No', but in him it has always been 'Yes'.* There is no inconsistency in Jesus Christ, the one proclaimed by Paul in his gospel – he is not 'Yes' and 'No', but always 'Yes', that is, he is utterly reliable. And Paul implies he is similarly reliable in his preaching of Christ and in all he has said or written, including what he wrote about his travel plans.

The title *Son of God* used of Jesus Christ here is found in only three other places in Paul's letters (Rom. 1:4; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 4:13). It appears that it was used as a messianic title in the Dead Sea Scrolls (cf. 4Q246), but this of itself does not imply a unique relationship with God. However, it is clear from Paul's use of the title, and his other references to Christ as God's 'Son', that for him the closest possible relationship between Christ and God is implied. This is

confirmed by those texts in which the apostle implies an identity of Christ with God (cf. Rom. 10:13/Joel 2:32; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10–11/Isa. 45:23). Barnett (p. 107) notes that from the time of his conversion in the mid-thirties onwards, Paul preached Jesus as the Son of God, first in Damascus (Acts 9:19–20; cf. Gal. 1:16) and then in Cilicia (Gal. 1:16, 21–23). Jesus as the Son of God continued to be central to Paul's understanding and preaching of the gospel (cf. 1:19; Rom. 1:3–4, 9; 5:10; 8:3, 32; Gal. 1:16; 4:4).

Paul specifically associates Silas (*Silouanou*, 'Silvanus' NRSV) and Timothy with himself in the preaching of the gospel in Corinth. Silvanus, who may be identified with the Silas (*Silas*) of Acts, was one of the leaders of the Jerusalem church chosen to carry the decision of the Jerusalem council to Antioch (Acts 15:22), and the one who became Paul's colleague on the second missionary journey following the disagreements between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36–41). When Paul and Silas reached Lystra, Timothy, the son of a Jewish Christian mother and a Greek father, was recruited to join the small missionary team (Acts 16:1–3). Thus, when Paul came to Corinth for the first time, both these men were associated with him, and joined him in the ministry of the gospel there.

20. *For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ.* With these words Paul clarifies what he meant by saying in the preceding verse that in Jesus Christ 'it is always "Yes" '. The Old Testament contains many promises of God that would find their fulfilment in Christ, including, for example, the seed of the woman who will bruise the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15), the raising up of one like Moses (Deut. 18:15; John 7:40; Acts 3:22; 7:37), one who will sit on the throne of David (2 Sam. 7:12–13), and the servant of the Lord who will bear the sins of the people (Isa. 53:4–11). Not one of these promises would fail to find its fulfilment in Christ. There is no equivocation as far as the promises of God are concerned. As Balaam said to Balak:

> God is not human, that he should lie,
> not a human being, that he should change his mind.
> Does he speak and then not act?
> Does he promise and not fulfil?
> *(Num. 23:19)*

And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God. The Greek underlying this sentence is difficult to translate and interpret accurately, although its general thrust is clear enough. It may reflect the worship of the early church in which ascriptions of praise to God were offered 'through him' (Christ) by members of the Christian community and confirmed by their 'Amen' (implying assent). A similar form is found in many of the ascriptions of praise elsewhere in

the New Testament (e.g. Rom. 1:25; 9:5; 11:36; 15:33; 16:27; Gal. 1:5; Eph. 3:21; Phil. 4:20; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16; 2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 13:21; 1 Pet. 4:11; 5:11; 2 Pet. 3:18; Jude 25; Rev. 1:6; 7:12), a fact which confirms the use of 'Amen' in this way in the early church. However, the immediate context (especially v. 19) suggests that the *us* by whom the *Amen* is spoken refers to Paul and his missionary colleagues.

21–22. In these verses we see why Paul introduced the idea of the unequivocal nature of God's promises. For it is the unequivocal God who has made Paul, his co-workers and the Corinthians themselves stand firm in Christ. It is this God who also anointed them and sealed them with the Spirit. Put simply, Paul's answer to those who ascribed fickleness to him because of the changes to his travel plans was that God's work in his life, making him stand firm in Christ, also guaranteed the trustworthiness of what he says. To explain the nature of this work of God in his life Paul introduces four important expressions.

First, he says, *Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ.* The verb translated 'to stand firm' (*bebaioō*) is used in a legal sense in the papyri of a guarantee given that certain commitments will be carried out. In the New Testament it is used similarly in connection with the proclamation of the gospel, which is 'confirmed' by miraculous signs or the bestowal of spiritual gifts (Mark 16:20; 1 Cor. 1:6). When the verb is used when human beings are the objects, it indicates their strengthening or establishing so that they exhibit certain characteristics. For example, in 1 Corinthians 1:8 Paul writes of believers being kept firm so as to be blameless in the day of the Lord. Here he argues that God has made him stand firm to be trustworthy.

Second, Paul says God *anointed us.* Anointing was used in commissioning rites in the Old Testament (cf. Exod. 28:41; 1 Sam. 15:1; 1 Kgs 19:16). References to anointing are found in several other places in the New Testament: once in Hebrews 1:9 ('God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy'), three times in the writings of Luke (Luke 4:18; Acts 4:27; 10:38) and three times in 1 John (2:20, 27 [2 x]). In the Lucan texts, it refers explicitly to anointing with the Spirit twice and arguably it is implied in the third, and it refers to the anointing of the Spirit in 1 John as well. Given the emphasis on the Spirit in the present context, it is best to see here also a reference to being anointed with the Spirit.

Third, Paul says that God *set his seal of ownership on us*. The verb, 'to set a seal on' (*sphragizō*), is used in commercial documents found among the papyri of the sealing of letters and sacks so that nobody can tamper with the contents. Used figuratively, as in the New Testament, 'to seal' means to keep secret or stamp with a mark of identification or ownership (cf. Rev. 7:3–8). In Ephesians,

Paul speaks of Christians being 'marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit' (Eph. 1:13; cf. Eph. 4:30), something that occurs at conversion as people are baptized (cf. Acts 2:38), and this is its meaning here also.

Fourth, Paul adds that when God put his seal upon us, he did so as he *put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit*. The Greek word translated *deposit* here by the NIV (and most other English translations) is *arrabōn*, and like *sphragizō* it is a commercial term. It is the pledge given by a purchaser to a seller as a guarantee that the purchase price will be paid over at the proper time. Here the term is applied figuratively by Paul to the Spirit whom God has given him and to whose presence he appeals as a guarantee of his apostolic integrity.[68]

The major thrust of verses 21–22, then, is that Paul and his colleagues have been made to stand firm by God and have been anointed with his Spirit.[69] Why does Paul make these assertions at this point in his letter? It is to show that the integrity of the apostolic band and the truthfulness of their gospel rests upon the work of God. It is the Spirit of God who makes them stand firm and anoints them, and whose presence is the authenticating seal upon their mission and message. The implication is that if this work of God in their lives guarantees their trustworthiness in the greater matter of the proclamation of the gospel, then surely it will also render them trustworthy in the lesser matter of their travel plans. Any changes in these will not be the result of mere fickleness, but of genuine concern for the Corinthians.

23–24. Beginning with an oath, *I call God as my witness – and I stake my life on it*, Paul asserts the purity of his motives, and insists that changes to his travel plans were made bearing in mind the feelings of the Corinthians, something he needed to emphasize because his motives had been called into question.

And I stake my life on it translates *epi tēn emēn psychēn* (lit. 'upon my life'), which is taken to be part of an imprecatory oath whereby Paul calls upon God as witness *against* him if he is not speaking the truth. However, *epi tēn emēn psychēn* may also be translated 'concerning my life', and, if so, Paul is calling upon God as a character witness concerning his life, in *support* of the truthfulness of what he is saying. This fits better in the present context, and is consistent with the way Paul calls upon God as his witness in the four other places in his letters where he does so (cf. Rom. 1:9; Phil. 1:8; 1 Thess. 2:5, 10), and with the way it was used in Greco-Roman tradition and in the literature of the Hellenistic and Roman period.[70]

Paul insists, *it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth.* The present context does not tell us from what the Corinthians were to be spared, but it seems from statements Paul makes elsewhere (13:1–4, 10) that they were spared disciplinary action which the apostle would have felt compelled to take.

Lest the Corinthians conclude from Paul's allusions to disciplinary action that he exercised some form of spiritual tyranny over them, he adds, *Not that we lord it over your faith.* The role of an apostle (and of all Christian ministers) is that of a servant to the people of God (cf. 4:5), not that of a tyrant. But, as verse 23 reveals, serving the people of God does not mean doing only what pleases them. It may involve disciplinary action as well. After all, apostles (like all Christian ministers), while called to serve the people of God, must do so by carrying out the desires of their Master.

Verse 24 also contains a most attractive description of the purpose of Christian ministry: *but we work with you for your joy* (lit. 'but we are fellow workers of your joy'). The NIV translation (like many other English translations) implies that Paul works with the Corinthians for their joy, but this is unlikely, as nowhere else does he speak of his converts as his fellow workers. Another possibility is that he speaks of being a fellow worker with God, but there is little in the immediate context to support that. It is probably best to see here a reference to Paul's missionary colleagues, Silas and Timothy, to whom he refers in verse 19. The Corinthians' *joy* for which they work is best understood as arising from their enjoyment of the blessings of salvation experienced as they embrace the gospel.

The reason Paul gives here why he does not lord it over their faith is found in the words: *because it is by faith you stand firm.* It is true that the Corinthians came to faith through Paul's ministry, but their faith was their own, and rests upon the power of God (cf. 1 Cor. 2:5; 15:1–2). Because of their faith, believers have their own standing before God (Rom. 5:1–2; 11:20), and in this respect they are subject to no-one else (Rom. 14:4).

Theology

Significant in this section is Paul's emphasis on the manner and purpose of Christian ministry. It is to be carried out with integrity and godly sincerity, relying upon the grace of God, eschewing worldly means of influencing people either by cunning and deceit or by inappropriate uses of rhetorical devices to manipulate people. The message is to be proclaimed in straightforward ways, and written communication is to be unambiguous and readily understood. Ministry must never involve 'lording it over' people's faith, but instead is to be carried out with a view to promoting their joy in the Lord.

Also significant is Paul's description of the ways in which God works in believers to establish them firm in the faith. He strengthens them to stand firm in Christ and he anoints them with the Holy Spirit, both as a seal that they belong to him and as a pledge guaranteeing their full salvation at the appearing of

Christ.

Paul emphasizes the centrality of Jesus Christ in the purposes of God when he says that all the promises of God find their 'Yes' in him. All the promises – the coming of a prophet like Moses, one who will sit on the throne of David and establish an everlasting kingdom of peace and justice, the Servant of the Lord who will bear the sins of God's people, the establishment of the new covenant under which people's sins will be remembered no more and the law of God that will be written in their hearts by the Spirit – all these promises and more find their fulfilment in Christ.

ii. The 'severe letter': its purpose and aftermath (2:1–13)

Context

Having defended his personal integrity in relation to his travel plans, Paul proceeds to explain his purpose in writing the 'severe letter' that had proved effective in getting the Corinthians to take strong disciplinary action against the offender. Having heard of the action taken, Paul was both relieved (cf. 7:6–13) and concerned – concerned that Satan might gain the advantage if the offender were to be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So he urged his audience to turn and reaffirm their love to the now presumably repentant offender. He minimized for their sakes the wrong he had suffered at the hands of the offender so that they would know they had his full support in reinstating the one who had hurt him.

Comment

a. The purpose of the 'severe letter' (2:1–4)

2:1. *So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you.* In 1 Corinthians 16:5–7 Paul informed his audience that he intended to visit them after passing through Macedonia. Subsequently he changed his plans so as to visit Corinth first on his way to Macedonia, and then again on his way back, so that the Corinthians might 'benefit twice' (1:15–16). He made the first of these promised visits, but because it turned out to be painful for both the Corinthians and himself, he did not make the return visit and wrote them the 'severe letter' instead (see Introduction, pp. 33–34, 38–40). In some ways Paul found himself in a 'no-win' situation. If he had made another visit at that stage, it would have proved painful. If he did not make the visit, his opposition would appear to have

won the day. And when he chose to write the ‘severe letter’, he ran the risk of being criticized for being bold when absent, but timid when present (cf. 10:1).

2. *For if I grieve you* [plural], *who is left to make me glad but you* [singular, lit. ‘the one’] *whom I have grieved?* Paul asks who there would be to make him glad if, when he made the second of these promised visits, he caused the Corinthians further grief. He answers his own question by saying that only ‘the one’ he has grieved could make him glad again, usually interpreted to refer generally to the Corinthian believers.[71]

An alternative approach is to identify the ‘one’ of this verse with the one referred to in verses 5–8. In this case, the grief caused to the ‘one’ would be the grief of realizing that disciplinary action had been demanded of the congregation against him by Paul. The grief caused to the Corinthians (*you*) would be the rebuke implied by Paul’s (renewed) demand for disciplinary action, something they had been reluctant to carry through, even when their apostle had been grieved (cf. v. 3). This interpretation yields good sense. Paul caused grief to both the offender and the Corinthian congregation by his demand for disciplinary action. There can be little joy in his relationship with the Corinthians until the offender has been disciplined, brought to repentance and restored to fellowship. Then the ‘one’ whom Paul grieved will make him glad. See Introduction, pp. 55–60, for a suggested identification of the offender.

3. *I wrote as I did*. This refers to the writing of the ‘severe letter’ after the apostle’s return from the ‘painful visit’ (see Introduction, pp. 33–34, 38–40). Paul wrote rebuking the Corinthians because they had not come to his defence when he was attacked by the one who caused him grief (2:5), demanding they punish this individual and making it clear that he expected their obedience in this matter (cf. vv. 6, 9).

Paul’s purpose in writing was *so that when I came I would not be distressed by those who should have made me rejoice* (i.e. in response to his letter he expected the Corinthians to take the necessary steps to remove the source of friction existing between them and their apostle). During the ‘painful visit’, Paul had been caused mental anguish by the offending individual, while the Corinthians, who should have made him rejoice, apparently stood by and did nothing. The ‘severe letter’ was intended to ensure that this would not happen again.

If the first part of the verse shows the purpose of the ‘severe letter’, the second part indicates Paul’s frame of mind when he wrote it: *I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy.* Though the ‘severe letter’ was certain to cause grief, nevertheless he wrote it in the confidence that they would want to see their apostle joyful once more. Paul could tackle the thorny problem of the punishment of the one who caused grief, confident of the goodwill of the

Corinthians towards him despite the difficulties in their relationship at that stage.

On first reading, it is strange that Paul speaks in this verse of the confidence he had in the Corinthians' goodwill towards him when he wrote the 'severe letter', because in the very next verse he says he wrote in 'great distress and anguish of heart'. Thrall (p. 169) suggests that Paul may have been subject to conflicting emotions or that he was projecting into the past what he felt now about them, having received good news from Titus about their response to the 'severe letter'. Most likely, Paul, despite the current distress he felt, continued to have confidence in the basic goodwill of his converts based upon his assurance of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

4. *For I wrote to you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears.* Paul's situation at the time of writing would have been poignant indeed. While in despair of life itself because of persecution in Asia (1:8–9), he was also distressed because of the situation in Corinth. We can appreciate why the letter was written with *many tears*. Calvin (p. 28) comments that tears 'in a brave and courageous man are a sign of great distress'.

Not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you. In the 'severe letter' Paul must have reprimanded the Corinthians for their failure to support him, hoping to move them to repentance (cf. v. 3). He assures them that his intention was not to grieve them, but to let them know the depth of his love for them. He showed this not by glossing over a bad situation, but by confronting it and demanding (again) that the Corinthians take action. It takes real love to confront a difficult situation rather than side-stepping it. Ambrosiaster says, 'Someone who rebukes another without feeling this way [with deep love] merely tramples on his feelings' (Bray, p. 205).

b. Forgiveness for the offender (2:5–11)

5. *If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent – not to put it too severely.* Paul had been caused grief by the offender (cf. v. 10), but he minimized the grief he experienced by drawing attention to the fact that he had grieved the Corinthians as well as himself. If grief was experienced by him alone, he might have followed the advice he gave in 1 Corinthians 6:7 and simply suffered the wrong. However, it was the congregation as a whole, as well as Paul, that had been affected, and so the matter had to be dealt with.

6. Turning from the grief caused to the action taken against the offender, Paul says, *The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient*. The word translated *punishment* (*epitimia*) is used only here in the New Testament, but in

extra-biblical writings it is used of the imposition of either legal penalties or commercial sanctions. Its use here approximates to the former sense and suggests that the congregation had acted formally and judicially against the offender, possibly by excluding him from their gatherings. Paul's use of the word translated *majority* (*pleionōn*) here might imply there was a minority who did not approve of the punishment to be meted out, or alternatively it may refer more generally to the whole congregation (minus the offender), in which case the punishment of the offending member would have been determined by a unanimous decision of the whole congregation, not simply by the majority of them. In whatever way the punishment was decided and carried out, Paul was now convinced that it was enough.

7–8. Because he regarded the punishment as 'sufficient' (and presumably because the offender had been brought to repentance), Paul says, *Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him.* Although the punishment of the offender was deserved, it brought Paul no joy (cf. v. 2); it was restoration for which he longed. And if the church did not forgive and comfort him, there would be the danger that he may be *overwhelmed by excessive sorrow*. The verb 'to overwhelm' (*katapinō*) was also used of animals who 'devour' their prey, and of waves or waters which 'swallow up' objects and people. Paul is afraid that the offender, if not forgiven and comforted, may 'drown' in his sorrow, so he adds, *I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him*. The Greek word translated to *reaffirm* (*kyrōsai*) was used in the papyri to denote confirmation of a sale or ratification of an appointment. It is used in Galatians 3:15 of the ratification of a covenant. The re-affirmation of love for which Paul calls, then, appears to be a formal act by the congregation, in the same way that the imposition of punishment in the first place appears to have been formal and judicial. Paul's desire to see the repentant offender reinstated is a reminder that church discipline is intended not only as a punishment but also to be remedial.

9–11. Paul now shifts his attention from the offender to the Corinthians themselves. The primary purpose of the 'severe letter' appears to have been to demand disciplinary action against the offender, but Paul indicates that this was not the only purpose: *Another reason I wrote* [72] *to you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything.* What Paul expected was not obedience to him personally, but obedience to him as an apostle and ambassador of Christ. This did not mean he wished to 'lord it over' their faith but, as he wrote earlier, he was working for their joy (1:24).

Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. While calling upon his audience to forgive the offender (vv. 6–7), Paul assures them he also forgives him. Perhaps the apostle says this to allay any fears they might have that he would not approve the

forgiveness and reinstatement of one who had hurt him so badly. *And what I have forgiven – if there was anything to forgive – I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake.* Three matters call for comment. First, Paul appears to be playing down the extent of his hurt when having said, *what I have forgiven*, he adds, *if there was anything to forgive*. There is no question that he had something to forgive, as the general thrust of 2:5–11 and 7:8–13 reveals. Second, Paul stresses that he had forgiven the offence *for your sake*. This shows that the apostle realized his own forgiveness was needed before the Corinthians themselves would feel free to forgive and effect reconciliation with the offender. His forgiveness would be *for their sake*, in that it opened the way for this reconciliation and thereby the restoration of a sense of well-being in the church. Third, the expression *in the sight of Christ* (lit. 'in [the] face of Christ') is difficult, and could be construed in a number of ways. It could be taken as an oath formula, in which case Paul would be saying, 'As I stand in the sight of Christ, I have forgiven the offence.' Alternatively, it could mean his forgiveness has the approval of Christ. In this case the translation would run: 'What I have forgiven has been forgiven in the sight of Christ who looks down with approval.' Finally, the expression could reflect the fact that at the time of writing the apostle had not had opportunity to express his forgiveness face to face with the offender, but nevertheless he had already forgiven the offence 'in the sight of Christ'.

All this was *in order that Satan might not outwit us* (lit. 'that we be not taken advantage of by Satan'). A possible interpretation of this statement is that Satan would be allowed to take advantage of the situation and keep the church weak if there were no forgiveness and reconciliation. However, a more specific interpretation is possible and preferable. The Greek word *pleonekteō* ('to take advantage of') is found in four other places in the New Testament – all in Paul's letters (2 Cor. 7:2; 12:17, 18; 1 Thess. 4:6). The other uses in 2 Corinthians (and arguably so for that in 1 Thess.) denote taking advantage of people in the sense of defrauding them of something which belongs to them. It seems likely, therefore, that what Paul has in mind in this verse is that Satan might take advantage of the situation and defraud the congregation of one of its members permanently. Paul adds, *For we are not unaware of his schemes*, and accordingly he urges the Corinthians to reaffirm their love for the offender to forestall such a possibility. Later in the letter (11:3, 14–15) we see that Paul recognizes an active role on the part of Satan to undermine the faith, devotion and good order of the church.

c. Waiting for Titus (2:12–13)

Paul tells his audience that he had no peace of mind in Troas, despite the great opportunities he had to preach the gospel there, because he did not meet up with Titus as expected and so did not receive the news of the situation in Corinth which he longed to hear. His purpose for telling them this may have been to emphasize again the love he had for them.

12. *Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me . . .* Paul had visited Troas on his second missionary journey, and there he had the vision of a 'man of Macedonia' begging him to come over and help them (Acts 16:8–10). Possibly during his brief stay in Troas at that time some disciples were made, and he went there again to preach the gospel, also expecting to meet Titus on his way back from Corinth.

Paul states that his primary purpose in coming to Troas was to preach the gospel of Christ, and he found the Lord had *opened a door* for him to do so there. In 1 Corinthians 16:9 Paul used the metaphor of the open door to describe the opportunity he had for 'effective work' in Ephesus. We know that as a result of his labours not only was a church founded in Ephesus, but the gospel was taken to other cities in the region (e.g. Colossae and Laodicea, and probably the other cities of the seven churches of Asia mentioned in Rev. 2 – 3; cf. Acts 19:10). When Paul says that the Lord had opened a door for him in Troas, it suggests that it was of similar potential to that opened for him in Ephesus.

13. *I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there.* Titus is here mentioned for the first time in the Corinthian correspondence. Paul spoke of him in Galatians 2:1–3 as one whom he took to Jerusalem, and who, 'even though he was a Greek', was not compelled to be circumcised. Apart from this, we know nothing of Titus' background, it being doubtful whether he can be identified with the Titius Justus of Acts 18:7. However, as 2 Corinthians itself reveals, Titus played a crucial role in relations between Paul and the church at Corinth. One of the Pastoral Letters is addressed to Titus, who was then active in Crete and responsible for setting up elders in the churches there (Titus 1:5).

Because he did not find Titus in Troas, Paul says, *I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia.* The fact that he was prepared to leave behind a door that the Lord had opened for him in Troas and say goodbye to the infant church there only serves to underline his lack of peace of mind because he had not made contact with Titus, nor had his concern for the Corinthian believers been relieved. This concern was but part of what he describes in 11:28 when, concluding a long list of his apostolic sufferings, he says, 'Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.'

The relief Paul experienced when he finally met up with Titus in Macedonia is described in 7:5–16. From that passage we may infer that when he arrived in

Troas Paul had been deeply concerned whether Titus would have been well received in Corinth, and whether the church there would respond positively to the demands of the ‘severe letter’. Before that there is a long digression (2:14 – 7:4) in which Paul speaks about the nature of his ministry and how he was used by God even during distressing times.

Theology

The passage 2:1–13 is replete with important pastoral examples. First, Paul was deeply committed to the well-being of his converts. The decisions he took that affected his relationship with them were driven by a desire both to avoid causing them pain and grief (2:1–2) and to let them know the love he had for them (2:4). Yet the love he had for them was ‘tough love’ – he was willing to write a strongly worded letter at the risk of causing them grief in order to deal with their failure to address a serious wrong that had been perpetrated by one of their members (cf. 7:8–12).

Second, Paul’s pastoral concern for the Corinthians involved the demand for punishment of the offender, because that was necessary for the well-being of the one concerned and of the congregation as a whole. This punishment was not only punitive, but was also intended to be remedial, producing repentance on the part of the offender. Once repentance was effected, Paul urged the congregation to forgive him, comfort him and reaffirm their love for him (2:6–8). To encourage them to do so, he assured them that anyone they forgave he also forgave, even though he himself was the primary object of the hurt inflicted by the offender (2:10).

Third, when moral failure occurred in the Corinthian congregation, opportunity was provided for Satan to cause further harm (2:10–11). This could involve fermenting further disharmony in the community and depriving them of one of their members indefinitely – if he was overwhelmed by excessive sorrow and not comforted and reinstated following his repentance.

Fourth, Paul was prepared to share with his converts his own emotions, his pain and the depth of his love for them (2:4), and even how his concern for them had led him to abandon the opportunity for fruitful work among others in Troas so that he might the sooner obtain news about them. This is a reminder that in Christian ministry professionalism is not enough. It must be motivated by love for those to whom we minister (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1–3).

iii. Competency in ministry (2:14 – 4:6)

Context

Paul's description of events in the previous passage concluded with the information that he did not meet up with Titus in Troas as he had expected. It breaks off at that point and is only resumed in 7:5–7. There intervenes a long digression to balance what could be taken as a rather depressing account of his ministry. He has spoken of affliction in Asia, criticisms of his integrity, the pain experienced in Corinth because of the offender, and his inability to settle to missionary work in Troas. As if to balance this somewhat depressing account, in 2:14 – 4:6 Paul strikes a positive note describing how God always and in every place enables him to carry on an effective ministry despite many difficulties (2:14–17). He follows this up with an assertion that he does not need to bear letters of recommendation to Corinth, because the very existence of the church there constitutes a 'letter' from Christ validating his ministry (3:1–3). Then he acknowledges that his competency for ministry comes from God who has made him an able minister of the new covenant (3:4–6). Next, he compares the greater glory of apostolic ministry under the new covenant with the lesser glory of the ministry of Moses under the old covenant (3:7–18). The section concludes with a description of the way Paul conducted his ministry (4:1–6).

Comment

a. Led in triumph (2:14–17)

14. Despite the difficulties of his mission, Paul is able to say, *But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession.* The words *leads us in triumph* translate *thriambeuonti hēmas*, the exact meaning of which has been the subject of much debate. The viewpoint adopted here is that *thriambeuonti hēmas* is best understood to mean that God, having 'conquered' Paul, now leads him as a 'captive' in his 'triumphal procession' (see 'Additional note: the meaning of *thriambeuonti hēmas* in 2:14', pp. 121–122). Paul uses the imagery of a triumphal procession accorded a victorious Roman general who leads his army through the streets of Rome up to the Capitoline Hill exhibiting the spoils and captives of war.

And uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. The imagery of the triumphal procession is carried over into this part of verse 14 and into verses 15–16.[73] During the procession, incense was burnt to the gods, and the aroma wafted over the spectators as well as those in the procession. For those celebrating the victory, the aroma had pleasant associations, but for the vanquished, the associations were far from pleasant. It is noteworthy that the one

whom Paul describes as led in triumph as a captive is the same one whom God uses to spread abroad the aroma of the knowledge of him, namely Christ, in whom the knowledge of God's glory is displayed (cf. 4:6)

15. *For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.* Paul can describe himself in these terms because, by the preaching of the word of God (v. 17), he spreads abroad the aroma of the knowledge of Christ. The triumphal procession background makes it possible to suggest the significance of Paul's reference to his being to God a pleasing aroma of Christ. In the Roman victory procession, the incense was offered to the gods, even though it was the people who smelt its aroma. So likewise, while Paul is primarily concerned here with the response of the people to the proclamation of the gospel, nevertheless he realizes that the proclamation of Christ is well pleasing to God: it is *to God the pleasing aroma of Christ*.[74]

The smell of incense burnt to the gods in a Roman triumphal procession would have had different connotations for different people. For the victorious general and his soldiers and for the welcoming crowds, the aroma would be associated with the joy of victory. But for the prisoners of war, the aroma would have been associated with the fate of slavery or death which awaited them. Gospel preaching likewise has different connotations for different people, as the next verse explains.

16. Employing the imagery of the triumphal procession to describe the effects of his ministry, Paul says, *To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life* (lit. 'to those [who are perishing] an aroma from death to death; to those [who are being saved] an aroma from life to life'). To those who accept the message of the gospel it brings life, but to those who reject the gospel it brings death (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18: 'For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God'). The heavy responsibility of such a ministry forces the apostle to ask, *And who is equal to such a task?* It is not until 3:5 that we find Paul's answer: 'Not that we are competent in ourselves . . . our competence comes from God.'

17. *Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit*. Paul implies that the heavy burden of responsibility he feels is due to the fact that he refuses to act like many others and simply *peddle* the word of God for profit. The verb used in the statement *we do not peddle* is *kapēleuō*, whose literal meaning was 'to trade in' or 'to peddle'. Because of the tricks of petty traders who would adulterate their wine with water or use false weights, the word came to have negative connotations. Paul's meaning here then is that he felt the burden of responsibility of gospel preaching so greatly because he refused to tamper with

God's word (cf. 4:2), to remove its offence so that like others he might peddle it for personal gain.

Later Paul will write about Jewish Christian intruders who came to prey upon the Corinthians (11:20). Quite possibly these men were already operating in the background at Corinth when chapters 1 – 7 were being written, and it may be that Paul is alluding to them when he speaks of *many* who peddle God's word for profit. To distinguish himself from such people, Paul refused to accept financial support from those among whom he was presently ministering, though he was willing to accept it from Christians elsewhere while doing so (11:7–12; 12:13–15). Then contrasting himself to such people, Paul says, *On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God*. He describes four aspects of his preaching: he speaks: (i) *in Christ*, as one who belongs to Christ and has been taught by him; (ii) *before God*, as one who is accountable to God (cf. 5:10–11); (iii) *with sincerity*, as one whose motives are pure and without dissimulation; (iv) *sent from God*, as one who has been commissioned by God and must faithfully carry out his commission.

Additional note: the meaning of *thriambeuonti hēmas* in 2:14

The word *thriambeuō* is found only twice in the New Testament, here and in Colossians 2:15, and not at all in the LXX, but it is found a number of times in extra-biblical writings (see LSJ, MM, BDAG s.v.). Six major interpretations of *thriambeuō* followed by an accusative object (as it is in 2:14) have been suggested. (i) To lead someone as a captive in a triumphal procession. This has the best lexical support, is the rendering of the NIV, NEB and GNB, and is adopted by a number of modern interpreters (cf. e.g. Thrall, pp. 191–195; Harris, pp. 243–246; Seifrid, pp. 84–86). (ii) To lead victorious soldiers in a triumphal procession. This does not have lexical support in extra-biblical texts. It is the interpretation underlying the NJB translation, and the choice of Calvin (p. 33), Allo (pp. 43–44), Héring (p. 18), Barrett (p. 98) and Bruce (p. 187). (iii) To cause someone to triumph. This is the rendering of the KJV, but it has no lexical support and has been abandoned by modern interpreters. (iv) To triumph over someone. This is its meaning in Colossians 2:15, the one other place where it is found in the New Testament: 'And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over [*thriambeusas*] them by the cross.' (v) To expose to shame. In this case, the idea of the triumphal procession is submerged, and *thriambeuō* is a metaphor denoting low esteem. (vi) To put someone on show or display. This view has been advanced by R. P. Egan. He rejects any association of *thriambeuō* with the Roman triumphal procession, arguing instead that Paul wishes to stress the idea of openness or visibility by the use of the verb.[75]

Of these interpretations, to lead someone as a captive in a triumphal procession is preferred by the majority of more recent commentators, though it does not fit that well into its context in 2:14–17 where Paul appears to be striking a positive note. He does this to balance the rather depressing account of his ministry in preceding verses where he spoke of affliction in Asia, criticisms of his integrity, pain experienced because of the offender, and his inability to settle to missionary work in Troas. For this reason, some modern interpreters have preferred to interpret *thriambeuō* to mean 'lead victorious soldiers in triumphal procession', despite its lack of lexical support. Alternatively, if we allow Colossians 2:15 to inform our interpretation, we could say that Paul depicts himself as one who has been defeated by Christ and made his captive.

Christ ‘conquered’ him when, on the road to Damascus, he put a stop to his persecution of Christians, transformed him into his willing slave and commissioned him as an apostle to the Gentiles. Now God leads him as a willing captive ‘in Christ’s triumphal procession’ and spreads ‘the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere’.[76]

b. Letters of recommendation (3:1–3)

Paul has a lot to say about the commendation of servants of God in this letter (cf. 4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 10:12, 18; 12:11). Elsewhere we read that when Apollos came to Corinth he brought a letter of recommendation from the Ephesian Christians (Acts 18:27) and that Paul wrote letters of recommendation for many other people (cf. Rom. 16:1–2; 1 Cor. 16:10–11; 2 Cor. 8:22–23; Eph. 6:21–22; Col. 4:7–8, 10; Phlm. 10–12, 17–19).

In 3:1–3 Paul claims, in the case of the Corinthians at least, that he did not need to produce a letter of recommendation for them or to receive one from them. It is not that Paul disapproved of letters of recommendation, but, as the founding apostle of the Corinthian church, he needed no letter of recommendation to prove the authenticity of his apostleship to that church. Also the fact that he planted the church in Corinth can be seen by others as proof of his apostleship, so he does not need a letter of recommendation from them either.

But why did Paul raise the question of letters of recommendation at all? We have to assume that the fact that he did not bring such a letter with him to Corinth had been used as a basis of criticism by someone in the church. Quite likely, it was the offender (the one who caused pain, 2:5; who did wrong, 7:12) who, in mounting his personal attack against Paul, criticized the apostle’s lack of such a letter. In so doing, the offender probably received moral support at least from the ‘false apostles’ who had already infiltrated the church and were themselves to oppose Paul so vehemently later on (cf. chs. 10 – 13).

1. *Are we beginning to commend ourselves again?* Self-commendation in itself was not reprehensible and was even necessary in situations where commendation by a third party was not possible. Elsewhere in 2 Corinthians, Paul does commend himself (4:2; 6:4), but he appears to have been reluctant to overdo it (cf. 5:12; 10:18).[77] It is in this light, and aware of what he has just written in 2:14–17, that he asks, *Are we beginning to commend ourselves again?* However, criticism that he did not bring letters of recommendation forced him to ask, *Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? Some people* had come to Corinth with letters of recommendation because they needed them and had apparently asked the Corinthians for letters to

facilitate the next stage of their mission. These people were probably critical of Paul for not doing so. When referring to *some people*, Paul would have had in mind the 'many' of 2:17, the false apostles who were already making their presence felt in Corinth. In any case, Paul regarded it as absurd that he should be required to bring such letters to the Corinthian believers or to ask them for letters of recommendation when he was their founding apostle. Thus Paul's question (introduced by the Greek negative particle, *mē*) expects an emphatic 'No' as an answer.

2. *You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone.* With these words, Paul defends himself against criticisms that he did not bring a letter of recommendation when he came to Corinth. Other ancient manuscripts support a reading of '*your* hearts' instead of '*our* hearts', though the latter has stronger manuscript support and is adopted here by the NIV. The sense then is of a *letter* written on the heart of Paul, presumably consisting of the knowledge of what God had done in the lives of the Corinthians through his preaching of the gospel. To knowledge of this fact, Paul could appeal whenever his credentials were called into question.

However, a strong case can be made for the weaker reading, '*your* hearts', because it fits well in the context. Earlier in this verse Paul says, '*you yourselves* are our letter', and in the following verse he says, '*you* are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry'. It was through Paul's ministry that Christ constituted the Corinthians a letter of recommendation for him. This suggests that the letter was written on their hearts, not Paul's. In this case, the very existence of believers in Corinth was testimony to the effectiveness and authenticity of Paul's ministry. They were his letter of recommendation, written, he says, *on our/your hearts, known and read by everyone*.[78]

3. *You show that you are a letter from Christ.* If the Corinthians are Paul's letter of recommendation, the author of that letter is Christ. Paul claims that Christ himself produced this letter for him. Certainly, then, his 'letter' of recommendation carries more weight than those written by human authors that 'some people' presented. While Christ was the author of the letter, Paul says it was *the result of our ministry*. Within a metaphor of letter writing (as here) where an author and a scribe are envisaged, Paul describes, as it were, a 'living letter', dictated by Christ, and 'inscribed' in the Corinthians' hearts through his apostolic ministry of gospel proclamation. Paul takes the analogy one step further when he says this scribal work was performed *not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God*. His ministry was empowered by the Spirit of God, and any changes wrought in the lives of his hearers were effected by the Spirit (cf. Rom. 15:17–19; 1 Cor. 2:4–5).

At the end of the verse, Paul varies the metaphor when he says this letter was written *not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Tablets of stone* is an allusion to the law written in stone at Mount Sinai (Exod. 31:18). But the gospel is not written on stone like the law of Moses, but on human hearts. Here the allusion is to the prophetic description of the new covenant under which God would write his law on human hearts (cf. Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:24–32). This allusion paves the way for Paul's description of himself as a minister of the new covenant (vv. 4–6) and for an extended comparison and contrast of ministry under the old and new covenants (vv. 7–18).

It is worth noting what an exalted view of ministry is implied by verses 1–3. Paul and his colleagues were privileged to be the agents by whom 'living letters' from the exalted Christ were inscribed in the hearts of men and women. For this ministry the apostles were entrusted with the precious *ink* of the Spirit. By the grace of God, what was effected in the hearts of the Corinthians through Paul's ministry became a letter authenticating and commending the very ministry by which it was effected. Chrysostom comments, 'The virtues of disciples commend the teacher more than any letter' (Bray, p. 213).

c. Ministers of the new covenant (3:4–6)

Here Paul answers the question he asked in 2:16 ('Who is equal to such a task?') by showing that his competence as a minister of the new covenant comes from God. In the process, he picks up and expands the allusion to Jeremiah 31:31 and the new covenant in verse 3, and by so doing introduces the contrast between ministries under the old and new covenants that he will develop in verses 7–18.

4–5. *Such confidence we have through Christ before God*. *Such confidence* is based upon seeing God's work in the Corinthians, to which he refers in verses 1–3. He has this confidence *through Christ*, because he has seen God effect transformation in people's lives through Christ who produced 'living letters' in the hearts of the Corinthians (vv. 1–3). He has it *before God* (or 'towards God'), the one who leads him in triumph and through him spreads abroad the aroma of the knowledge of God (2:14–17).

Paul straightaway makes clear that his confidence is not self-confidence: *Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God*. He insists that his competence in ministry comes from God, and in so doing answers the question he raised in 2:16: 'Who is equal to such a task?' His denial of self-sufficiency does not reflect an exaggerated humility, but rather a sober recognition of the facts of the matter. Spiritual ministry can be accomplished only by the power of God at work in the minister

and released through the preaching of the gospel (cf. Rom. 15:17–19; 1 Cor. 1:18 – 2:5).

6. *He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant.* Paul repeats here his answer to the question raised in 2:16 ('Who is equal to such a task?') by stressing that it is God who has made him a competent minister of the new covenant. The word translated 'minister' (*diakonos*) can mean either an agent acting as an intermediary, or an assistant who acts at the behest of a superior.[79] In his ministry, Paul functioned in both these ways (cf. 5:20; 1 Cor. 3:5). The expression *new covenant* is found in only one other place in Paul's writings, in 1 Corinthians 11:25, where it forms part of the Lord's Supper tradition which Paul says he received ('This cup is the new covenant in my blood'). Both Jesus' words of institution and Paul's reference to the new covenant here indicate that the prophecy of Jeremiah has been fulfilled:

> 'The days are coming,' declares the LORD,
> 'when I will make a new covenant
> with the people of Israel
> and with the people of Judah.
> It will not be like the covenant
> I made with their ancestors
> when I took them by the hand
> to lead them out of Egypt,
> because they broke my covenant,
> though I was a husband to them,'
> declares the LORD.
> *(Jer. 31:31–32)*

Both Jesus' words of institution which Paul quotes in 1 Corinthians 11:25 and the exposition of Jeremiah 31:31 by the writer in Hebrews 9:15–28 make it clear that it was the death of Christ that established the new covenant, a covenant that superseded and surpassed the old Mosaic covenant, as the apostle makes plain in verses 7–11.

What Paul stresses in the present context is not how the new covenant was established, but that the ministry of the new covenant is *not of the letter but of the Spirit*. This has been interpreted in the past as a ministry which does not focus upon the literal meaning of the Old Testament ('letter'), but on its real underlying intention ('spirit'). But such an interpretation fails to recognize that in this chapter Paul uses 'letter' and 'Spirit' to characterize the law of Moses ('engraved in letters on stone', v. 7) and the Holy Spirit (v. 8), which are the primary features of ministry under the old and new covenants respectively.

After describing apostolic ministry as one *not of the letter but of the Spirit*, Paul highlights the difference involved by adding *for the letter kills, but the*

Spirit gives life. How can Paul say that the *letter*, that is, the law of Moses, kills? It is not that there is anything wrong with the law – elsewhere he insists that the law is holy, righteous, good and spiritual (Rom. 7:12, 14). But he also says it is powerless to curb human sin (Rom. 8:3) or to bring life and be a means to establish righteousness (Gal. 3:21). Instead, it pronounces God's judgment upon sinners and therefore brings death (Rom. 7:10). So a ministry of the *letter* is a ministry of death.

The Spirit, on the other hand, *gives life* and does what the law could never do, that is, bring about the fulfilment of its own demands (Rom. 8:2–4). So the ministry of the *Spirit* is quite different from the ministry of the *letter*. It is a ministry of the new covenant under which sins are forgiven and remembered no more and God's law is written on people's hearts (cf. Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:25–27). It is a ministry under which people are motivated and enabled by the Spirit to overcome their sinful tendencies and live lives pleasing to God (Rom. 7:4, 6), the final outcome of which is eternal life (Gal. 6:8).

It needs to be stressed that when Paul contrasts the *letter* that kills and the *Spirit* who gives life, no downgrading of the role of Scripture in Christian life and ministry is involved. The *letter* that kills refers to the law of Moses in its role of pronouncing judgment upon those who commit sin. But, as Paul emphasizes, that same law testifies to the saving gospel of Christ (Rom. 3:21; 4:1–25; 10:5–8), and he asserts, 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

d. The greater glory of new covenant ministry (3:7–11)

Having contrasted the new covenant 'of the Spirit' with the old covenant 'of the letter' in 3:6, Paul further contrasts them in 3:7–11 by an exposition of Exodus 34:29–32. His primary purpose in so doing is to demonstrate the greater glory of the new covenant under which he was privileged to minister as an apostle, and so explain why, despite so many difficulties, he does not lose heart (cf. 4:1).

The fact that Paul pursues this purpose by comparing the superior glory of the ministry of the new covenant with the lesser glory of the ministry of the old covenant may indicate an underlying apologetic or even a polemic intention. If those whose opposition to Paul is reflected so vividly in chapters 10 – 13 had already begun to have influence in Corinth by the time he wrote chapters 1 – 7, then he may have felt the need to defend his own ministry and expose the shortcomings of his opponents' ministry, in which case an apologetic or a polemic undertone in our present passage is understandable. If these people who

stressed their Jewish connections (cf. 11:21b–22) were already causing trouble, Paul's exposition of Exodus 34:29–32 which shows the inferiority of the glory of the old covenant may have been written to counteract an overemphasis on these things.

Paul recognizes that the old covenant was accompanied by glory, but using a rabbinic method of exegesis (from the lesser to the greater), he shows that the new covenant is accompanied by far greater glory. The superiority of the new covenant is argued on three counts: (a) the new covenant ministry of the Spirit is more glorious than the old covenant ministry of death; (b) the new covenant ministry of righteousness is more glorious than the old covenant ministry of condemnation; and (c) the permanent ministry of the new covenant is more glorious than that of the old covenant, which was transitory.

7. This verse introduces Paul's exposition of Exodus 34:29–32 in which he argues for the superiority of the new covenant. He begins by acknowledging that the old covenant was accompanied with glory: *Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was* . . . The ministry that *brought death* was the old covenant ministry, with commandments *engraved in letters on stone*. How it brought death is best understood in the light of Romans 7:10, where the apostle says that 'the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death'. Although Leviticus 18:5 promised life to those who kept the commandments, Paul knew that no-one does so in fact, and as a result the law could only pronounce the verdict of death over transgressors.

While this ministry *brought death*, it nevertheless *came with glory*. To illustrate this, Paul recounts how Moses, having received the law from God, descended Mount Sinai with his face still shining with reflected glory as a result of having been in God's presence. Such was the intensity of this reflected glory that *the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses*, even though it was a transitory phenomenon.

8. *Will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?* Arguing from the lesser to the greater, Paul, having acknowledged that the ministry that brought death 'came with glory', asserts that the ministry of the Spirit is *even more glorious*. For under the old covenant the commandments were 'engraved in letters on stone', whereas under the new covenant the Spirit writes the law of God upon people's hearts (cf. Jer. 31:31). Unlike the commandments 'engraved in letters on stone' which could not enable a person to fulfil their demands and so those who transgressed were subject to death, the Spirit who writes God's law on people's hearts also enables them to walk in the way of God's commandments

(cf. Ezek. 36:27; Rom. 8:3–4). For this reason, *the ministry of the Spirit* is far more glorious than the ministry of death.

9. *If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!* This is the apostle's second argument from the lesser to the greater, demonstrating the more glorious character of new covenant ministry. Here ministry under the old covenant which was *glorious* is nevertheless described as a ministry *that brought condemnation*, and this is so because those who disobeyed the commandments 'engraved in letters on stone' were condemned.[80] Ministry under the new covenant is described as *more glorious* because it is *the ministry that brings righteousness*. Now those who are guilty of transgressions are nevertheless accounted righteous by God because of the sacrificial death of Christ that inaugurated the new covenant (cf. Rom. 3:21–26). Once again, new covenant ministry is shown to be more glorious than old covenant ministry, for under the new covenant the grace of God is seen far more clearly.

10. *For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory.* The whole point of verses 7–11 is focused in this statement. Such is the surpassing glory of the new covenant of which Paul was made a minister that the old covenant of which Moses was minister, though certainly attended by a glory of its own (Exod. 34:29–32), has now in comparison come to have no glory at all.

The expression translated here as *in comparison with* (*en toutō tō merei*) may also be translated as 'in this matter', as is the similar expression (*en tō merei*) in 9:3, the only other place in the New Testament where it is found. If this is done, verse 10 could be translated: 'Indeed, *in this case*, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it' (ESV, italics added). 'In this case' would then refer back to the fact that the ministry of the law under the old covenant brought condemnation, whereas the ministry of the Spirit under the new covenant brings righteousness.

11. *And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!* This is the third of Paul's arguments from the lesser to the greater. The role of the law given under the old covenant was transitory in the sense that it was introduced for a specific period of time only. It was introduced 430 years after the promise of blessing was made to Abraham (cf. Gal. 3:17), and its role as a regulatory norm was terminated with the coming of Christ (cf. Rom. 7:1–4; 9:4; Gal. 3:22 – 4:6; Eph. 2:15–16; Col. 2:16–17). But the role of the Spirit operating under the new covenant is permanent, and for that reason the new covenant is of 'much greater glory' than the old covenant which is transitory.

While it is true that the law as a regulatory norm no longer applies to believers, having been replaced by the work of the Spirit, it still has a role as it is re-appropriated in the light of Christ and in that way continues to be effective for 'teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness' (2 Tim. 3:16).[81]

e. The greater boldness of new covenant ministers (3:12–18)

Verses 12–18 are an exposition of Exodus 34:33–35, which tells how Moses veiled his face after communicating God's law to the Israelites so that they would no longer have to look upon the radiance of his face which resulted from his being in the presence of the Lord. Paul sees in the veiling of Moses' face, which prevented Israel from seeing its radiance, something analogous to the 'veil' which lay over the minds of many of his Jewish contemporaries, preventing them from properly understanding the law of Moses when it was read in their synagogues. Believers, by contrast, are those from whose faces the 'veil' has been removed so that they 'see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God' (cf. 4:4).

In his exposition, Paul stresses two matters: first, the boldness with which he conducts his own ministry, in contrast to the lack of boldness of Moses who covered his face with a veil; and second, his own beholding with 'unveiled face' the glory of the Lord in the face of Christ, which he contrasts with the 'veiled minds' of his Jewish contemporaries when they hear the law of Moses being read.

12–13. *Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.* This statement is connected with what precedes in verse 11, where the permanence of the new covenant was emphasized. Paul's hope relates to the permanent character of the new covenant of which he is a minister. He has no fear that this covenant will be superseded, and for that reason he can be very bold. It is in this respect that he declares, *We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away.* Paul could be bold because he ministered under the provisions of a permanent covenant, whereas Moses lacked boldness, Paul says, because the covenant under which he ministered, and its glory, were *passing away*.

Exodus 34:33–35, which forms the basis of Paul's exposition here, gives no indication that Moses veiled his face so that the Israelites might not see *the end of what was passing away*. The apostle seems to have inferred this from the text. He saw in the passing of the radiance of Moses' face a symbol of the abolition of the old covenant under which Moses ministered. He inferred that Moses lacked boldness because he knew the old covenant was to be abolished and he veiled his

face so that the Israelites might not see the end[82] of the radiance associated with the old covenant. Harris (p. 297) suggests that Moses veiled his face to prevent the Israelites from focusing upon its radiance, instead of giving heed to what they heard from him. Baker argues that the radiance of Moses' face did not fade; rather, it was permanent and 'blocked' from the sight of the Israelites by the veil he put over his face because they were afraid.[83]

14. *But their minds were made dull.*[84] The purpose of these words appears to be to correct any impression that Moses was to blame for the Israelites' inability to behold the glory of the old covenant reflected in his face. Moses may have veiled his face, but it was the Israelites' minds that were dull (cf. Ps. 95:8; Heb. 3:8, 15; 4:7). Augustine comments, 'The veil is not there because of Moses but because of their gross and carnal minds' (Bray, p. 223). Rabbi Simeon ben Jochai (writing c. AD 150) said that it was the effects of the Israelites' sin in making the golden calf while Moses was on the mount that resulted in their being unable through fear to look upon the brightness of Moses' face (Str-B 3, p. 515).

For to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed. The dullness of mind of the Israelites of Moses' day reminds Paul of the dullness of mind of the Jews of his own day, and he finds in the idea of the veil a way of describing that dullness. Just as the veil prevented the ancient Israelites from seeing the brightness of Moses' face, so too *the same veil*, as it were, remained when the Jews of his own day heard the Old Testament read (as would have been the case with Paul himself before his conversion). They could not see that the old covenant had come to an end and the new covenant had already been inaugurated. Paul seems to imply that he is not to blame for his Jewish contemporaries' failure to embrace the gospel – their minds are dull just as were those of the Israelites in Moses' day.

Because only in Christ is it taken away. When people believe in Christ and join the Christian community, they experience at the same time the removal of the veil of ignorance and unbelief that previously prevented them from understanding the true meaning of the Old Testament, that is, its witness to Jesus Christ, the end of the old covenant and the inauguration of the new covenant which his coming brought about.[85] When Paul says, *only in Christ is it taken away,* 'it' refers to the veil. Other commentators suggest that 'it' refers to the old dispensation, which was terminated by Christ. This is unlikely, as the veil is the subject of verse 14a and therefore presumably the subject of verse 14b as well, and also because in verses 14–16 the veil is the main object of Paul's reflection.

15–16. What was said in verse 14 is reiterated in verse 15: *Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts*, and then in verse 16 the

exposition is taken another step further: *But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away*.[86] This is an adaptation of Exodus 34:34: 'But whenever he entered the LORD's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out.' After Moses descended the mount and after he had communicated God's message to the Israelites, he veiled his face so they would no longer have to look upon its brightness. However, when he went in before the Lord, he removed the veil and only replaced it again when he came out to the people. Paul applies this to his Jewish contemporaries by saying that if they accept the gospel and turn to the Lord, the veil over their minds will be removed.

Normally, when Paul uses the word 'Lord', it refers to Christ. But here, where he is adapting the LXX reading of Exodus 34:34, the title is best understood to denote God. We may add that for Paul it is now only through Christ that a person comes to God, for the glory of God now shines in the face of Christ (cf. 4:4, 6); nevertheless, in the present context the title *Lord* denotes God.

17. *Now the Lord is the Spirit.* These words have given rise to much debate. If *the Lord* is taken to refer to Christ, then it may be asked whether Christ is equated with the Spirit – with all the implications such an identification would have for the doctrine of the Trinity. However, the meaning of the statement can be determined only by seeing it in the wider context of Paul's argument in this chapter.

It needs to be remembered that Paul's main concern in chapter 3 is to highlight the greater glory of the new covenant of the Spirit (cf. vv. 3, 6, 8, 18), which he contrasts with the lesser glory of the old covenant of the law. Paul's Jewish contemporaries related to God through the law, but believers relate to God through the Spirit. Further, it must be recalled that in verse 16 'the Lord' refers to God, not Christ, and therefore in verse 17 it is to be understood in the same way. The thrust of the two verses, then, is that when people turn to God, the veil over their minds is removed, and they realize that the time of the old covenant of the law has come to an end and that of the new covenant of the Spirit has begun. So, when under the new covenant they turn to the Lord, they experience him as the Spirit. The expression *the Lord is the Spirit* is not a one-to-one identification, but rather a way of saying that under the new covenant we experience the Lord as the Holy Spirit.

And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. It is significant that Paul refers to the Spirit as *the Spirit of the Lord* (*pneuma kyriou*), an expression found only here in his letters, but twenty-two times in the LXX, where, for the most part, it refers to the Spirit of God (Yahweh), confirming that when Paul says, *the Lord is the Spirit,* he is referring to God, not Christ, in this context.

This statement, *where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom*, must be

understood within the overall context of chapter 3, where the new covenant of the Spirit is contrasted with the old covenant of the law. Under the new covenant, where the Spirit is the operative power, there is freedom. Under the old covenant, where the law reigns, there is bondage. Probably the best commentary on this freedom is Galatians 3:23–25, where the apostle describes the Jewish people as those 'held in custody under the law', the law being their 'guardian until Christ came'. But once they come to faith in Christ, they are no longer under the law's guardianship, and in this freedom Paul says they must 'stand firm' and not allow themselves to 'be burdened again by a yoke of slavery' (Gal. 5:1).

18. *And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory.* Paul takes up again his exposition of Exodus 34:33–35 (in which we are told how Moses removed his veil when he went in before the Lord). While Moses may have lacked boldness before the Israelites and so veiled his face (v. 13), when he went in before the Lord he did so with confidence and freedom, symbolized by the removal of the veil.[87] Like Moses, then, Paul and all believers approach God in confidence and freedom with unveiled faces, and like Moses also, they behold the glory of the Lord. To express the latter, Paul uses the middle participle *katoptrizomenoi*. The middle form of the verb *katoptrizō* generally means 'to behold oneself or something as in a mirror', although there is evidence to show it could also be used to mean 'to reflect as in a mirror'. However, the idea of beholding fits the context better. In Exodus 34:33–35, which forms the basis of Paul's exposition, we are told that it was when Moses went in before the Lord that his face was unveiled, and at that time he was beholding, rather than reflecting, the glory of the Lord. Further, Paul's idea of being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another (v. 18b) is better understood to occur while believers are beholding rather than reflecting the glory of God. Finally, in 4:6 it is certainly beholding the glory of God that Paul has in mind.

If we were to ask Paul in what way believers behold the glory of God, his answer would be that they do so as the 'veils' are removed from their minds so that the truth of the gospel is no longer hidden from them. It is in 'the light of the gospel' that they behold 'the glory of Christ, who is the image of God', and they see 'the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ' (4:3–6).

And we all . . . are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory. It is important to note that this changing into his likeness takes place not at one point in time, but is an extended process. The verb *metamorphoumetha* ('we are being changed') is in the present tense, indicating the continuous nature of the change, while the words *with ever-increasing glory* stress its progressive

nature. The verb *metamorphoō* is found in only three other places in the New Testament. It is used to describe Jesus' transfiguration in Matthew 17:2 and Mark 9:2, and Paul uses it in Romans 12:2 to denote moral transformation ('Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind', italics added).

Paul speaks often of the transformation of believers in other passages, though words other than *metamorphoō* are employed. In some cases, he has in mind the future transformation of believers' bodies to be like Christ's glorious body (1 Cor. 15:51–52; Phil. 3:21). In other cases, it is clearly a present moral transformation that is in view (Rom. 6:1–4; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15). The Old Testament prophets who spoke beforehand of the new covenant certainly anticipated a moral transformation of those who were to experience its blessings (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:25–27), and Paul saw this expectation fulfilled in the lives of his converts (1 Cor. 6:9–11; 2 Cor. 3:3). These last references, together with Romans 12:2 cited above, provide the clue to Paul's meaning in the present context. The continuous and progressive transformation by which believers *are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory* is the moral transformation which is taking place in their lives so that they approximate more and more to the image of God.

Which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. The reference to *the Lord who is the Spirit* may be taken to mean God who, under the new covenant, is present and experienced by believers as the Spirit (see Commentary on v. 17). The Spirit's activity is the major characteristic of the new covenant, and the transformation of believers is wholly attributable to his work in their lives (cf. Rom. 8:1–7).

f. The conduct of Paul's ministry (4:1–6)

In 3:7–18 Paul described the glory of the ministry entrusted to him – a ministry of the Spirit that brings life, righteousness and transformation of character to those who believe the gospel. In 4:1–6 he tells how, in the light of the great privilege of participating in such a ministry, he conducted himself and proclaimed the gospel. He also tells why the minds of some were still blinded to this gospel, and concludes by describing the essential content of his gospel – Jesus Christ as Lord – and by affirming that the glory of God shines in the face of the Christ he proclaims.[88] Barnett (p. 211) describes how Paul's own experience is reflected in this passage:

> He had been an unbeliever, blinded to the light of the gospel (v. 4). On the road to Damascus, however, Paul had seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, who is the image of God (vv. 4, 6). Having

given him the ministry of the new covenant, God showed him mercy, illuminating his heart that he might give the light of the knowledge of God to others (vv. 1, 6). In proclaiming the word of God, the gospel that 'Jesus Christ is Lord,' Paul 'sets forth the truth' (vv. 2, 4, and 5), and he does so as their 'slave' for Jesus' sake.

1. *Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.*[89] *This ministry* is the ministry of the Spirit under the new covenant whose glory Paul depicted in 3:7–18. The apostle was very conscious that his participation in this ministry was only *through God's mercy*, for he never forgot that he was formerly a persecutor of the church of God (cf. 1 Cor. 15:9–10; 1 Tim. 1:12–16). The awareness of the great privilege and responsibility involved caused him not to *lose heart*, despite the many difficulties and sufferings he experienced in carrying out that ministry (cf. 11:23–28).

2. *Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways.* What it means to renounce shameful (or disgraceful) ways is spelt out in the rest of the verse. Negatively, Paul says *we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God.* He uses the word *deception* (*panourgia*) again in 11:3, where he says, 'Eve was deceived by the serpent's *cunning*.' Paul asserts that in his preaching of the gospel there was no attempt to deceive by cunning or to *distort the word of God*.[90] The verb translated 'to distort' (*doloō*) is found only here in the New Testament. Its use in extra-biblical texts in relation to the adulteration of wine[91] suggests that Paul had in mind the distortion of the word of God, either by mingling it with alien ideas, or removing its offence so as to peddle it for personal gain (see commentary on 2:17). He appears to be responding to criticisms of the way he conducted his ministry, criticisms that had been entertained by the Corinthians.

Positively, he claims, *On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.* The contrast between using deception and *setting forth the truth plainly*, and between the word of God that has been distorted and the truth, is clear. By a straightforward presentation of the gospel, Paul commends himself to everyone's conscience. For the apostle, the conscience is that human faculty by which people are able to approve or disapprove their actions (those intended as well as those already performed) and also the actions of others (see commentary on 1:12). Thus, by the straightforward nature of the truth, Paul invites the approval of everyone, convinced that when they judge him in the light of their own consciences, they will acknowledge that he has acted with integrity. The final words, *in the sight of God*, remind us that Paul, while concerned that the conduct of his ministry should commend itself to people's consciences, was concerned ultimately to minister in a way that finds God's approval. In 1 Corinthians 4:3–4 he goes so

far as to say, ‘I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.’

3. It is surprising that Paul, having just spoken of setting forth the truth plainly, immediately goes on to discuss its hiddenness: *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.* In 3:14–16 he spoke of the veil over the minds of many of his fellow Jews when they heard Moses read. Perhaps Paul had been criticized because his gospel was rejected by many of his own people (cf. Acts 13:44–45; 17:5–9; 18:5–6, 12–13; 19:8–9), and the Corinthians had entertained that criticism. His response to such criticism is that the hiddenness of the gospel is due not to deficiencies in his ministry, but to the condition of the hearers: it is veiled only *to those who are perishing*. In 1 Corinthians 1:18–24 he points out the effect of this blindness on both Jews and Gentiles, when he says,

> For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God . . . Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

4. In their case, *the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers. The god of this age* refers to Satan, who is permitted to exercise a limited rule in the present age (cf. John 12:31), a rule that will be terminated altogether with the coming of the new age at Christ’s return. In the meantime, he is active in blinding the minds of unbelievers to the truth of the gospel. The reason why many rejected Paul’s gospel is to be found not in deficiencies in his proclamation of it, but because their minds have been blinded by the god of this age (= Satan). In 3:14–16 Paul spoke of the veil over the minds of his Jewish contemporaries, which prevented them from understanding their own Scriptures. Here it is implied that Satan was involved not only in the veiling of the minds of Jewish people, but of all unbelievers. Other references in 2 Corinthians indicate that the activity of *the god of this age* (= Satan) is not restricted to the blinding of the minds of unbelievers, but is directed against believers as well, seeking to deceive them and to move them away from their devotion to Christ (cf. 2:11; 11:3, 14).

In each place where Satan (or as here, *the god of this age*) is mentioned in 2 Corinthians, he is seen to be seeking to hinder the work of God. However, it must be remembered that Satan can do so only with divine permission, and the blindness of mind which he is allowed to impose can at any time be penetrated by a blaze of light if God so wills. This, of course, was Paul’s own experience. In his blindness, he persecuted God’s church until such time as it pleased God to

reveal his Son to him (cf. Acts 9:1–19; Gal. 1:13–17).

So that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. Here Paul indicates that the purpose for which the god of this age blinds people's minds is *so that they cannot see the light*. The light is described as *the light of the gospel*, the gospel that *displays the glory of Christ*, and Christ is described as *the image of God*. When Paul says unbelievers cannot *see* the light of the gospel, he means that when they *hear* the gospel they do not appreciate its truth. Jesus made a similar point when explaining the parable of the sower. He said of the seed that fell on the path: 'Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved' (Luke 8:12).

It is unusual for Paul to describe the gospel as that which displays *the glory of Christ* when elsewhere he frequently says the gospel he preaches concerns 'Christ crucified' (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2; Gal. 3:1). However, in the next verse he says that he preaches 'Jesus Christ as Lord' (4:5), and in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 he describes the content of the gospel as 'Christ died for our sins . . . was buried . . . was raised' (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3–4). The gospel includes the fact that the crucified One is the Lord who was raised from the dead, and this is sufficient to justify a description of the gospel as that which *displays the glory of Christ*.[92]

Paul says that the gospel concerns the glory of Christ, *who is the image of God*. There may be an allusion here to the creation of humankind in Genesis 1:26 ('Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness'), especially in the light of the fact that Paul does speak of Christ as the 'last Adam', comparing (and contrasting) him with the 'first Adam' (1 Cor. 15:45–49; cf. Rom. 5:12–19). There may also be an allusion here to Israel's wisdom literature where Wisdom is personified and her glories celebrated: 'For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness' (Wis 7:26, NRSV). Strengthening the possibility of such an allusion is the fact that elsewhere Paul ascribes to Christ that role in creation which Israel's wisdom literature ascribes to Wisdom (cf. Prov. 8:22–31; Col. 1:15–20). Bringing the two possible allusions together, it has been suggested that for Paul, Christ is the image of God after the fashion of Adam as far as his humanity is concerned, and after the fashion of Wisdom as far as his transcendence is concerned.[93]

5. *For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.* This statement constitutes a concise description of Paul's ministry: his primary vocation was that of a preacher, the content of his preaching is *Jesus Christ as Lord*, and he ministers to people as their servant *for Jesus' sake*.

Elsewhere when describing the content of his preaching, Paul says, 'we preach Christ crucified' (1 Cor. 1:23), which, like the preaching of *Jesus Christ as Lord*, is a shorthand pointer to the heart of his gospel. When the lordship of Christ is proclaimed, people are called to give their allegiance to him, but the one to whom they give their allegiance is also the crucified One, the one who died for them and was then raised as Lord of all. These two elements of the gospel need to be held together, for if they are not, the gospel itself is distorted.

Contrary to any idea that in his preaching he promoted his own authority and importance, Paul says he regards himself as the servant of those to whom he preaches. But this must not be misunderstood to mean that they are his masters, any more than he is theirs (cf. 1:24). Paul acknowledges only one Master, and it is in obedience to him that he serves his converts – *for Jesus' sake*.

This verse could be understood as either apologetic or polemic, possibly even both. It would be apologetic if Paul were responding to criticism that in his preaching he puts himself forward (i.e. that he is more concerned to draw attention to his own importance as an apostle than to proclaim the gospel). It would be polemic if Paul were implying that, unlike others who do put themselves forward in their preaching, he preaches the lordship of Christ.

6. In this verse Paul explains that the gracious work of God in his heart motivates his preaching of the gospel: *For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.* This appears to recall Genesis 1:3: 'And God said, "Let there be light." '[94] If this is the case, Paul likens the revelation to him of God's glory to the creative act of God whereby the darkness of the primeval world was banished by the light. Conversion is thus depicted as illumination revealing the true nature of Christ as the one in whose face the glory of God is displayed. Paul's own conversion may well have prompted him to think in this way (Gal. 1:13–17; cf. Acts 9:1–9). Barnett (p. 224) comments, 'There is an outward as well as an inward aspect here. Outwardly, on the way to Damascus, Paul saw "the glory of God in the face of Christ"; inwardly, and as a consequence, "God has shone in our hearts" . . . Whereas God's outward revelation of his glory to Paul was unique, his inner enlightenment of the heart also describes the illumination of all who receive the gospel message.'

Before leaving this passage, it is worth noting two things. First, the very high view of the person of Christ that Paul espouses implied by the references in verse 4 ('the image of God') and verse 6 ('God's glory displayed in the face of Christ'). It is true that humankind in general was created in the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:26), an image that was subsequently marred by sin and is now being restored by grace (cf. 3:18). However, the view of Christ reflected in Paul's

words in verses 4, 6 involves much more than that. His view is most clearly set out in Colossians 1:15–20, where Christ is not only described as ‘the image of the invisible God’ (v. 15), but is also identified as God’s agent in creation and providence (vv. 16–17), spoken of as the Lord of the church (v. 18) and the one in whom ‘God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell’ (v. 19). In holding such an exalted view of Christ, Paul is not alone among the writers of the New Testament. A similar exalted Christology is to be found, for example, in John 1:1–4 and Hebrews 1:1–4.

Second, this passage is a reminder to all who minister in Christ’s name today that they too have their ministry only by the mercy of God who made his light shine into their hearts to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Christ. Being entrusted with such a treasure, they must refuse to distort the gospel and must preach the truth plainly, commending themselves to people’s consciences, if not their prejudices. They must preach Jesus Christ as Lord, and be willing to be servants of those to whom they minister *for Jesus’ sake*. They need to recognize that not all will accept their message, because their minds have been blinded, but need to remember that the God who made his light shine into their own hearts can do likewise for those to whom they preach.

Theology

This long section (2:14 – 4:6) in which Paul speaks of his competence for ministry provides significant insights into the nature of authentic ministry, its validation and its conduct.

First, employing the imagery of the Roman triumphal procession, Paul says that through the preaching of the gospel God spreads abroad the ‘aroma’ of the knowledge of God everywhere. The gospel brings life to those who accept it, but death to those who reject it. Paul felt the heavy responsibility of this ministry because he refused to adulterate the gospel message to make it more acceptable, as ‘some’ did (2:14–17).

Second, in response to questions raised about the validity of his ministry on the grounds that it was not supported by letters of recommendation, Paul claims that the fruits of ministry constitute its validation. In particular, he claims that the very existence of a Christian community in Corinth is his letter of recommendation. It is a letter whose ‘author’ was Christ, and it was inscribed with the ‘ink’ of the Spirit in the hearts of the Corinthians through Paul’s own ministry (3:1–3).

Third, in response to the question, ‘who is equal to such a task?’, Paul says his competence for ministry is not found in himself, but comes from God, who made

him an able minister of the new covenant (3:4–6). The new covenant is far more glorious than the old covenant, because it is a covenant of the Spirit rather than one that brings death, one that brings righteousness rather than condemnation, and one that lasts rather than being transitory (3:7–11). It is an immense privilege as well as a weighty responsibility to participate in such a ministry.

Fourth, in response to criticisms that even many of his fellow Jews would not accept his message, Paul says this was due, not to any deficiencies in either the gospel or his ministry, but to the fact that their minds had been made dull – as if a veil had been drawn across them to prevent them from seeing the truth. This veil is removed only when people turn to the Lord, and then they see the glory of the Lord displayed in the face of Christ and they in turn are transformed progressively into his image (3:12–18).

Fifth, ministry is carried out with integrity when people refuse to use deception or to distort the word of God, and when they proclaim truth clearly. Ministry is authentic when Jesus Christ is proclaimed as Lord, and when those who proclaim him see themselves as servants of those to whom they minister, for Jesus' sake.

iv. Present suffering and future glory (4:7 – 5:10)

Context

Having spoken of the glorious ministry in which he was privileged to participate in 3:7–11, and the light of the glory of God that has shone in his heart in 4:6, here in 4:7 – 5:10 Paul explains that he experiences all this in the context of suffering and weakness – he has this treasure in a jar of clay. He states this as a general principle in 4:7, illustrates it in 4:8–9, restates it as a principle in 4:10–12, and adds that despite all the difficulties he continues to operate in a 'spirit of faith' in 4:13–15. Then in 4:16–18 he says that because of his sufferings he is outwardly wasting away, yet inwardly he is being renewed day by day while he keeps his eyes fixed on 'an eternal glory'. What this means is explained in 5:1–10, where he says that if 'the earthly tent' we now live in is destroyed, God will provide us with 'an eternal house in heaven' (5:1–5). This gives him confidence to make it his aim to please God, conscious that 'we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due to us' (5:6–10).

Comment

a. Treasure in jars of clay (4:7–15)

7. *But we have this treasure in jars of clay*. Clay jars were found in virtually every home in the Ancient Middle East. They were inexpensive and easily broken. Unlike metal vessels (which could be repaired) or glass ones (which could be melted down and the material reused), once broken, clay jars had to be discarded. They were thus cheap and of little intrinsic value. Paul may have had in mind the small earthenware oil-lamps sold cheaply in the market-places. If so, 'the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ' (v. 6) would be the treasure, while the apostles in their frailty would be the earthenware lamps from whom the light was made to shine in the world. Perhaps aware of criticisms that if he claimed to participate in such a glorious ministry, how come his life was marked by weakness and suffering, Paul explains, *we have this treasure in jars of clay*.

The contrast between the *treasure* and the *jars of clay* which contain it is intended *to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.* In 1:9 Paul testified that the affliction he experienced in Asia taught him 'not to rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead', and in 3:5 he acknowledges that 'our competence comes from God'. In similar vein here, the frailty of the messengers shows that the all-surpassing power comes from God and is not inherent in his envoys. What this means is teased out in the following verses.

8–9. The general principle enunciated in verse 7 is here illustrated by a series of four paradoxical statements. These reflect the vulnerability of Paul and his co-workers on the one hand and the power of God which sustains them on the other. *We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed.* The participles translated *hard pressed* (*thlibomenoi*) and *crushed* (*stenochōroumenoi*) are similar in meaning, but in this context the latter clearly represents an intensification of the experience of affliction referred to in the former. Paul's point is that, while God allows him to be hard pressed, by his power at work in Paul's life God saves him from being completely crushed.

Perplexed, but not in despair. The participle translated *perplexed* is *aporoumenoi*, and that translated *in despair*, *exaporoumenoi*, is a compound form of the same participle and expresses an intensification of the former. Paul's point again is that while he is often perplexed, because of God's power at work in his life he does not succumb to despair. Commenting on the apparent contradiction between this statement and Paul's reference to despairing of life itself in 1:8, Thrall (pp. 327–328) suggests he may have learnt from the past experience referred to in 1:8 not to despair completely, as he says in 1:9, 'this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God'.

Persecuted, but not abandoned. The verb 'to abandon' (*enkataleipō*) is used

by Paul of Demas who abandoned him when he was in prison (2 Tim. 4:10) and of those who abandoned him at his first defence before Caesar (2 Tim. 4:16). It is also the word Jesus used when abandoned by God on the cross (Matt. 27:46). Paul's point is that, while he was often persecuted in the course of his ministry, he was never abandoned by God.

Struck down, but not destroyed. The allusion here may be a military one – a soldier struck down but not killed by his opponent. Paul may be referring to physical violence he experienced, but insisting that even so, God had not allowed him to perish (cf. 1:10; Acts 14:19–20). For a catalogue of the sorts of experiences reflected in these four antitheses, see 11:23–33.

10. After the illustrations drawn from experience in verses 8–9, Paul states in another two antitheses the theological principle involved. In the first of these he says, *We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.* The word translated *death* (*nekrōsin*) can denote either the process of dying or being dead. The word is found in only one other place in the New Testament, in Romans 4:19 where it is appropriately translated as 'dead' when describing Sarah's infertility ('Without weakening in his faith, he [Abraham] faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah's womb was also dead'). However, here in the context of verse 10, *nekrōsin* is better understood to denote the process of dying: as Paul carries around the dying of Jesus in his body, he also experiences the life of Jesus – both of which signify process. In this case, the dying of Jesus is understood to be all his afflictions that culminated in his death. In like manner, Paul's carrying around the dying of Jesus could be understood as all his apostolic sufferings that would in time culminate in his martyrdom. Bearing *in our body the death of Jesus* indicates that Paul's sufferings (referred to in vv. 8–9) are similar to those of Christ himself (cf. Col. 1:24), excluding, of course, his vicarious death as an atoning sacrifice.

11. In the second of the antitheses, Paul says, *For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body.* This is essentially an unpacking of the first antithesis in which Paul substitutes the word *thanaton* for *nekrōsin* when referring to *death*, and the word *sarki* for *somati* when referring to our *body*. These substitutions are almost certainly stylistic rather than substantial. So, then, *being given over to death for Jesus' sake* (v. 11) is equivalent to 'carry around in our body the death of Jesus' (v. 10), and *so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body* (v. 11) parallels 'so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body' (v. 10). When Paul says he was *given over* to death for Jesus' sake, he uses the same verb (*paradidōmi*) as that employed when he speaks of God handing Christ over

to death for us and for our sins (Rom. 4:25; 8:32). On the one hand, therefore, those responsible for Paul's exposure to suffering and death were those who persecuted him (unbelieving Jews and Gentiles), but on the other hand, it may be said that just as God handed Christ over to suffering and death for our salvation, so God handed Paul over to the same so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in him, and, as the next verse states, when death was at work in him, life was at work in the Corinthians.

12. *So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.* This statement takes the thought of verses 10–11 one step further. Daily exposure to forces leading to death was Paul's apostolic experience, but accompanying that was a continual manifestation of the life of Jesus. This not only sustained him, but worked through him to bring life to others. To the Colossians he wrote, 'Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church' (Col. 1:24). It was through Paul's preaching of the gospel in the power of the Spirit, albeit in the midst of persecution and suffering, that Jesus' life was mediated to others.

13. *It is written: 'I believed; therefore I have spoken.'* Paul's quotation is from Psalm 116:10 (LXX 115:1). The psalmist relates how he trusted in God when he was immersed in distress and sorrow and that the Lord heard his cry for mercy. The point Paul makes based on this quotation is: *Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak.* Despite the difficulties of his ministry, Paul says that he operates with the same *spirit of faith* as the psalmist did in the midst of his distress, and in this faith Paul goes on speaking, that is, he goes on proclaiming God's word (cf. 2:17). There has been debate as to whether *spirit of faith* refers to a human disposition, as indicated when the initial letter is lower case ('spirit') or to the Holy Spirit, in which case the initial letter would be upper case ('Spirit').[95] The former is the better option, as Paul is saying that, like the psalmist, his faith in God persists despite the sufferings he encounters. He is not making a point about the Holy Spirit being the one who inspires faith.

14. *Because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus*. Paul's faith was strengthened by the knowledge that, should his sufferings intensify and culminate in death, the God who raised Jesus from the dead would also raise him along with Jesus. Paul makes a similar statement in 1 Thessalonians 4:14: 'For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.' In 1 Corinthians 15:20–23 Paul speaks of Jesus' resurrection as the firstfruits which are the sign of the full harvest to follow. God, who raised Jesus as the 'firstfruits' from the dead, shall surely raise us as part of the 'full

harvest'. This knowledge encouraged the apostle in the midst of his difficulties (cf. Rom. 8:11, 17).[96]

And present us with you to himself. The words *to himself* have no counterpart in the original, and translated literally this would read: 'and present us with you'. To whom we will be presented is not stated, but seeing that it is God who raises and presents us, it follows that he will present us, not to himself, but to Christ. In 11:2 Paul speaks of believers being presented as 'a pure virgin' to Christ, their 'one husband'.

Resurrection is not an end in itself. It is the gateway to immortality in the presence of God. Paul looks forward to the day when, being raised up, he will be presented along with his converts to Christ in the presence of God (cf. 1:14; Phil. 2:16; 1 Thess. 2:19).

15. Paul says of his apostolic preaching and suffering that *all this is for your benefit* (i.e. so that the Corinthians might experience the grace of God made known through the gospel). But there was a further reason why Paul endured *all this*: it was *so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.* We see here both the penultimate (*for your benefit*) and the ultimate (*to the glory of God*) purposes of Paul's apostolic ministry.

b. We do not lose heart (4:16–18)

16. *Therefore we do not lose heart. Therefore* refers back to verses 14–15, where Paul expressed his confidence that the one who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise him on the last day, and in the meantime his ministry, accompanied though it was with many afflictions, was the means by which God's grace was reaching more and more people.

Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. A literal rendering of the original would read: 'But if our outward man (*ho exō hēmōn anthropos*) wastes away, yet our inner man (*ho esō hēmōn* [*anthropos*]) is being renewed day by day.' The meaning of Paul's reference to his 'outer man' and 'inner man' has been the subject of debate. One view is that Paul adopted a dualistic view of the human constitution, one which regards the inner nature (soul) as good and destined for immortality, but regards the outer nature (body) as evil and destined to pass away. However, most recognize that this is at odds with Paul's personal eschatology, which involves a future existence, not as a disembodied soul, but as a whole person – with a resurrected body (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35–38; 2 Cor. 5:1–5).

Another view is that Paul was employing a general distinction between the

physical body and the soul that would be readily understood by his predominantly Greco-Roman audience. However, more than the physical body is involved in the wasting away of 'the outer man', as is indicated by his description of those afflictions which were causing it. These include being hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down, and being given over to death (vv. 8–11); great pressure beyond his ability to endure, despair of life itself (1:8–10); imprisonment, floggings, exposure to death, the forty lashes minus one, being beaten with rods, pelted with stones, shipwreck, constant journeying, dangers from rivers, bandits, his fellow Jews, and Gentiles, dangers in the city and the country, at sea, from false believers, hard labour, sleeplessness, hunger, thirst, cold and lack of clothing, and besides all this the daily pressure of his concern for all the churches (11:23–28). The afflictions that contributed to the wasting away of Paul's 'outer man' certainly included many which affected his physical body, but also those which affected his mind and spirit. For this reason, it is better to say that the 'outer man' is the whole person from the standpoint of one's creaturely mortality, whereas the 'inner man' is the whole person as a new creation (5:17), the renewed being of the believer (Harris, pp. 359–360).

Rather than losing heart because of his outward *wasting away*, Paul says that by God's grace he was being inwardly *renewed day by day*. On the one hand, he encounters debilitating afflictions which affect him 'outwardly': he is hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down and being given over to death (vv. 8–11). On the other hand, he experiences a daily renewal 'inwardly'. The best indication of what inward renewal involved is expressed in Paul's prayer for the Ephesian believers:

> I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
> *(Eph. 3:16–19)*

17. Paul further explains the reason why he does not lose heart in the midst of affliction: *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.* Paul's troubles were, of course, neither *light* nor *momentary* in themselves. They were the burdensome and virtually constant accompaniment of his ministry. Yet, by comparison with the weighty and eternal character of the glory they were achieving for him, he could describe them as *light and momentary* (cf. Rom. 8:17–23). Paul saw a connection between the troubles he endured and the glory that would far outweigh them. More literally translated, verse 17 would read: 'For our temporary lightness of affliction is

producing for us an eternal weight of glory that is out of all proportion [to the affliction].' The experience of affliction 'is producing' the glory to be revealed. How are we to understand the causal connection between the two? Among Paul's Jewish contemporaries, there was a belief that the messianic age would be ushered in by a definite and predetermined measure of afflictions to be experienced by the people of God. These afflictions were known as the birth-pangs of the Messiah (cf. Mark 13:3–8, 17–20, 24–27 and parallels in Matt. 24 and Luke 21). It may be the belief that his afflictions were part of the birth-pains of the new age that lies behind Paul's statement that the one 'is producing' the other. On the other hand, it may be better to see the connection simply in terms of God's gracious blessing of believers who suffer for the sake of his Son. Paul states this clearly in Romans 8:17–18: 'Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us' (cf. Matt. 10:32–33; 2 Tim. 2:11–12). Calvin (p. 64) rightly rejects the idea that 'by afflictions we can merit the inheritance that comes to us only by the gracious adoption of God'.

18. *So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* Paul does not lose heart, even though he is exposed to persecution and is outwardly 'wasting away' (v. 16). This is so, not only because he is being continuously renewed inwardly, but also because his eyes are fixed not on what is seen but on what is unseen. When he contrasts things that are *seen* with those that are *unseen*, he is not contrasting things that are visible with those that are inherently invisible. It is rather a contrast between what is now visible and what is not yet visible but about to be revealed, that is, at the revelation of Christ and his kingdom at the second coming (cf. Rom. 8:24–25; Col. 3:1–4; Heb. 11:1–3).

There is something else about that which is presently unseen but soon to be revealed which further strengthens Paul's resolve not to lose heart. It is that, unlike what may now be seen, which is transient, what is presently unseen but soon to be revealed is eternal. The present world, including the 'outer nature' of the Christian, is subject to decay or corruption; the world that is to come, including the glorious resurrection body of believers, is eternal and incorruptible (cf. Rom. 8:19–23; Phil. 3:20–21).

c. The heavenly dwelling (5:1–10)

This passage is often studied in virtual isolation from the rest of 2 Corinthians

because of its obvious importance for understanding Paul's views about life after death. However, in seeking a proper understanding of 5:1–10, it is essential to see it in its context, especially in relation to what immediately precedes, for in fact 4:16 – 5:10 constitutes one integrated section. It is in the light of the outward 'wasting away' (4:16) and the fact that the 'light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all' (4:17) that Paul proceeds to explain what he looks forward to 'if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed' (5:1).

1. In many ways this verse is the interpretive crux for the whole passage. How one interprets it determines to a large extent how one understands the verses that follow. In seeking to understand this verse, it is important to recognize that the word *for* (*gar*) indicates that what follows is closely related to what precedes (i.e. the light and momentary troubles which are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory).

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed. Paul does not use here the usual word for tent (*skēnē*) which is found extensively in the LXX (366 times) and twenty times in the New Testament. Rather, he uses an unusual word, *skēnos*, which is found only once in the LXX (Wis 9:15) where it is used figuratively to refer to the human body, and it is also used in this manner in the papyri. *Skēnos* is found only twice in the New Testament (here and in v. 4), and its use in the LXX and the papyri strongly suggests that it should be understood here also to refer to the human body. This is confirmed by the overall context of 4:16 – 5:10, where Paul is concerned with the effects of persecution and suffering. We may conclude that in the first part of the verse, then, he is referring to the final outcome of such a process, that is, the destruction of the body in death.

While the *earthly tent* may be destroyed, Paul is certain that when this happens *we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.* While most scholars agree that the destruction of the *earthly tent* refers to the death of the body, there is no agreement about the meaning of *a building from God . . . not built by human hands*. Some have suggested it is temple imagery and recalls the accusations made at Jesus' trial: 'We heard him say, "I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands" ' (Mark 14:58). Thereupon it is argued that it refers to a heavenly temple, understood either as the church in heaven, or heaven itself as the dwelling-place of God in which Christians find their eternal habitation. However, such suggestions fail to take account of the fact that Jesus' accusers misunderstood the thrust of his statement, for, as the fourth Gospel points out, 'the temple he had spoken of was his body' (John 2:21). The building

made without hands was in this case the resurrected body of Jesus himself.

Others interpret the *building from God . . . not built by human hands* as a reference to Jesus' resurrection body understood corporately, so that those who believe in him share in it now. But while it is true that *we have* is in the present tense, it must be remembered that it is part of a conditional sentence (*if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have* …) which puts the 'having' of the building from God into future time in relation to the destruction of the earthly tent.[97] So it is not the resurrected body of Christ presently in heaven nor believers' sharing in it now that Paul had in mind.

An important factor in determining Paul's meaning is the parallelism existing in this verse. What is earthly and threatened with destruction in verse 1a is to be replaced by something corresponding to it which is heavenly and eternal in verse 1b. If the *tent* which forms our earthly dwelling denotes the physical body of the believer, it is reasonable to regard the *building from God* as a reference to another body, the resurrection body of the believer.[98] By referring to the resurrection body as a *building*, Paul may be emphasizing its permanence, as compared with the impermanence of the present body he refers to as a *tent*.

There is a parallel passage in Romans, a letter written shortly after 2 Corinthians, which lends support to this view. Romans 8:18–24 also deals with the subject of the suffering experienced by believers, comparing it with the glory to be revealed to them. In that passage what the believer looks forward to at the revelation of this glory is the redemption of the body (v. 23), clearly a reference to the resurrection body of the believer. Seeing that this passage in Romans treats a similar subject to that dealt with in 2 Corinthians 4:16 – 5:10, and seeing that Romans was written just a short time after 2 Corinthians, it is reasonable to interpret verse 1b in the light of Romans 8:23 and so conclude that the *building from God . . . not built by human hands* refers to the resurrection body promised to the believer.

One important matter this verse raises is the implication of Paul's statement that if the *earthly tent* is destroyed, we *have* a building from God in the heavens: that is, is he emphasizing the permanency and the immediacy of having a resurrection body should we die? He is certainly stressing its permanency (*an eternal house*), but it is questionable whether he is implying it will be immediate (i.e. that at death we will immediately receive the resurrection body), for this would imply that the universal resurrection which has not yet arrived is somehow already being experienced by deceased believers. The matter of the intermediate state of those who die before the parousia is left open at this stage.

2. *Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling.* Once again the parallel in Romans 8:18–24 is helpful, and in this case

quite striking. Believers are depicted as groaning (the same verb, *stenazō*, is used) as they wait for their adoption, interpreted as the redemption of their bodies (vv. 23–24). This supports the view that, when Paul talks about groaning and longing to put on the heavenly dwelling in the present context, he is speaking of the same thing.

3. *Because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked.* Consistent with the line of interpretation adopted, the nakedness which Paul expects to avoid when he puts on the heavenly dwelling is the nakedness of a disembodied spirit.[99] Paul, as a Jew, would regard existence as a disembodied spirit as something to be eschewed. The promised heavenly body will save him from that. It may be that in emphasizing the future embodied state he is countering dualistic notions of salvation (the release of the soul from the prison of the body), which may have been of some influence in Corinth.

4. *For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened*. This is our experience in the present situation in which we are still in this *tent*, that is, being still in the physical body and exposed to the afflictions which come upon us. The word translated *burdened* (*baroumenoi*) was also used in 1:8, where Paul spoke of his experience of afflictions in Asia as being 'under great pressure' (*ebarēthēmen*), far beyond his ability to endure, so that he despaired of life itself.

Because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Although the apostle groans, being burdened by sufferings and persecutions which afflict him while he remains in his present body, he does not therefore seek escape into a permanent disembodied state. He longs for a new and better embodiment.[100] What he wants is then described with the use of two metaphors. First, employing a clothing metaphor, he says he wants instead to be *clothed* with his heavenly body. Second, using an eating metaphor, he says he wants his mortal body to be *swallowed up by life*. In this way his mortal body is not so much done away with, but is taken into and transformed in the immortal. Thus Paul shows that it is not release from bodily existence for which he longs, but for a bodily existence which is permanent and heavenly. In the categories of Romans 8:23, it is the redemption of the body for which he hopes, or in the terms of Philippians 3:21, the transformation of his body to be like Christ's glorious body.

It is possible that Paul's insistence that his ultimate hope is not for a disembodied existence but for a permanent embodiment in a resurrection body was also intended to counteract dualistic tendencies of some in Corinth who denied the resurrection of the body (cf. 1 Cor. 15:12).

5. Having stated the nature of his hope for the future, Paul picks up again the idea introduced in 4:17 and reminds his audience that *the one who has fashioned*

us for this very purpose is God. It is not a vain or empty hope that the apostle entertains, rather it is based upon the known fact that God himself has prepared us for such a future. It must not be overlooked that, in the light of 4:16–17, part of the process of preparation for the glorious future is participation in present suffering (cf. Rom. 8:17). But this truth must be complemented by that found in Romans 8:28–30, where God's election, calling and justification of sinners form the basis upon which he prepares his children for glory. Theodoret of Cyr comments, 'Since God the Creator foresaw the sin of Adam, he prepared a remedy for it. For he himself has given us the first fruits of the Spirit, so that by the miracles which the Spirit does in our midst we may be reassured that the promises of future glory are true' (Bray, p. 241).

Paul's hope rests not only upon the objective knowledge that it is God who is preparing him for a glorious future, but also upon the subjective experience of the Spirit which believers enjoy. The God who prepares is also the God *who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come*. The Greek word translated *deposit, guaranteeing* is *arrabōn*. The word is also used in 1:22, and here, as there, it refers to the Holy Spirit given to believers as a pledge guaranteeing their share in *what is to come*, that is, their share in Christ's glory (cf. Rom. 8:16–17). For an explanation of the concept of the deposit as a guarantee (*arrabōn*), see commentary on 1:22.

It is worth noting that up to this point, by the use of various images, Paul has spoken of the destruction of the physical body being compensated for by the provision of the resurrection body, and that he has done so without any reference to the possibility that the former may take place before the provision of the latter. It is in verses 6–10 that he grapples with this possibility, very probably in the light of an increasing awareness that he personally might experience the destruction of the body before the general resurrection.

6–7. From the time Paul began in 2:14–17 to explain how, despite many difficulties, he remained confident in God, he has again and again affirmed his confidence and the fact that he does not lose heart (cf. 2:14; 3:4, 12; 4:1, 16). Here in verse 6 he picks up the theme again: *Therefore we are always confident.* Yet while affirming this, Paul confesses that the present situation does leave something to be desired: *we . . . know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.* What this means can be ascertained from the parenthesis he provides in verse 7 before returning to the main stream of his thought in verse 8. In parenthesis he says, *For we live by faith, not by sight.* This suggests that to be at home in the body (in the 'earthly tent') means that God is not accessible to our sight (and in that sense we are away from the Lord), but he is accessible to us by faith (cf. John 20:29). Ambrosiaster comments, 'God is

still present, but because we cannot see him we are said to be absent from him as long as we are in the body' (Bray, p. 242).

8. *We are confident, I say.* With these words, Paul takes up the train of thought he was pursuing before the parenthesis. But here, despite the assertion that he is of good courage, he proceeds to confess his desire for a better situation: *and [we] would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.* As the parenthesis of verse 7 threw light backward upon the meaning of verse 6, so too it throws light forward upon the statement in verse 8. To be away from the body means to be at home with the Lord, in the sense that then the Lord will be accessible to sight, and no longer accessible only to faith. In the words of 1 John 3:2, 'we shall see him as he is'. Calvin (p. 70) comments, 'True faith begets not merely contempt for death but desire for it and thus it is a sign of unbelief in us when the fear of death is stronger than the joy and comfort of hope.'

In verse 8 Paul recognizes that although he does not wish to experience a disembodied state, he may have to do so if he dies before the parousia. But this verse expresses his conviction that even if this should be his lot for a time, it would be more preferable than remaining 'in the body' and so 'away from the Lord' (v. 6). Paul says elsewhere, 'I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far' (Phil. 1:23).

9. Paul does not provide any clues as to what he may have thought the nature of the disembodied state might be. What he does in 5:9, however, is to stress something which is more important than speculation about that: *So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.* How long he will continue to live at home in the body or whether he will soon die and be away from the body are matters which he cannot determine. But what he must determine is how he will live. Paul states that it will always be his aim to please the Lord.

10. *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.* The apostle is determined to live in a way pleasing to the Lord because he knows that all believers must appear before the judgment seat of Christ. The word used here for *judgment seat* is *bēma*. Among the ruins of ancient Corinth there still remains an impressive stone structure known as the *bēma* (see Introduction, p. 27, for more details). According to Acts 18:12–17, Paul was brought before the *bēma* ('tribunal') by angry Corinthian Jews who made accusations against him before the proconsul, Gallio. However, Gallio refused to sit in judgment in Jewish matters and drove Paul's accusers from the *bēma*. Both Paul and his audience knew what being brought before the judgment seat in Corinth meant. What Paul is saying here is that we need to order our lives in the light of the fact that each one of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ (cf. Rom. 14:10).

So that each of us may receive what is due to us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. There is no question of a person's salvation, one's acceptance before God, depending upon what one has done in the body.[101] In his letter to the Romans Paul makes it abundantly clear that no human being shall be justified in God's sight on the basis of what he or she has done: 'for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:23). It was for this reason that God made a new way for people to be justified in his sight apart from works (cf. Rom. 3:21–26).

What then does Paul have in mind here when he speaks of receiving good or evil according to what a person has done in the body? It is a recognition that God will evaluate the lives and ministries of his children and reward those who have acted faithfully, while those who have not will suffer the loss of any reward. In 1 Corinthians 3:10–15 Paul applies this to the work of those who founded and built up churches: 'The Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved' (vv. 13–15).

It is important to note that it is what a person has done in the body that will be evaluated at the judgment seat of Christ. In the present context, where Paul has been speaking of living 'at home in the body' and 'away from the body', what a person does in the body can refer only to what he or she does in this life. All this means that what believers do in this life has serious implications. They are accountable to the Lord for their actions, and will be rewarded or suffer loss accordingly. This fact forms the basis of the next verse in which Paul speaks of knowing the fear of the Lord.

Theology

In 4:7–18 Paul juxtaposes statements about present sufferings in the carrying out of his ministry that contribute to his outward wasting away with the inward renewal that enables him to persevere. He likens himself to a cheap and fragile clay jar, but one that bears an invaluable treasure: the light of the gospel of the glory of God displayed in the face of Christ. The immense privilege of being a minister of this gospel is one reason why he does not lose heart amidst his afflictions. The other reason is that God compensates the effects of his outward afflictions with inner renewal through the work of the Spirit. He endures the sufferings for two reasons: firstly, for the benefit of those to whom he ministers so that they will experience God's blessings as a result of his labours ('death is at work in us, but life is at work in you'), and secondly, because in the light of

those blessings there will be an ever-increasing volume of thanksgiving to God who bestowed them. Paul regarded the afflictions accompanying his ministry as ‘light and momentary’ in comparison with the ‘eternal glory’ they were achieving for him. Keeping his eyes fixed on what is eternal prevented him from losing heart.

In 5:1–10 Paul expresses his confidence that if his afflictions were to intensify and culminate in death, so that the ‘earthly tent’ he lives in were to be destroyed, he would have a ‘building from God, an eternal house in heaven’. In other words, if he should die and his earthly body be destroyed, God would provide him with a heavenly body, a resurrection body. This was his ultimate hope. He makes clear that his first wish was not to be ‘unclothed’ (i.e. to be disembodied), but rather to be ‘clothed’ with the heavenly dwelling, his resurrection body. However, recognizing that he might die before the parousia and the general resurrection, he says he would rather be ‘away from the body’ and be ‘at home with the Lord’, implying a conscious existence in the presence of God even in a disembodied state, something that would be better by far than being present in the body but away from the Lord (cf. Phil. 1:21–24). Paul concludes this section by saying that in whatever state he finds himself, whether ‘at home in the body or away from it’, his aim is to please God, for all believers must appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive what is due to them according to what they have done while ‘in the body’. This is best understood not in regard to salvation, but as reward for service (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10–15).

v. The ministry of reconciliation (5:11–21)

Context

Having spoken of his aim to please the Lord whether at home in the body or away (5:9), and having reminded his audience that ‘all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ’ (5:10), Paul tells how he tries to persuade others to be reconciled to God (5:11). While doing so, he responds to criticisms of the way he conducts his ministry (5:11–15), and then spells out the theological basis upon which reconciliation with God rests (5:16–21).

Comment

a. Defence of his ministry (5:11–15)

11. *Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others.*

The word *since* indicates that what Paul is about to say follows on from what he says in 5:10 about appearing before the judgment seat of Christ. Paul is not 'afraid' of the Lord, but he does have a 'reverential awe' of him and recognizes that his whole life and ministry will come under his scrutiny. It is with this awareness that he persuades others.

There are two possible ways to understand Paul's reference to persuading others. According to the first, he is saying that awareness of his accountability to God motivates him to be diligent in his efforts to persuade others, that is, to bring about in them the obedience of faith, as he was commissioned to do. What would have been involved in such persuasion can be glimpsed from a number of references in Paul's writings (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1–5; 2 Cor. 10:5; Col. 1:28) and also the testimony of Luke in Acts (Acts 9:20–22; 13:16–43; 17:22–34; 19:8–10; 26:24–29; 28:23). He sought to remove intellectual barriers, to overcome prejudice and ignorance and to convince by argument, testimony and the straightforward proclamation of the gospel.

According to the second, anticipating the defence of the conduct of his ministry that is to follow, Paul stresses that the persuasion he practised was free from all dubious methods, being carried out with a proper fear of the Lord, who would countenance nothing less than full integrity in his messengers. It is perhaps significant that in the only other place he uses the verb 'to persuade' (*peithō*) where other persons are the objects of the persuasion, it carries a negative connotation: 'Am I now trying to win the approval [*peithō*] of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people?' (Gal. 1:10). What seems to be implied by that use of the verb is persuasion by adulterating the gospel, so that he might please his hearers. In the light of this, verse 11 could be seen as Paul's concession that he practises persuasion while asserting that his is not a persuasion which sacrifices the truth in order to please his hearers. His persuasion is quite straightforward, carried out with a proper fear of the Lord.

This second interpretation receives some support from the words that follow: *What we are is plain to God*. Paul's motives and actions lie open before God, who sees there is no deception involved in his attempts to persuade people. *And I hope it is also plain to your conscience.* Here he appeals to the consciences of his audience (cf. 4:2) in the hope that they will recognize his integrity when they listen, not to the criticisms of others, but to the testimony of their own consciences (see commentary on 1:12 for an explanation of Paul's understanding of the role of the conscience).

12. *We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again*. Paul is very sensitive about self-commendation (cf. 3:1; 10:18), and it is likely that some of the criticism directed against him was related to this. So he denies that, in

defending the straightforward character of the persuasion he practises, he is indulging in self-commendation. Rather, what he is doing, he says, is *giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart.* Paul is aware that there are those present in Corinth who are critical of his motives and methods, and he makes this defence of his integrity so that his converts may be able to deal with the criticisms of those people. He wants them to be able to feel justly proud of the way in which their spiritual father conducts himself, and so be able to answer his detractors. Calvin (p. 73) comments, 'We are here taught that the servants of Christ ought to be concerned for their own reputations only in so far as it is for the advantage of the Church.'

The detractors who lurked behind the scenes in Corinth Paul describes as *those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart*. From hints provided in both chapters 1 – 7 and the later chapters 10 – 13, we can see the sort of outward matters upon which these men prided themselves. These included the letters of recommendation they carried (3:1), their rhetorical prowess (11:5–6), Jewish ancestry (11:22), ecstatic visionary experiences (12:1) and the apostolic signs they performed (12:11–13). Paul implies that for them such outward matters were more important than the condition of a person's heart, which is what God sees.[102]

13. *If we are 'out of our mind,' as some say, it is for God.* There are two possible ways in which this could be taken. First, it could be Paul's response to charges that he was mad. Such charges were certainly made later in his career, and they had also been made against his Master. Jesus was accused of being mad because of his unflagging zeal (Mark 3:21) and because his teaching offended his hearers (John 10:20). This latter reason lay behind the charge of madness that Festus made against Paul (Acts 26:22–24), which charge, of course, Paul rejected: '"I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable" ' (Acts 26:25).

Second, it could be Paul's response to those in Corinth who denied that his ministry was truly spiritual because he gave no evidence of ecstatic experience. To this Paul would reply, 'If we do experience ecstasy [*exestēmen*], that is something between us and God' – it is not something to bragged about in support of the validity of my ministry. The first alternative is preferable in the light of the preceding verse where Paul denies he is commending himself to the Corinthians, but giving them grounds on which they can respond to his critics. It would make more sense in that case to insist on his rationality rather than on his ecstatic experiences.

If we are in our right mind, it is for you. If we adopt the first of the alternatives

above, then Paul is saying, 'Even if [as some say] we are mad, that is but the result of our faithfulness to God in preaching a pure gospel, but if we are in our right mind [as we are], then that is for your sake [who benefit from the sober truth we speak].' On the second alternative, Paul is saying, 'If we do experience ecstasy, then that is something between us and God [not something to be displayed before others as proof of the spiritual character of our ministry], but if we are in our right mind [and use reasonable, intelligible speech], that is for your benefit.'

14. Still by way of explanation and defence of the conduct of his ministry, Paul says, *For Christ's love compels us.* There is a parallel use of the verb translated *compels* (*synechei*) in Philippians 1:23, where Paul, facing the possibilities of departure to be with Christ through death or a longer life and further ministry, says, 'I am torn [*synechomai*] between the two.' He felt the pressure of two alternatives so that he was motivated on the one hand to do one thing, but on the other hand to do the opposite. This illustrates the basic meaning of *synechō*, which is 'to press together, constrain'. It is the pressure applied not so much to control as to cause action. It is motivational rather than directional force. The verb here in verse 14 is in the present tense, which emphasizes the continuous nature of the pressure upon Paul. The source of the pressure is the love of Christ. This can be construed either as Paul's love for Christ (objective genitive), or Christ's love for Paul (subjective genitive). In the light of what follows (vv. 14b–15 where Paul speaks of Christ's death for all), the second option is to be preferred. It is Paul's recognition of Christ's love shown in his death for all which acts as the motivation for his ministry.

The love of Christ, which so deeply influenced the apostle that he gave his whole life in unflagging zeal to his service, must be something quite exceptional. Paul was so affected, he says, *because we are convinced that one died for all.* It was not some vague idea of Christ's goodwill that moved him, but rather the fact that *one died for all*. The verb *died* (*apethanen*) is in the aorist tense, pointing to the historic event of the cross. But it was not the bare fact of Christ's death that moved Paul; it was the death of Christ understood in a particular way. It was his death *for all* (*hyper pantōn*). There has been a lot of debate about whether *hyper* should be understood to mean 'instead of' (i.e. Christ dying 'in place of' all) or 'for the sake of' (i.e. Christ dying 'for the benefit of' all, understood to mean something different from 'instead of' all). Against the former, it has been argued that if Paul had meant to say Christ died 'instead of' all, he would have used the Greek preposition *anti*, which more clearly expresses that idea. It is true that *anti* expresses the idea unambiguously, but while *hyper* need not denote 'instead of', it may do so.

The matter cannot be settled by consideration of this text in isolation. Other Pauline texts bearing upon the subject must be allowed to guide us. For example, in Galatians 3:13 Paul says, 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse for [*hyper*] us, for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole." ' In that context Christ clearly endures God's curse instead of us. There was absolutely no reason for him to endure God's curse otherwise. So on the 'pole' (i.e. in his death upon the cross), he bore the curse of God instead of us. It is likely, therefore, that in the present context *one died for* [*hyper*] *all* means that Christ died instead of the *all*.[103] This interpretation preserves the logical connection with what follows: *and therefore all died*. If Christ did not die instead of the *all*, then the *all* cannot be said to have died (the meaning of *all* is discussed along with the meaning of 'world' in the commentary on verse 19, where the latter is found). Only because Christ is the incarnate Son of God could the death of *one* be for *all*. Only the death of this *one* could redeem us from the curse of the law; the death of a mere human being could never achieve this.

It is the exceptional character of Christ's love, understood as that which moved him to die in our place, which alone accounts satisfactorily for its great motivational power in Paul's life (cf. Gal. 2:20: 'The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved *me* and gave himself for *me*', italics added). It is just that function which the death of Christ has in the affirmation here in verse 14. Paul will provide further clues concerning the significance of Christ's death in verses 18–21, but for the moment his main concern is with its motivational power, and this is carried over into verse 15.

15. Here Paul states the purpose of Christ's death in so far as the lives of those who benefit from it are concerned. Stating it first negatively, he says, *And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves,* and then putting it positively, he adds, *but for him who died for them and was raised again.* The possibility that those who have benefited from Christ's death and resurrection should revert to living for themselves is ever present, and was the path actually taken by a number of Paul's associates (Phil. 2:21; 2 Tim. 4:10). What kept Paul on the right path, and will keep us there too, is an awareness of the exceptional character of Christ's love for us. We love him and desire to live for him as we realize that he loved us and gave himself for us (cf. Gal. 2:20).

b. God's reconciling act in Christ (5:16–21)

16. *So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view*. From the time Paul realized the significance of the death of Christ – 'one died for all, and therefore all died' (v. 14) – the love of Christ expressed in his death 'for all' was

the motivating force in his life, and not only so, but it also changed his whole outlook (cf. Phil. 3:4–8). He could no longer regard others *from a worldly point of view*. He confesses that *we once regarded Christ in this way*. In his pre-conversion days he judged Christ using worldly criteria and came to the wrong conclusion, but after God revealed his Son to him, he had to say, *we do so no longer*. Prior to his conversion, like many of his fellow Jews, Paul would have dismissed claims that Jesus was the Messiah, because he, like them, would have regarded it as unthinkable that God's Messiah could be crucified like a criminal.

This verse, with its reference to regarding Christ from a worldly point of view (lit. 'according to [the] flesh'), was used by Bultmann (pp. 155–156) to argue that Paul showed little interest in the historical Jesus (Christ after the flesh), but focused rather upon the Christ of faith. However, such a view can claim no support from this verse, because Paul is talking about a *way* of knowing ('according to the flesh'), not about a particular *phase* of Christ's existence (Christ after the flesh = the historical Jesus). Paul is saying that previously he had an inadequate knowledge of Christ – one based on a worldly point of view – but now his understanding of Christ is no longer limited in that way. We should note the way Paul regarded Christ before and after his conversion to appreciate the contrast of viewpoints spoken of here. Before his conversion he would have regarded him as a false Christ, whose followers ought to be stamped out. Afterwards he knew Jesus was God's Messiah, the one who was to make all things new, and to whom all people must be called to respond in the obedience of faith.

17. The great significance of Christ's work is expressed when Paul says, *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come* (lit. 'so that, if anyone [is] in Christ, [there is] a new creation'). What it means to be *in Christ* has been variously interpreted: to belong to Christ; to live in the sphere of Christ's power; to be united to Christ; and to be a member of the Christian community through baptism. It is difficult to explain precisely what Paul intended by the expression here, and each of the options mentioned above is feasible. At a minimum, to be *in Christ* means to belong to him through faith, and to belong to him means living in the sphere of his power, being united with him through the Spirit, and to have become a part of the Christian community by baptism.

While we may wish to be able to explain precisely the meaning of being *in Christ* here, what Paul stresses is its significance: the person *in Christ* is a new creation, so that it may be said, *the old has gone, the new is here!* This is reflected in the changed outlook of which verse 16 spoke and in a new holiness of life (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9–11). Commenting on Paul's statement that *the old has*

gone, the new is here!, Chrysostom says, 'By this he briefly showed that those who, by their faith in Christ, had put off like an old cloak the burden of their sins, those who had been set free from their error and been illumined by the light of justification, had put on this new and shining cloak, this royal robe' (Bray, p. 250).

God's plan of salvation, while primarily concerned with humanity, encompasses the whole created order (cf. Rom. 8:21). When people are *in Christ*, they have already become part of the new creation. It is true, of course, that for the time being the old still persists and the new has not yet fully come (cf. Rom. 8:18–25; Gal. 5:15–26). However, in the present passage, it is the newness of life in Christ now which is being stressed, rather than the limitations and the tension involved in participating in the new creation while still living as part of the old. Being *a new creation* now will culminate in transformation by resurrection to immortality in the new created order at the parousia (cf. Isa. 65:17–25; 66:22; Rom. 8:19–23; Rev. 21:1).

18. Paul underlines the fact that *all this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.* The heart of Paul's gospel is Christ crucified as Lord, but the framework of that message is decidedly theological. The great plan of salvation by which all creation is to be reconciled is God's plan, and he it is who through Christ reconciles us to himself. Where the language of reconciliation is found in the New Testament, God is usually the one who initiates the reconciling activity (cf. Rom. 5:10–11; 11:15; 2 Cor. 5:18–20; Col. 1:19–20, 22).

Reconciliation involves the restoration of friendly relationships after estrangement. Humanity was estranged from God because of its sin. God himself took the initiative to overcome this estrangement through the cross of Christ. There is no hint that Christ is the gracious one who must overcome unwillingness on God's part to be reconciled with sinful humanity. This does not mean there existed no obstacle on God's part to be overcome before reconciliation could be effected with humanity. God's wrath, revealed from heaven against the wickedness of humanity, had to be dealt with (cf. Rom. 1:18; 5:9–11). What is stressed in the present passage is the amazing grace of God revealed when he himself took action in Christ to remove the obstacle to reconciliation existing on his part. It is only on the basis of this action that humanity can now be reconciled to God and experience his friendship.

It is important to note that in one sense reconciliation has been accomplished already. God through Christ has already *reconciled* us to himself. He has broken down the barrier which separated us from him. What that barrier was and how it was broken down Paul describes in verses 19, 21. However, before doing that he indicates with the words *and gave us the ministry of reconciliation* that the

reconciling process is in another sense still incomplete. The preaching of reconciliation has to be carried out and people must hear the call to be reconciled to God. Unless they respond to that call, they cannot actually experience reconciliation.

19. Reiterating God's role in initiating and effecting reconciliation, Paul says, *God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ* (lit. 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself'). This may be interpreted, as in the NIV, to indicate that it was through the agency of Christ that God reconciled the world to himself. This, at least, is intended. However, more than this may be involved. In Colossians 1:19–20 Paul says, 'For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.' In that text Paul juxtaposes the fullness of God that dwelt in Christ and God's action in him to reconcile the world to himself. Harris (pp. 442–443) comments, 'It was only because God in all his fullness had chosen to dwell in Christ (Col. 2:9), that reconciliation was accomplished . . . Not only was Christ God's agent in effecting reconciliation (Rom. 5:10–11; 2 Cor. 5:18; Col. 1:19–22); he also mediated the divine presence, thus giving validity to his reconciliatory sacrifice.'

When Paul says, *God was reconciling the world to himself*, the *world* refers to humanity, not the whole created order, as the context indicates when reconciliation is related to *not counting people's sins against them* (elsewhere he does include the whole creation in the reconciliation; cf. Col. 1:20).

Not counting people's sins against them. The verb Paul employs when speaking of God not *counting* (*logizomai*) people's sins against them is a mathematical or accounting term used in relation to keeping a score of wrongs or crediting and debiting things to people's accounts. What is involved in the non-counting of people's sins against them is expressed by Paul in Romans 4:8, citing Psalm 32:2: 'Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.' This blessing, Paul goes on to explain, is not restricted to Jews ('the circumcised'), but is pronounced over all who believe, including Gentiles ('the uncircumcised') (Rom. 4:9–12). In the light of this, the universal expression *the world* in verse 19a is best interpreted to apply to all who believe, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, not extensively to every individual human being. Elsewhere Paul clearly implies that unless people repent, their sins are and shall be counted against them (cf. Rom. 1:18–32; 2:5–11; Eph. 5:3–6; Col. 3:5–6). Nevertheless, it is vital to stress that the death of Christ is sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world (cf. 1 John 2:2) and make reconciliation possible for everyone, but this becomes effective only in those who respond

positively to the message of reconciliation.

And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. God has not only reconciled the world to himself, he has also commissioned messengers to proclaim that good news. In Paul's case, the commission to preach the gospel came to him when he encountered Christ on the Damascus road. The reconciling activity of God is manifested in two movements: the first is his own reconciliation of the world in Christ, and the second is his call to people to be reconciled on that basis through his messengers.

20. Because God entrusted him with the message of reconciliation (v. 19), Paul is able to say, *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us*. The Greek verb Paul uses in the expression *we are . . . Christ's ambassadors* (*presbeuō*) means essentially 'to be older or the eldest', but came to be used in connection with functions for which the wisdom of age was a necessary prerequisite. In the political sphere it was used of ambassadors who were commissioned and given authority to represent their nations. In the religious sphere it was used figuratively, for example, by Philo when speaking of the angels or Moses as God's emissaries. Jesus said the Twelve were to act as his representatives, and that whoever received them received him and the one who sent him (Matt. 10:40), a statement paralleled in the rabbinic adage: 'a man's agent is like to himself' (*m. Berakoth* 5.5).[104] Paul was commissioned as an ambassador/apostle of Christ at his conversion and spoke in his name and with his authority (cf. 10:8; 13:10; 1 Thess. 2:6; 4:2), so that when he preached the gospel, people experienced the word of God at work in their hearts through the ministry of the Spirit (1 Thess. 1:4–5; 2:13). God, who reconciled the world to himself through the death of his Son, appealed to people, through his ambassador, to be reconciled to God.

We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God.[105] This may reflect the language of Paul's evangelistic preaching, but here the appeal is directed to members of the Corinthian church. Paul can hardly be implying that his audience had not yet responded to the gospel, for they had accepted the message he himself had brought to them. However, Paul's apostolic authority and gospel had been called into question in Corinth, and in succeeding passages he entreats his converts not to accept the grace of God in vain (6:1–13), but to open their hearts to their apostle (6:11–13; 7:2–4). It is perhaps by way of preparation for these appeals that Paul employs the language of evangelistic preaching here.

21. Before proceeding to his appeal to the Corinthians in 6:1–13, for which he prepares the way in verse 20, Paul makes a highly compressed but extremely profound statement concerning the work of Christ: *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us*. This is the way Paul (in this letter) describes the basis upon

which God reconciled us to himself. From this statement we get some idea of why the cross, as the expression of the love of God in Christ, had such great motivating power in the apostle's life.

Paul describes Christ as one *who had no sin* (*ton mē gnonta hamartian*; lit. 'who did not know sin'). To 'know' sin in this context is not to know *about* sin, but to know it by being personally *involved* in it. The consistent witness of the New Testament is that Jesus did not sin (cf. Matt. 27:4, 24; Luke 23:47; John 8:46; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22). There may be an allusion here to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah ('he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth', Isa. 53:9). It may be inferred from Paul's statement that Christ *had no sin*, that only a sinless one could, through his death, be the agent of reconciliation (cf. 1 Pet. 1:19).

What Paul stresses is that God made the sinless one to be sin for our sake. Various interpretations have been suggested for this profound statement: (a) Christ was made a sinner; (b) Christ was made a sin-offering; (c) Christ was made to bear the consequences of our sins. The first suggestion is rightly rejected out of hand. The second can be supported by appeal to Paul's use of sacrificial terminology elsewhere to bring out the significance of Christ's death (e.g. Rom. 3:25; 1 Cor. 5:7). It has also been pointed out that in Leviticus 4:24 and 5:12 (LXX) the same word, 'sin' (*hamartia*), is used to mean 'sin-offering'. It appears to be used in the same way in Romans 8:3, and it probably carries this meaning here in verse 21 as well. The third suggestion, that Christ was made to bear the consequences of our sins, also has merit. It is supported by the fact that in Galatians 3:13 Paul interprets the work of Christ in terms of his bearing the consequences of our sins: 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole." ' A 'both and' approach is probably best – Christ was made a sin-offering and as such bore the consequences of our sins.

The statement, *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us* (v. 21a), is balanced in antithetical parallelism by the words, *so that in him we might become the righteousness of God* (v. 21b). We must construe the former in such a way that the latter is understood as its antithetical counterpart. In seeking to understand what it means to become the righteousness of God, we receive assistance from other passages where Paul touches upon the same subject (Rom. 3:21–26; Phil. 3:7–9). The righteousness of God, understood as that which believers have or become, is the gift of a right relationship with God, based upon the fact that God has adjudicated in their favour by refusing, because of the death of Christ in their place, to take account of their sins.

If becoming *the righteousness of God* means God has adjudicated in our

favour and put us in right relationship with himself, then to be made sin, being the antithetical counterpart of this, will mean that God has adjudicated against Christ (because he took upon himself the burden of our sins; cf. Isa. 53:4–6, 12), with the result that the relationship of the human Jesus with God was (momentarily, but terribly beyond all human comprehension) severed. If this interpretation is correct, then we can perhaps begin to understand something of the agony of Gethsemane: 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done' (Luke 22:42), and the awful cry of dereliction from the cross: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matt. 27:46). We obviously stand at the brink of a great mystery, and our understanding of it can be only minimal.

Early Church Fathers wrestled with the implications of this mystery. 'It is not "as if, when Jesus was fixed upon the wood of the cross, the Omnipotence of the Father's Deity had gone away from Him; seeing that God's and Man's nature were so completely joined in him that the union could not be destroyed by punishment nor by death" (Leo I, *Serm*. 68.1).' '"It was not he who was forsaken either by the Father or by his own Godhead," wrote Gregory of Nazianzus. "But, as I said, he was in his own person representing us. For we were the forsaken and despised before" but now by his representative act saved (*Orat*. 30.5).'[106]

Theology

In defending the way he conducted his ministry, Paul was not indulging in self-commendation, but making it possible for his converts to be proud of him and supply an answer for those who criticized him. There is nothing to be gained by allowing false accusations to influence people and undermine our ministry when steps can be taken to set the record straight.

Paul speaks of two things that motivated him in ministry: (i) The fear of the Lord, for he knew that he, along with all believers, must appear before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account of his life and ministry (5:10–11). (ii) The love of Christ who gave himself for him and for all people. Paul's ministry was carried out in gratitude to his Lord, and a love for those for whom Christ died.

Paul was convinced that if Christ died for all, then 'all died', that is, Christ died in their place and God regards his death as their death, the punishment their sins deserved, and in this way Christ effected their salvation (5:14). Because Christ has died for all, Christians can no longer regard others from a worldly point of view (5:16). Christ's death for them demonstrated the high value placed upon them by God.

Those who respond positively to the gospel join those who are ‘in Christ’ and become part of ‘the new creation’ and begin experiencing its blessings (5:17). This was made possible because God effected reconciliation through Christ, not counting their sins against them. Instead, he made Christ, who knew no sin, ‘to be sin’ for them when he adjudicated against him as he bore their sins. As a result, God can now adjudicate in their favour, granting them a right standing in his sight (5:18–21). Paul was commissioned as an ambassador of Christ, and through his ministry God made his appeal for others to be reconciled to him (5:20).

vi. Reconciliation practised (6:1 – 7:4)

Context

Paul, having spoken in the previous chapter of the reconciling activity of God and his own role as an ambassador of Christ and a messenger of reconciliation, now in 6:1 – 7:4 enacts this role for the benefit of his audience. Paul was aware of the strains in the Corinthians’ relationship with him because of the actions of the ‘offender’ and the influence of intruders. In order that their relationship be fully restored, he exhorts them not to receive the grace of God in vain (vv. 1–2). He makes another defence of his ministry (vv. 3–10), and appeals to them to open their hearts to him so as to be fully reconciled to their apostle (vv. 11–13; 7:2–4), interspersing a call to holy living (6:14 – 7:1).

Comment

a. An appeal for reconciliation (6:1–13)

1. *As God’s fellow workers . . .* Following the theologically profound parenthesis of 5:21, Paul picks up again the theme of 5:20 – his appeal to the Corinthians to be reconciled to God. The expression *as God’s fellow workers* is the NIV translation of a single Greek word, *synergountes* (‘working together with’). Although the party with whom Paul works could conceivably be understood as God, this would be at variance with his normal use of the word to refer to his colleagues (cf. 8:23; Rom. 16:3, 9, 21; 1 Cor. 3:9; Phil. 2:25; 4:3; Col. 4:11; 1 Thess. 3:2; Phlm. 1, 24). He is God’s ambassador (5:20), but God is not his co-worker.

We urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. God’s grace may be understood as all that was proclaimed in the ‘message of reconciliation’ (5:19),

what God wrought through Christ and the benefits he offers people through the preaching of the gospel, including the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation. Paul's audience had accepted this gospel and experienced the grace of God. Now he exhorts them to make sure their acceptance of it is not in vain.

It is unlikely that Paul implies their acceptance was only superficial (like seed sown on rocky ground). It is more likely he has in mind how easily these people were influenced by others, whether by the offender who made the personal attack against him (2:5; 7:12) or the critics of the apostle who were already lurking in the background in Corinth. He does not want the lives of those who responded positively to the gospel to be marred by entertaining criticisms of that gospel and the one who brought it to them.

2. To underline the gravity and urgency of his appeal, Paul introduces a verbatim quotation from Isaiah 49:8 (LXX): *For he says, 'In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you*.' In their original context these words are addressed to the Servant of the Lord and refer to the time of Israel's release from exile in Babylon. Paul makes his own application: *I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation*. If the time of the exiles' return was a day of salvation, then the time when God acted in Christ to reconcile the world to himself is the day of salvation par excellence, and when the Corinthians heard the gospel, that was the day of salvation for them. If 'today' is *the time of God's favour*, it is imperative that people respond to his grace 'today'. Calvin (p. 84) comments, 'We know that as long as the Gospel is preached to us, the door to the kingdom of God is open to us, and there is raised up before us a sign of God's kindness to invite us to accept salvation, for when we are called to receive it, we may be sure that we have an opportunity of doing so.'

The idea of the day of salvation is not exhausted by what is already present, for Paul and other New Testament writers looked forward to the return of Christ as the day on which salvation would be consummated (cf. Rom. 13:11; 1 Thess. 5:8–9; Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 1:5).

3–4a. *We put no stumbling-block in anyone's path*. Paul exhorted his audience 'not to accept the grace of God in vain', and here he insists that his own conduct did not constitute a stumbling-block that might hinder people's acceptance of God's grace. What he means is clarified by what follows: *so that our* [lit. 'the'] *ministry will not be discredited*. If fault could be found in his ministry, and there were in Corinth those ready to find fault, that could be used as an excuse to reject his message. Harris (p. 469) comments, 'The principle in v. 3 is timeless and universally relevant. Christian ministry is discredited when the Christian gives offense by un-Christian conduct.'

Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way. What is involved here is not primarily personal commendation, something which the apostle eschewed (3:1; 5:12), but the commendation of a ministry. In verses 4b–10 we see what Paul means by *in every way*.

4b–5. *In great endurance*. This appears to be the general heading for nine factors Paul adduces to commend his ministry. These comprise three sets of three. The first set, *in troubles, hardships and distresses*, is expressed in general terms, the second set represents particular examples, *beatings, imprisonments and riots*, while the third set speaks of hardships voluntarily undertaken, *hard work, sleepless nights and hunger*.[107] Chapter 11 and the account of Paul's ministry in Acts (cf. 13:50; 14:19; 17:5; 18:12; 19:29) provide the best commentary on these verses. Three of the factors call for explanation. By *riots* Paul means 'civil disorders' (cf. Acts 13:50; 14:19; 16:19; 19:29), his *sleepless nights* (cf. 11:27) were probably due to the pressures of travel, ministry and his concern for the churches, and *hunger* could refer either to fasting or lack of food.

It may seem strange that Paul should appeal to such hardships to commend his ministry. But underlying the appeal is the recognition that Jesus, the true Servant of God, was the Suffering Servant, and that loyal followers of Christ must be prepared to share his fate: 'The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master' (Matt. 10:24; cf. Acts 20:19).

6–7. Proceeding with his self-commendation, Paul speaks of moral integrity and the *weapons* employed in his ministry. Thus he commends his ministry *in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God*. Most of these are self-explanatory. Paul's inclusion of *in the Holy Spirit* in this list may be understood as an indication that these virtues are fostered and enhanced by the work of the Spirit, or alternatively that it is a shorthand way of referring to the gifts of the Spirit (cf. Gal. 3:5).

With weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left. Harris (p. 477) notes that there are four ways that *weapons of righteousness* may be understood: as (i) righteous weapons, (ii) weapons that fight for righteousness, (iii) weapons consisting of righteousness, (iv) weapons supplied by righteousness. He opts for the fourth option, regarding *righteousness* here as a metonym for God, and finding support for it in Ephesians 6:11–13, where believers are urged to put on the armour supplied by God.

Ministry with *weapons* [*hoplōn*] . . . *in the right hand and in the left* has been variously interpreted as a ministry that is: (i) ready for an attack from any quarter, (ii) armed with weapons of offence (a sword for the right hand) and defence (a shield for the left), (iii) carried out both in prosperity (the right hand)

and adversity (the left hand). This sort of military metaphor is used in other passages in Paul's letters, and a consideration of these throws light on its use here. In 10:3–5 Paul speaks of 'the weapons [*hopla*] we fight with' which are not worldly, but 'have divine power to demolish strongholds'. These strongholds are 'arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God', and the purpose of their destruction is to 'take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ'. What we see here is the offensive weapon of gospel presentation and argumentation (cf. e.g. Acts 19:8–10) whereby the power of God is released to demolish false arguments and bring people to the obedience of faith.

In Romans 13:12 Paul writes, 'The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour [*hopla*; lit. 'weapons'] of light.' The exhortation forms part of a call for godly living, in contrast to revelling and drunkenness, and so on, so the expression 'armour of light' here stands for Christian character and behaviour.

In Ephesians 6:10–20 the various items of a Roman soldier's equipment form the basis of a description of the Christian's 'armour'. Paul says, 'put on the full armour [*panoplian*] of God' (Eph. 6:13). The word *panoplian* was used of the equipment of a heavily armed soldier. While the actual Greek word used is different (i.e. not *hopla*), the underlying military metaphor is the same. The items of armour listed are mostly defensive (e.g. breastplate, shield, helmet; cf. 1 Thess. 5:8), but include one offensive weapon, 'the sword of the Spirit', which symbolizes 'the word of God' (Eph. 6:17).

In the light of all this, it is best to adopt an interpretation of *weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left* which sees it as a reference to weapons of both offence and defence.

8–10. Paul further commends his ministry by setting forth nine antitheses. In each case one part of the antithesis represents an evaluation of his ministry 'from a human point of view', and the other part, the view of one 'in Christ'. Thus he commends his ministry *through glory and dishonour, bad report and good report*. Those who judge from a human point of view (outsiders, or perhaps his critics in Corinth) would hold him in *dishonour* and give a *bad report* of his ministry, but those who no longer view things from a human point of view would recognize the *glory* of the ministry entrusted to him and give it a *good report*.

We are *genuine, yet regarded as impostors*. Those who criticized Paul because he did not carry letters of recommendation (3:1–3) may have regarded him as an 'impostor', but those with godly discernment would recognize that he was a 'genuine' apostle. *Known, yet regarded as unknown*. By the world and by his

critics, Paul was *unknown*, he was not 'recognized', but to those who no longer judged according to worldly standards, he was *known* and his apostolate was recognized.[108] *Dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed*. Judged by worldly standards, Paul's career was a miserable one. He was continually exposed to the danger of death, attacked by angry mobs and beaten by civil authorities, but God delivered him again and again (see 1:8–10 for the most recent deliverance), so that contrary to all expectation, he was not killed, but lives.

Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. This antithesis is closely related to the previous two. In all his troubles Paul appeared a *sorrowful* sight to those who regarded him from a human point of view, but by the grace of God he was *always rejoicing* (cf. Acts 16:19–26). *Poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything*. It was a commonplace in Paul's day (e.g. among Cynic and Stoic philosophers) to speak of having nothing materially, but possessing everything in a higher sense.[109] Paul's having nothing would be the result in part of refusing either to accept support from the Corinthians (11:7–9), or to 'peddle' the gospel for financial gain (2:17). Nevertheless, he regarded himself as truly rich, because he was already experiencing as a sort of firstfruits the spiritual blessings of the age to come. And further, he rejoiced that, though materially poor, he could make many rich by enabling them to share in spiritual blessings through Christ.

The purpose of Paul's long commendation (vv. 3–10) is to show that no fault was to be found in his ministry, and thereby to clear the ground for an appeal to the Corinthians for a full reconciliation with their apostle. Having done this, Paul proceeds immediately to his appeal (vv. 11–13).

11. *We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you*. When literally translated, *we have spoken freely* (*to stoma hēmōn aneōgen*) would be 'we have opened our mouth'. Similar expressions are used of Jesus speaking (cf. Matt. 5:2; 13:35) and reflect a common Hebraic idiom meaning simply 'to speak'. However, Paul's expression, *we have spoken freely* (*to stoma hēmōn aneōgen*), is a Greek idiom denoting candour or straightforward speech. By adding that he has *opened wide* his heart to the Corinthians, Paul affirms that there is plenty of room for them in his affections.

12. *We are not withholding our affection from you*. The Greek underlying this translation (*ou stenochōreisthe en hēmin*) contains the idea that the Corinthians are not restricted to a narrow place in Paul's affections. The apostle then adds, *but you are withholding yours from us* (*stenochōreisthe de en tois splanchnois hymōn*; lit. 'but your are restricted in your affections'). The constraints existing in the Corinthians' relationship with Paul are the result of their own affections

being restricted, as it were, to a narrow place. They have allowed the events of the past and listening to criticisms levelled against their apostle to restrict the breadth of their affection for him. Chrysostom comments, 'The heart of one who loves is wide open. He walks with great freedom. It is when love is lacking that restrictions appear. Paul did not want to accuse them openly of lack of love. He merely points to the behavioural result and encourages them to perceive the cause for themselves' (Bray, p. 260).

13. *As a fair exchange – I speak as to my children – open wide your hearts also*. The pastoral concern of a spiritual father is reflected in this verse. Those whom he addressed as 'Corinthians' in verse 11 are here addressed as *children* (cf. 1 Cor. 4:14–15 where Paul reminds them that, though they have 'ten thousand guardians in Christ', it was only he who became their 'father through the gospel'). When Paul says, *As a fair exchange . . . open wide your hearts also*, he is appealing to his beloved children to respond to his own open-heartedness towards them (v. 11) by being similarly open-hearted towards him. He longs for their reciprocal affection.

b. A call for holy living (6:14 – 7:1)

This passage poses some problems for the reader because its connection with what precedes and follows it is not obvious. Whether or not it is to be regarded as a later interpolation has been discussed in the Introduction (pp. 50–52). It was concluded there that the interpolation theory raises greater problems than it solves, for it is extremely difficult to explain, on that theory, why anyone would introduce such a passage at this place. If it is not a later interpolation, we have two tasks before us: to understand the message of 6:14 – 7:1 itself, and to relate it somehow to the rest of the letter, especially its immediate context.

To understand the passage itself we need first to recognize its structure. It consists of: (i) an introductory exhortation not to be 'yoked' with unbelievers (6:14a); (ii) five rhetorical questions which bring out the necessity of heeding this exhortation (6:14b–16a); (iii) an affirmation of believers' unique relationship with God (6:16b); (iv) a number of quotations from the Old Testament which highlight the privilege involved in this relationship and reiterate the content of the exhortation (6:16c–18); and (v) a concluding call to be cleansed 'from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God' (7:1).

14a. *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers*. The expression *be yoked together* (*ginesthe heterozygountes*) contains the idea of being unevenly yoked. The verb *heterozygeō* is found only here in the New Testament, but is used in the

LXX at Leviticus 19:19 as part of a prohibition on yoking different types of animals together.[110] In Deuteronomy 22:10 is found the command, 'Do not plough with an ox and a donkey yoked together.' Using language reminiscent of these prohibitions, Paul exhorts his audience not to enter into 'partnerships' with unbelievers. But what sort of partnerships did he have in mind? Were they marriage partnerships (cf. 1 Cor. 7:39), or were they partnerships in pagan practices (cf. 1 Cor. 10:14–22)? In the light of what follows (vv. 15–16), the latter seems more likely. Such an exhortation was particularly applicable to the Corinthian believers, evident from the fact that in his earlier letter Paul had to charge them not to eat in idol temples (cf. 1 Cor. 10:7, 14–22). Paul is not saying that believers should have no contact with unbelievers (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9–10; 7:12–15; 10:27; 14:22–24), only that they should not participate with them in idolatrous worship.

14b–16a. The opening exhortation of verse 14a is here backed up by five rhetorical questions which underline its importance. *For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?* The contrasts between righteousness and wickedness, and light and darkness contained in these first two questions are found frequently in the Dead Sea Scrolls also (e.g. 1QH 1:26–27; 1QM 3:19). The word *Belial*, found in the third question, *What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?*, is also found frequently in the Dead Sea Scrolls (e.g. 1QM 1:1, 5, 13, 15; 4:2; 11:8) and in intertestamental literature (e.g. *T. Levi* 3:3). In these writings Belial is a name given to the chief of demons, or Satan, and this is its meaning here.

In Colossians 1:12–14 Paul depicts salvation as the deliverance of believers 'from the dominion of darkness' into the kingdom of God's Son, where they share in 'the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light'. Thus, those who have been transferred into the kingdom of Christ and light can have no fellowship with Satan and the dominion of darkness. In 1 Corinthians 10:14–22 Paul speaks of participation in idol worship as fellowship with demons, and his question here in verse 15, *What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?*, probably reflects concern in the same area. In this case his fourth rhetorical question, *Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?*, would be best interpreted also in relation to worship, and the call for separation which this whole passage makes should then be related not to the day-to-day contacts with unbelievers (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9–10), but to participation in idol worship.

What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? This final question with its temple imagery offers extra support for the view that the earlier questions constitute a call to have no involvement in worship in idol temples. When Paul speaks here of *the temple of God*, the background imagery is that of

the Jerusalem shrine, but in the foreground is the Christian community as God's temple. This is confirmed by the affirmation which follows in verse 16b.

16b. *For we are the temple of the living God.* Having emphasized the incompatibility of 'the temple of God' and idols (v. 16a), Paul shows why the Christian community must not become involved in idol worship: it is because its members constitute *the temple of the living God*. In 1 Corinthians Paul speaks of both the individual Christian's body (1 Cor. 6:16–20) and the Christian community as a whole (1 Cor. 3:16–17) as God's temple. It is the latter sense which he employs here. The expression *the living God* is used frequently by the apostle (cf. Rom. 9:26; 2 Cor. 3:3; 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 Tim. 3:15; 4:10). Its background is the Old Testament contrast between the living God of Israel and the lifeless idols of pagan nations. In the present context the same contrast is implied. Elsewhere Paul states clearly that idols in themselves are nothing, the danger of idolatry being that the involvement with demonic powers active therein provokes the Lord to jealousy (1 Cor. 8:4–6; 10:19–22).

16c. The series of Old Testament quotations that follows is introduced by the formula, *as God has said*. In their original context, God was in fact the speaker in each case, and the people of Israel were those addressed. Paul applies these words of God to the Christian community in Corinth.

I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. There is no exact counterpart in the LXX or the Hebrew Bible. Paul's 'quotation' appears to be a free one, and possibly draws upon both Leviticus 26:11–12 and Ezekiel 37:26–27. However, the promises contained here are repeated again and again in the Old Testament (cf. Exod. 25:8; 29:45; Jer. 31:1) and are taken up in Revelation to express the final bliss of the redeemed: 'Look! God's dwelling-place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them' (Rev. 21:3). The people of God enjoy no greater privilege than that of belonging to God and having him dwell with them. In Old Testament times God made himself present in tabernacle and temple. Since Pentecost, he dwells with his people in a far more intimate way through his Spirit, and this is a foretaste of the final bliss of which Revelation 21:3 speaks.

17. In the light of the great privileges of the people of God expressed in the passages cited in verse 16, Paul reiterates here the exhortation to have nothing to do with idols, and he does so by making use of another passage from the Old Testament: *Therefore, 'Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing.'* In substance, this is taken from Isaiah 52:11, where the primary appeal is for the Jewish exiles in Babylon to leave their pagan place of exile and return to Judea and Jerusalem. Paul applies the text to the Corinthians, calling them to separate themselves from idolatry in Corinth.

To encourage his audience to do this, Paul brings forward more quotations to show how God welcomes those who turn to him. First, he quotes from Ezekiel 20:34 (LXX): *and I will receive you*. The primary reference of the text was to the exiles returning from Babylon, but again Paul applies a text to the Corinthians who are being called to abandon involvement with idolatry.

18. Paul exchanges the temple imagery of verses 16–17 for that of the family, quoting 2 Samuel 7:8, 14 (LXX): *I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.* This promise, originally addressed to King David (2 Sam. 7:8, 14), Paul modifies by substituting second-person plural pronouns ('you') and adding the words *and daughters* (cf. Isa. 43:6). As it stands in the present context, the quotation further emphasizes the immense privilege of belonging to God's people. What greater incentive could there be to abandon all idolatrous practices than knowing there was a welcome from *the Lord Almighty* who will treat them as his children? The description of the Lord as the Almighty (*pantokratōr*) is found only here in Paul's letters, nine times in Revelation (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22), and nowhere else in the New Testament. It means the all-powerful, omnipotent One, the Creator and Lord of history.

7:1. *Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit.* In the light of the great promises set forth in verses 6:16c–18, Paul reiterates his call for holy living. The expression *dear friends* reveals his affection for the Corinthians, and the use of the hortatory subjunctive (*let us purify*) and the first-person plural reflexive pronoun (*ourselves*) shows that he includes himself with his audience as those who must fulfil the exhortation. Ritual cleanliness was required of worshippers in the Old Testament, but Paul's reference to purifying ourselves from things that contaminate *body and spirit* indicates that more than ritual cleansing is intended here. He has in mind defilement by participation in idol worship. It may imply either that the 'whole person' can be affected adversely by idolatrous practices, or more specifically that both a person's body (external) and spirit (internal) can be defiled. The latter alternative may be illustrated by 1 Corinthians 6:15–18, where the apostle describes people's sexual involvement with prostitutes as a sin 'against their own body' (sacred prostitution was part of idol worship in Corinth), and by 1 Corinthians 10:19–21, where participation in idolatrous worship involves partnership with demons (i.e. contamination of spirit). To cleanse oneself from such contamination meant abandoning all participation in idol worship.

In the expression *everything that contaminates*, the Greek word *molysmos* is employed, a word found only here in the New Testament and only three times in

the LXX (Jer. 23:15; 1 Esdr. 8:80; 2 Macc. 5:27). In all cases it denotes religious defilement.

Paul's call for holy living finishes on a positive note: *perfecting holiness out of reverence for God*. He uses the noun 'holiness' (*hagiōsynē*) in Romans 1:4, where he speaks of 'the Spirit of holiness' by whom Christ was designated Son of God with power, and also in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, where it comes as part of a benediction: 'so that you will be blameless and holy [lit. 'in holiness'] in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones'. This indicates that complete perfection in holiness is experienced only at the parousia. In the present passage, where Paul exhorts his audience to make their holiness perfect, what is involved is abandonment of involvement in idolatry. This break they would have to effect themselves, but in this, as in all growth in holiness, they could depend upon God's grace mediated through the Spirit of holiness.

The whole passage, 6:14 – 7:1, then, constitutes a call and encouragement for Christians to have nothing to do with idol worship and *to perfect holiness out of reverence for God*. The difficult question remains as to why, if it is not an interpolation, the passage is included by Paul at this point in the letter. Various suggestions have been made, all of which have some merit (see Introduction, pp. 51–52), including: (i) Paul is picking up his exhortation that his audience 'not receive God's grace in vain' (6:1), something they would be doing should they become involved again in idolatry; (ii) being deeply concerned to re-establish fellowship with the Corinthians (cf. 6:11–13; 7:2–4), Paul reminds them that full restoration of fellowship can be achieved only if they cease all involvement with idol worship; (iii) Paul is warning his audience that if they were to join the opposition to him and his gospel, such action would be tantamount to siding with Satan/Belial. He calls on them to avoid any such liaison and to be reconciled with their true apostle instead.

c. A further appeal for reconciliation (7:2–4)

2. Here, following the section calling for no compromise with paganism (6:14 – 7:1), Paul renews his appeal to the Corinthians (cf. 6:11–13) to open their hearts to their apostle: *Make room for us in your hearts*. The verb form is aorist imperative, indicating that Paul was looking for some specific action, rather than simply making a general exhortation, which in turn suggests he believed there was still some reticence on the part of the Corinthians to open their hearts to him. In the earlier appeal (6:11–13) he stressed that his own heart was open wide towards them and that the remaining restriction in the relationship was on their

side.

To support this renewed appeal, Paul asserts his integrity on three levels. First, he says, *We have wronged no one*. What had happened in their relationship, of course, is that Paul had been wronged (cf. 7:12) and not vice versa.

Second, he says, *we have corrupted no one*. The verb, 'to corrupt' (*phtheirō*), is used three times in the Corinthian correspondence. In 1 Corinthians 3:17 Paul uses it after speaking of the building of the church on the foundation of Christ by various ministers, all of whose work is to be tested, and says anyone who 'destroys [*phtheirei*] God's temple', that person God will 'destroy' (*phtheirei*). In 1 Corinthians 15:33 Paul speaks of bad company which 'corrupts' (*phtheirousin*) good character (a parallel use to this is found in Eph. 4:22 where the 'old self' is said to be 'being corrupted' [*phtheiromenon*] by deceitful desires). In all probability, therefore, Paul's meaning in the present context is that he has caused the church no harm; his teaching and example have not corrupted it or encouraged immoral behaviour.

Third, he says, *we have exploited no one*. This is one of four places where the verb 'to exploit' (*pleonekteō*) is used in this letter. In 2:11 the idea is that we will be 'outwitted' (*pleonektēthōmen*) by Satan if he is allowed to rob the church of one of its members. In 12:17 and 12:18 it is used with the idea of 'exploiting' people for financial gain, and it is in this way that we are to understand its present use. Paul claims personal integrity in financial matters. He did not use his position for personal gain, and he certainly did not use the collection for the poor in Jerusalem as an opportunity to line his own pockets (cf. 12:14–18).

3. *I do not say this to condemn you*. Paul may have felt that the strong defence of his own integrity in verse 2 might be taken to imply a criticism of the Corinthians' integrity, and there were certainly aspects of the Corinthians' attitudes to Paul in the past that deserved censure. However, these words constitute an immediate denial of such an attitude on his part. On the contrary, his attitude towards them was much more positive: *I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you.*[111] In 6:11–12 Paul told the Corinthians that his heart was open wide to them, and here he reinforces that affirmation. In the papyri the idea of living and dying together is found where mutual friendship and loyalty are extolled. The idea is that friendship will be sustained throughout life and will keep friends together even in the face of death (cf. Mark 14:31).

4. Despite the fact that there may still have been some reticence on the part of the Corinthians to embrace him fully in their affections, Paul nevertheless felt and expressed great confidence in them: *I have spoken to you with great frankness; I take great pride in you*. This expression of pride, repeated later in

verses 14, 16 in relation to assurances he gave to Titus when he sent him to Corinth, indicates that despite the attack made upon his integrity by the offender (cf. v. 12 and Introduction, pp. 33, 55–60), Paul still believed in the basic loyalty of the Corinthians. They just needed to be released from restrictions brought about by painful past events and the criticisms they had entertained concerning his integrity. When Paul says, *I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds*, it is almost certainly a reflection of the great relief and joy he experienced when he heard of the steps taken by the Corinthians in obedience to the demands he made in the 'severe letter' and reported to him by Titus when they met in Macedonia (cf. vv. 5–7). The Corinthians had demonstrated their loyalty to their apostle, so he is able to say, *I am greatly encouraged*, and that despite the afflictions he was experiencing even as he wrote these things (cf. v. 5).

Theology

People who have responded positively to the gospel and have begun enjoying its benefits must ensure they do not 'receive God's grace in vain' (6:1–2). What Paul was warning the Corinthians against was entertaining criticisms of the gospel and of him as its messenger, lest they fail to benefit fully from the grace of God made available to them. The lives of ministers must not become a stumbling-block hindering people from embracing the gospel (6:3). Rather, they need to commend themselves by the way in which they endure hardships, by godly living and truthful speech in whatever situation they find themselves (6:4–10).

Those who preach reconciliation must also practise it in their relationships with others, especially within the Christian community. For Paul this involved frankness in speaking and sincere declarations of his affection and open-heartedness towards his converts. And this was accompanied by earnest appeals that they respond likewise by opening their hearts to him (6:11–13; 7:2–4). But full reconciliation involves abandonment of those things which hinder it, and what Paul had in mind was involvement in idolatrous worship. This threatened not only full reconciliation between believers, but more importantly, their relationship with God, because there can be no fellowship between 'Christ and Belial', nor was there any 'agreement between the temple of God and idols' (6:14 – 7:1).

vii. Paul's joy after a crisis resolved (7:5–16)

Context

In this section Paul returns to the account of his travels which was broken off at 2:13 to include the long treatment of the nature, integrity and divine enabling of his ministry (2:14 – 7:4). He picks up the threads dropped at 2:13 and completes the account of his travels and concerns in relation to the Corinthian crisis. He recounts the great relief he experienced when he finally met up with Titus in Macedonia and received the good report of affairs in Corinth (vv. 5–7). He tells how, in the light of the events reported by Titus, he no longer regretted writing the 'severe letter', though shortly after sending it he had done so. This change had been brought about by learning of the positive benefits resulting from that letter (vv. 8–13a). Finally, Paul tells how he was also relieved because the confidence he expressed to Titus about the Corinthians proved to be justified (vv. 13b–16).

Comment

a. Paul's relief when Titus arrived (7:5–7)

5. In 2:12–13, before the long diversion concerning his ministry, Paul told the Corinthians that when he came to Troas to meet Titus as previously arranged, he did not find his colleague there. What he did find was a great open door for evangelism, but because of his anxiety and longing for news from Titus, he was unable to take up that opportunity. He left Troas and went on to Macedonia. Here in verse 5 Paul tells how having arrived in Macedonia he found himself embroiled in troubles again: *For when we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn*. He explains that this involved *conflicts on the outside, fears within*. The *conflicts on the outside* may refer to his sharing the persecution in which the Macedonian churches were immersed (cf. 8:1–2). However, the word translated *conflicts* (*machai*), where it is found elsewhere in the New Testament (2 Tim. 2:23; Titus 3:9; Jas 4:1), applies only to quarrels and disputes, so Paul's *conflicts* may have been heated disputations with either unbelievers (cf. Acts 17:5–14) or Christian opponents (cf. Phil. 3:2) in Macedonia. The *fears within* could refer to either fear of persecution (during his first visit to Corinth Paul had on one occasion been in danger of being reduced to silence through fear; cf. Acts 18:9) or fear about the spiritual losses that would be incurred if the Corinthians did not react positively to his 'severe letter' (evidence that Paul experienced this sort of fear can be seen in 11:3 and Gal. 4:11). The latter is more likely, seeing that the arrival of Titus with good news about the situation in Corinth brought relief. Whatever the exact nature of the

conflicts on the outside and *fears within*, Paul was obviously in a state of some distress as he awaited Titus' arrival in Macedonia.

6–7. *But God, who comforts the downcast*. Paul experienced God's comfort not only as verbal encouragement, but also as God intervened to alleviate his situation (1:3–11; cf. Isa. 49:13), assured him of his protection (cf. Acts 18:9–10) and when necessary provided the grace he needed to endure (cf. 12:7–10).

In the distress in which he found himself in Macedonia, Paul says, *God . . . comforted us by the coming of Titus*. The meeting with Titus, so long delayed but finally achieved, brought great relief to the apostle, but as he goes on to say, the relief he experienced was brought about *not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him*. When Titus set out for Corinth as Paul's envoy after the apostle's own 'painful visit', he would have done so with a good deal of apprehension, despite Paul's expressions of confidence in his converts. When he arrived and saw how they responded to Paul's 'severe letter', and how they received him, he was greatly relieved and comforted (cf. 7:13b–16). When Paul received news of Titus' relief, he too was comforted as *he told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever* (see commentary on v. 11, where the nature of this response is spelt out in greater detail). It was not only the pleasure of meeting up with Titus that brought comfort to Paul, but also the news of the improved condition of the Corinthian church, news that they were deeply concerned about and longing for their apostle.

b. The 'severe letter' and its effects (7:8–13a)

8–9. Paul tells of the regret he felt over the writing of the 'severe letter' because it caused such sorrow to his audience. Yet, in the light of the response it evoked, he can say, *Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it.* The initial regret he felt was probably in Ephesus just after he had dispatched the letter and wondered how it would be received. He explains why he no longer felt regret about writing this letter from Macedonia: *I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while*. He hastens to add that he found no pleasure in causing sorrow through that letter: *yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance*. The sorrow they experienced was not useless remorse without any corresponding action to rectify the situation. Calvin (p. 98) comments, 'A father is grieved by his severity if at any time he has to chastise his son, but he approves of it nevertheless because he sees it is for his son's good. So for Paul, it was far from pleasant for him to trouble the Corinthians, but because he was convinced that

there was a good reason for doing so, he did his duty rather than followed his inclination.'

There is an important difference between the *regret* (*metamelomai*, 'to regret') Paul felt and the *repentance* (*metanoia*) to which the Corinthians were led. Paul felt regret when he became concerned about the effect his 'severe letter' might have upon the Corinthians. The Corinthians' repentance produced grief as they realized what they had done and not done, and this resulted in a marked change in their behaviour.

For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. The sorrow they experienced was *as God intended*, that is, a sorrow that led to repentance, not just remorseful self-pity. What 'harm' Paul thought they might have experienced had it not led to repentance is not specified. Perhaps he was concerned that his letter would result not in genuine sorrow for past failures, but in bitterness and further alienation between them and himself. Paul uses the same verb 'to harm' (*zēmioō*) in 1 Corinthians 3:15 of those who will 'suffer loss' (*zēmiōthēsetai*) of reward if their works do not pass God's test on the last day. Paul may have felt that the Corinthians' positive response to his 'severe letter' had saved them from such a loss.

10. Paul contrasts godly sorrow with worldly sorrow: *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. Godly sorrow* which issues in repentance (i.e. a change of mind and heart and a willingness to change behaviour), when coupled with faith in God, leads to salvation. Repentance itself is not the cause of salvation, rather God saves us and freely forgives our sins only when our repentance shows that we have renounced them. Harris (p. 538) says that Paul 'is relating repentance to salvation not as cause and effect but as antecedent and result'.

On the other hand, *worldly sorrow* does not progress beyond remorse. There are regrets over what has happened, but there is no accompanying change of mind and heart, or any willingness to change behaviour, nor any faith in God. The result is not salvation, but death (cf. Rom. 6:15–23). Chrysostom says, 'Worldly sorrow . . . is regret for the loss of money, reputation and friends. That kind of sorrow merely leads to greater harm, because the regret is often a prelude to a thirst for revenge. Only sorrow for sin is really profitable' (Bray, p. 266).

Biblical examples of godly sorrow can be seen in the cases of David (2 Sam. 12:13; Ps. 51), Peter (Mark 14:72) and Paul himself (Acts 9:1–22), while examples of worldly sorrow are to be found in the cases of Esau (Gen. 27:1–40; Heb. 12:15–17) and Judas (Matt. 27:3–5). It is worth noting that Paul acted to head off the possibility of mere worldly sorrow in the case of the 'offender' when in 2:7 he urged his audience to reaffirm their love for him so that he might

not be overcome with excessive sorrow and so be lost to the church (see commentary on 2:5–11).

11. Paul reminds his audience of the outworking of their godly sorrow: *See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done*. The indignation was probably directed towards the 'offender' who was at the centre of the trouble (cf. 2:5; 7:12). The *alarm* (lit. 'fear') may have been their fear of God because they realized they had not accorded his apostle proper respect, while the *longing* and *concern* Paul speaks of was probably their desire for the restoration of their relationship with him. *Readiness to see justice done* (*ekdikēsin*; lit. 'vengeance', 'punishment') would relate to the Corinthians' preparedness to discipline the offender as Paul demanded (cf. 2:6).

Thus Paul's 'severe letter' awakened in his audience a deep sense of shame, leading to repentance over the deterioration in the relationship with their apostle and the state of affairs they had allowed to develop in the church. The result was energetic and zealous action to clear themselves, restore their relationship with Paul and discipline the 'offender'. When Paul heard of this, he was able to assure them: *At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.* It seems that while the congregation as a whole may not have sprung to the apostle's defence when he was maligned in their presence by the 'offender', and while they had been lax in responding to earlier calls to discipline him, nevertheless they were not involved in maligning him. In that matter at least they proved to be guiltless when they finally acted to discipline the offender.

12–13a. Because of the Corinthians' positive response to the 'severe letter', Paul was able to explain to them his real motive in writing: *So even though I wrote to you, it was neither on account of the one who did the wrong nor on account of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are*. He says that he wrote not simply to get action taken against the 'offender' or just to have his own position vis-à-vis the Corinthians clarified and vindicated, but rather that the Corinthians themselves, by experiencing such godly sorrow, might realize how much Paul really meant to them. Thrall (pp. 495–496) addresses the question of whether this accurately reflects Paul's original intention when he wrote the 'severe letter' or how he interpreted it retrospectively. She suggests that it 'should be attributed to an Hebraic manner of speaking whereby a negated alternative is not intended to be negated absolutely, "but only in comparison with the alternative, which is much more important" '.

That Paul describes the purpose of his 'severe letter' as bringing out the

Corinthians' devotion for him *before God* reflects the fact that they were accountable to God for their actions in the whole affair. Paul by his letter had stimulated them to act in a way that is pleasing to God, and that they should have so acted seems to have been the major concern of the apostle, more important to him than his own vindication. And because this has happened, he concludes, *By all this we are encouraged*.

c. Titus' happiness and affection for the Corinthians (7:13b–16)

13b–14. In these verses Paul further explains the reasons for his joy at meeting up with Titus: *In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you.* Paul rejoiced because Titus' own apprehensions had been dispelled upon his arrival in Corinth and his mind set at rest. He rejoiced too that his boasting to Titus about the real attitude of the Corinthian congregation as a whole had proved true: *I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me. I had boasted to him about you* translates *hoti ei ti autō hyper hymōn kekauchēmai* (lit. 'because if I boasted somewhat about you to him'), which reflects something less than complete confidence about the Corinthians' attitude, and explains why Paul was so relieved when he heard the good news about their reception of Titus.

But just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well. Despite their earlier failure to defend their apostle when he was maligned, it would appear Paul still believed there would be a basic readiness to respond positively to his 'severe letter', and he had assured Titus along these lines when he sent him to Corinth. The Corinthians' response to Titus when he visited them proved that Paul's boasting about them was true.[112]

15. Paul also rejoiced when he saw how Titus' own heart now went out to the Corinthians: *And his affection for you is all the greater when he remembers that you were all obedient, receiving him with fear and trembling.* As Titus recalled their obedience (to the demands made in Paul's 'severe letter') and the fear and trembling with which they received him (evidence of the respect in which they held Paul and his apostolic team), his affection for them increased. Their *fear and trembling* may also be evidence of an awareness of their failed responsibility before God, to whom they would have to give an account for the way they had acted during the crisis in Corinth. Informing the Corinthians of Titus' growing affection for them would predispose them to welcome him when he made his upcoming visit in the administration of the collection for the poor believers in

Jerusalem.

16. Paul concludes this major section of the letter with an expression of confidence in the congregation: *I am glad I can have complete confidence in you.* Paul's expression of confidence paved the way for broaching with them again in the next two chapters the matter of the collection.[113]

Theology

In this section of his letter (7:5–16) Paul picks up and expands upon the theme of 'the God of all comfort' introduced in 1:3–7. There God comforted him directly; here he does so 'by the coming of Titus' who brought news of positive changes in the Corinthians' relationship to Paul. That Titus could bring such heartening news was the result of the work of God in the lives of the Corinthians.

This section also provides insight into Paul as a pastor. He was prepared to exercise 'tough love' when sending the 'severe letter', but this was done with genuine care for the Corinthians, such that, having sent it, he initially regretted doing so, fearing it might cause them harm. But as it turned out, the effect was very positive and brought about real change in them and a great desire for a restored relationship with their apostle. This was a great encouragement to Paul and a source of real joy when he received news of it from Titus. All this underlines the fact that Paul was no laissez-faire pastor, nor was he just clinically objective, but he was deeply involved emotionally with his converts. In fact, he saw one of the purposes of his 'severe letter' being to enable the Corinthians to recognize how devoted they really were to him.

Responding to the news Titus brought, Paul noted the difference between the 'godly sorrow' the Corinthians felt and 'worldly sorrow'. 'Godly sorrow' is God-given and does not stop with remorse for things done, but issues in repentance and a change in behaviour. 'Worldly sorrow' does not go beyond remorse and concern for worldly benefits lost. It is not accompanied with the desire to repent, to turn away from sinful behaviour and to seek God's forgiveness, or readiness to make restitution for wrongs done.

C. The matter of the collection (8:1 – 9:15)

Context

Having spoken of his joy and relief on hearing the news Titus brought of the Corinthians' response to his 'severe letter', Paul proceeds to raise with them the matter of the collection being taken up among the Gentile churches to assist the poor believers in Judea. They had been hit hard by famine during the reign of the Emperor Claudius (AD 41–54), and the largely Gentile church at Antioch (Syria) had responded quickly by sending relief by the hand of Barnabas and Saul (Paul) (Acts 11:27–30). In Galatians 2:10 Paul tells how the leaders of the Jerusalem church, having recognized his apostolate to the Gentiles, urged him to continue remembering the poor, which thing, he said, he was eager to do. By the time he wrote 1 Corinthians (c. AD 55), he had already begun soliciting aid from the churches of Galatia, and the Corinthians had heard about it and asked to be allowed to share in this ministry (1 Cor. 16:1–4). And by the time 2 Corinthians was written (c. AD 56), Paul had contacted the Macedonian churches and they had begged him 'for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people' (8:4). He was now using the example of their generosity to stimulate the Corinthians to carry out what they had earlier shown themselves ready to do (8:1–7; cf. 1 Cor. 16:1–4), just as he had previously used the example of the Corinthians' readiness to motivate the Macedonians (9:1–5).

The question as to whether both chapters 8 and 9 were originally connected with chapters 1 – 7 is discussed in the Introduction (pp. 41–43). It was concluded that the evidence in favour of unity is at least as strong, if not stronger, than that against. The connection between chapters 1 – 7 and chapters 8 and 9 can be explained along the following lines. In chapters 1 – 7 Paul responds with great relief and joy to the good news brought by Titus of a turn for the better in the relationship between the Corinthians and himself. He concludes that response with an expression of his confidence in the Corinthians (7:14–16). Because the relationship was for the time being in a good state, he could remind the Corinthians of their earlier desire to contribute to the collection for the Judean Christians, urging them now to complete what they had previously begun.[114] So although the subject matter of chapters 8 and 9 is quite different from that of chapters 1 – 7, the former can be explained as arising from the latter.

That Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians was successful in dealing with this matter is evident from his comment in Romans 15:26 written just a few months later: 'Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for

the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem.' The churches of Achaia, of course, included the Corinthian church (cf. 9:2).

Comment

i. The example of the Macedonians (8:1–6)

In these verses Paul uses the example of the Macedonian believers' remarkably generous response to the collection appeal to motivate the Corinthian believers to carry out what they had previously shown themselves ready to do, to provide relief for the believers in Jerusalem.

1. *And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches*. The Roman province of Macedonia comprised the northern part of Greece where the Pauline churches at Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea (cf. Acts 17:13–14; 20:4) were located. The apostle regarded the liberality of the Macedonians as the result of God's grace in their lives. God is generous (v. 9; Rom. 5:6–8; 8:31–32; cf. Matt. 5:45; 7:11), and where his grace is experienced in people's lives, the evidence will be similar love and generosity (cf. Matt. 5:43–48; 10:8; Rom. 15:7; Eph. 4:32; 5:1–2; Phil. 2:4–11; Col. 3:12–13; 1 John 4:7–12).

2. The remarkable evidence of God's grace in the churches of Macedonia was shown by the fact that their generosity was exercised in adverse circumstances. First, it was *in the midst of a very severe trial*. The birth of the churches in Macedonia was accompanied by much opposition, both to the apostolic team and to the new converts (cf. Acts 16:11 – 17:15), and Paul was still vividly aware of that when he wrote to the churches of Thessalonica and Philippi (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:1–2, 14–16; 3:1–5; 2 Thess. 1:4; Phil. 1:27–30). The churches of Macedonia were again (or still) embroiled in persecution when Paul wrote to Corinth from Macedonia (cf. 2 Cor. 7:5).

Second, and equally remarkable, *their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity*. Later in the chapter Paul will speak of the need for equality, one church's abundance supplying another's want (vv. 13–15). The Macedonians were notable in generosity because they responded while being in want themselves, and that, Paul says, with *overflowing joy*.

Joy in the midst of difficulty was a mark of the early believers. Paul could say, 'in all our troubles my joy knows not bounds' (7:4). In Acts 16:25 we are told that, after being flogged and imprisoned in Philippi, Paul and Silas 'were praying and singing hymns to God'. And the believers in Thessalonica 'welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit'

(1 Thess. 1:6).

Paul says of the Macedonians that *their overflowing joy . . . welled up in rich generosity*. He mentions the Macedonians' generosity repeatedly in his letters (cf. Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:1–4; 11:9; Phil. 1:5; 2:25; 4:15–16, 18). Jesus told the Twelve when he sent them out on the Galilean mission, 'Freely you have received; freely give' (Matt. 10:8). The Macedonian Christians knew the joy of being the recipients of God's free grace, and in that joy they gave freely. Because of their own situation, what they gave was probably quite a small amount, but measured against their extreme poverty it represented *rich generosity* (cf. Mark 12:41–44). Calvin (p. 107) comments,

> The thing that makes us more close-fisted than we should be with our money is that we are too careful and look too far forward at possible dangers that might come upon us and so become too cautious and anxious and work out too fretfully how much we are going to need during our whole life and how much we lose when the smallest part is taken away. But the man who depends on the Lord's blessing has his mind set free from these vexatious cares and at the same time his hand set free for beneficence.

3–4. Paul explains further the nature of the remarkable generosity of the Macedonian churches: *For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability*. The expression *as much as they were able* (*kata dynamin*) is very common in the papyri, especially in marriage contracts where a husband promises to provide food and clothing for his wife as much as he is able (MM, p. 171). Paul testifies that the Macedonians have done all that could be expected of them; they responded to the appeal with *as much as they were able*, but then adds, *and even beyond their ability*. Once again the papyri throw light upon the significance of this sort of expression. 'Beyond one's ability' (*para dynamin*) is found in the context of a man's complaint against his wife for whom he has provided beyond what his means really allowed (MM, p. 171). Paul says of the Macedonians that they have contributed to the collection in a way that was over and above anything that could be expected, given their situation (cf. Jesus' comment in Luke 21:4 about the poor widow: 'she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on').

All this they have done, Paul says, *entirely on their own*, that is, 'of their own accord'; they did not need to be persuaded to do so. In fact, he says, *they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people*. They shared in it both by contributing to the collection itself and by providing representatives to accompany those who conveyed it to Jerusalem (9:2–4).

Contained in verse 4 are three key words used by Paul in relation to the collection: (i) *privilege* (*charis*) is used to show that the Macedonians regarded

the opportunity to contribute as a favour, not a burden. They evidently understood the truth of Jesus' words: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35); (ii) *sharing* (*koinōnia*) indicates that their involvement was seen as participation in a larger entity (i.e. an 'ecumenical' act of compassion); (iii) *service* renders the Greek word *diakonia*, and its use here reflects the fact that contributing to the collection was viewed as Christian 'service'. This was service in which the Philippian church at least was involved over a long period of time (Phil. 4:14–20).

5. Finally, Paul testifies, *They exceeded our expectations: they gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us*. What apparently surprised Paul was that the Macedonians did not only give their money out of compassion for the Judean Christians, but that they first gave themselves to the Lord (cf. Rom. 12:1–2) and his apostle by the will of God. They saw their participation in the collection as an opportunity to express their devotion to the Lord. Jesus said of those who care for his followers: 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me' (Matt. 25:40). Harris (p. 568) says their giving themselves 'to the Lord' and 'to us' was 'a rededication of their lives to the Lord Jesus for a specific task that involved Paul, namely the facilitation of the collection among the churches in Macedonia'. When the Macedonians gave themselves to their apostle as well as to the Lord, they were recognizing Paul's God-given authority, and their response to his appeal on behalf of the Judean believers was a recognition of that authority.

The expression, *by the will of God*, is peculiarly Pauline and is found seven times in his letters and nowhere else in the New Testament. Five times it relates to Paul's call to be an apostle (1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1). Once it relates to Paul's plans to visit the believers in Rome (Rom. 15:32), and here in 8:5 it relates to the Corinthians' dedication of themselves to the Lord and his apostle.

6. *So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part*. Seeing the extraordinary response of the Macedonians prompted Paul to urge Titus to follow up his earlier efforts to encourage the Corinthians to participate in the collection. Verse 10 refers to the time when the Corinthians first began to participate (cf. 1 Cor. 16:1–4), but it is unlikely that Titus was involved at that early stage, because 7:14 suggests that the visit to Corinth from which he had just returned (7:5–7) was his first to the church there. It is more likely, therefore, that it was on his recent visit that Titus, seeing the Corinthians responding so positively to Paul's 'severe letter', began to work with them on the matter of the collection. In the present context, then, Paul

tells his audience that he has urged Titus to complete what he began on his recent visit.

ii. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to finish what they began (8:7–15)

7. *But since you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you*[115] *– see that you also excel in this grace of giving*. If the words, *since you excel in everything*, had been found in 1 Corinthians, we would suspect the use of satire (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14 – 3:4; 6:5), as if Paul were saying, 'If you *think* you excel in everything …!' But in the context of a passage connected with chapters 1 – 7 – a letter of reconciliation, relief and joy – satire would be out of place.

When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he acknowledged their excellence in 'speech' and 'knowledge' (1:4–7), but the *earnestness* and *love* Paul mentions in the present context are qualities called forth by the 'severe letter'. The words, *the love we have kindled in you*, translate *tē ex hēmōn en hymin agapē* (lit. 'the love from us in you'). If, as we have suggested, this love was kindled through Paul's 'severe letter', it is possible to understand how it was 'love from us in you'.

The closing words of verse 7, *see that you also excel in this grace of giving*, are construed in the NIV as a command (regarding *hina* plus subjunctive as an imperative). Alternatively, Paul's words may be interpreted as an exhortation expressing a wish rather than issuing a command (cf. NRSV: 'we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking'). Either way, Paul expects his converts to respond positively to what he says.

8. *I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.* The phrase *I am not commanding* translates *ou kat' epitagēn legō*, which rendered literally reads: 'I am speaking not in accordance to a command.' In 1 Corinthians 7:6, when giving advice to the married about temporary sexual abstinence in order to devote themselves to prayer, Paul uses the same expression: 'I say this as a concession, not as a command' (*ou kat' epitagēn*). Hafemann (p. 336) argues that here in verse 8 Paul is acknowledging that he has no direct command *from the Lord*. But this is explicit neither in verse 8 nor 1 Corinthians 7:6, as it is, for example, where Paul speaks of his call to be an apostle and to preach the gospel by the command *of God* (Rom. 16:25–26; 1 Tim. 1:1; Titus 1:3). This suggests that in verse 8 and 1 Corinthians 7:6 Paul is not saying he has no command *from the Lord*, but that he is not issuing a command with apostolic authority. When he urged the Corinthians to excel in the 'grace of giving', it was not a command to be obeyed,

but an exhortation to take the opportunity to demonstrate the genuineness of their own love and commitment.

When the apostle says he wants to test the sincerity of the Corinthians' love *by comparing it with the earnestness of others*, he is referring to the Macedonians. By their astonishingly generous response to the appeal, they had shown the earnestness of their Christian commitment, and in that light Paul wanted to test the sincerity of the love of the Corinthians. Harris (p. 577) comments, 'The apostle is not promoting a contest among rivals (*pace* Betz, pp. 48–49) but encouraging friendly imitation among equals.'

9. To support his call to the Corinthians to express their love by generous participation in the collection, Paul cites the example of Christ: *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Beginning his statement with the words, *for you know*, indicates that Paul is reminding them of truth they already knew, the content of which functions as an authoritative example for believers. When Paul speaks of the grace of God, or as here, *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*, what he refers to is not merely an attitude or a gracious disposition, but God's love expressed in concrete saving action on behalf of humanity. And similarly, it is a concrete expression of love that Paul expects from his audience.

The nature of Christ's expression of love is stated in the words: *that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich*. It is important in seeking to understand this statement that we neither distort the biblical picture of Jesus' experience of poverty, nor fail to recognize the nature of the poverty that Paul has in mind here. As far as Jesus' experience is concerned, Luke does highlight the lowly circumstances of his birth, but this is not an indication of the poverty of the holy family, but rather of the overcrowded conditions in Bethlehem at the time of the census (Luke 2:7). The offering that Mary made for her purification was that permitted to those who could not afford a lamb (Luke 2:24; cf. Lev. 12:6–8), and this indicates that the family were not wealthy. Jesus was known as 'the carpenter . . . Mary's son' (Mark 6:3), and as a craftsman, he would not have been numbered among the abject poor. During his Galilean ministry, he did remind a would-be disciple that 'Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head' (Luke 9:58). However, this must not be taken to mean that as an itinerant preacher Jesus was continually in dire economic circumstances. The indications are that the costs of his itinerant ministry and the support for his followers were provided by a number of well-off sympathizers who had been the recipients of his healing ministry (Luke 8:1–3). In addition, it was a custom among the Jews to provide hospitality for travelling preachers (cf. Matt. 10:9–13), and Jesus enjoyed such hospitality at a number of homes, and especially at

that of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42; John 12:1–3). On the evidence, then, Jesus was no poorer than most of his countrymen, and better off than some (those reduced to beggary). Indeed, Jesus and his band of disciples had sufficient money to be able to provide help for those worse off than themselves (cf. John 12:3–6; 13:27–29).

Irrespective of the degree of poverty which Jesus may have experienced (and this can be exaggerated), it is not economic poverty about which Paul writes here. Most likely, he had in mind Jesus' whole incarnate life. In this case his becoming poor relates to setting aside his pre-existent glory in the presence of the Father. Statements in John's Gospel illustrate the self-imposed 'poverty' involved in the incarnation: he who was in the beginning 'with God' and who 'was God' (John 1:1–2) 'became flesh and made his dwelling among us' (John 1:14). 'He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him' (John 1:10–11; cf. Phil. 2:5–8.)

Just as Jesus' poverty is not to be understood in terms of desperate need, so too the riches which he came to make available to believers are not to be understood in terms of material prosperity. It is salvation itself and the blessings accompanying it that constitute the riches which Christ by his 'poverty' enabled believers to enjoy. These riches are experienced both in the present time as a kind of pledge or guarantee, and in full measure at the return of Christ (1 Cor. 1:4–8; 2 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 1:3–14).

We must never forget that it is only *through his poverty* that we may become *rich*. There was a price to be paid for the blessings we enjoy in Christ. Included in the price was the cost of the incarnation of the pre-existent Son into a fallen world, but great though that was, it was just the beginning. There was also the cost of rejection, ridicule, persecution, betrayal and suffering, all culminating in the agony of Gethsemane and the cross. These things together made up the full price of our salvation (cf. Rom. 3:22b–26; 1 Cor. 5:7; 6:19–20; 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13–14; 1 Pet. 1:18–20).

10. Having cited the example of Christ's self-giving love, Paul urges his audience to show the genuineness of their own love by a concrete act of compassion: *And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so*. The apostle was not averse to making demands which he regarded as commands of the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 14:37–38), but he distinguishes his own judgments or opinions as an apostle from such authoritative commands (cf. 1 Cor. 7:25, 40), as he does here when prefacing it with *here is my judgment*. Paul's judgment was that it was *best* for them to finish *now* what they began *last year*. He knew that

representatives from the Macedonian churches (to whom he had boasted of the Corinthians' readiness) would soon arrive in Corinth. If the Corinthians had not carried through in this matter by then, they would be embarrassed before the Macedonian Christians (cf. 9:1–5), so it would indeed be *best* for them to complete now what they had previously begun.

The reference to what was begun *last year* probably relates to the action taken in response to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 16:1–4. The expression translated *last year* (*apo perysi*) is used in the papyri to mean some time during the previous calendar year. Thus the time reference could be to a point as recent as one month or as long as twenty-three months ago. In this context, assuming the Corinthians' original initiative in the matter was expressed in their letter to which Paul responded when he wrote 1 Corinthians, the point in time to which *apo perysi* refers will be determined by the period of time we judge to have elapsed between the writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians, possibly about one year (see Introduction, pp. 53–54).

We might have expected Paul to refer to 'what they not only began to desire but also to give'. However, the order is the reverse of this. He refers to what they began *not only to give but also to have the desire to do so*. This throws emphasis upon the fact that the Corinthians' earlier actions sprang from their own desires, not from pressure applied by the apostle. But the Corinthians' good intentions had failed to produce further results over the past year.

11. *Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.* The expression, *finish the work* (*to poiēsai epitelesate*), is imperative in form, but in this context functions as an exhortation or entreaty rather than a demand (cf. the similar use of imperatives in 5:20; Matt. 6:10–11; Luke 11:1; John 4:7, 31). Paul exhorts them to let *your eager willingness to do it* last year be matched now *by your completion of it*. This would probably involve renewing the practice of setting aside a sum of money on the first day of every week, as Paul advised (1 Cor. 16:2). No matter how strong one's *willingness* may be, it is fruitless unless expressed in action. True love never leaves us content just to talk; it has to be expressed in practical ways (cf. Luke 19:1–10; 1 John 3:16–18).

By adding *according to your means*, Paul indicates that his exhortation is not unreasonable, but takes into account their situation as well as the needs of the Judean believers. He is not suggesting they do what the Macedonians did, who not only 'gave as much as they were able', but 'even beyond their ability'(v. 3).

12. *For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.* Paul explains here what he meant by the brief reference to 'according to your means' in verse 11. In doing so, he

makes two points about gifts that are acceptable to God. First, there needs to be a *willingness* to give and no sense of compulsion. Second, the size of the gift is acceptable when it is in proportion to what one has. Speaking of the collection in 1 Corinthians 16:2, Paul says, 'Each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income.' That Paul had to explain this to the Corinthians may be an indication that one reason why they had not completed what they had begun was because they felt their resources prevented them from raising a suitably large amount. Calvin (p. 112) comments, 'If you offer a small gift from your slender resources, your intention is just as valuable in God's eyes as if a rich man had made a large gift out of his abundance.'[116]

The word *acceptable* (*euprosdektos*) is found in three other contexts in Paul's letters. It occurs in Romans 15:16, where Paul speaks of the Gentiles being an 'acceptable' sacrifice to God. It is found again in Romans 15:31, where he expresses his hope that the collection will be 'favourably received' (lit. 'acceptable') to the Judean Christians. And in 2 Corinthians 6:2 it is used of the day of 'God's favour' (lit. 'acceptable time'), 'the day of salvation'. Thus Paul uses *euprosdektos* of acceptability both to God and to human beings. In our present context, where the word is used in an absolute sense, and where no human acceptance is in view, acceptability before God of the Corinthians' gift is intended. Paul assures his audience that when they give according to what *one has*, that is acceptable to God. His view is a sane one in that it takes account of the giver's situation and does not expect a response which is *according to what one does not have* (cf. Tobit 4:8 NRSV: 'If you have many possessions, make your gift from them in proportion; if few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have'). Chrysostom says, 'Look at how unbelievably wise Paul is. After pointing out the need and showing them an example, Paul leaves the Corinthians to do as much as they can, letting the example of the Macedonians do its own work of persuasion. He knew that imitation was a more powerful incentive than exhortation' (Bray, p. 274).

13. *Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality.* Paul seeks to prevent any misunderstanding about the collection. The Corinthians must realize that they are not being *hard pressed* so that others may *be relieved*. Barnett (p. 413) suggests that Paul may have anticipated a Corinthian objection: 'Is it not unfair that the Jerusalemites should be relieved at the cost of our impoverishment?' What Paul argues for is *equality* among believers. By *equality*, he does not intend that every church should have identical financial resources, for if this were so, as Thrall (p. 540) comments, he would have solicited support for the Macedonians who were experiencing 'extreme poverty' (v. 2) rather than accept donations from them.

What he did have in mind is explained in verses 14–15.

14a–b. *At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need.* The relative affluence of the Corinthians at the present time should provide for the needs of the poor Judean believers. This should happen *at the present time* when the Judean believers were suffering, possibly because of famine or maybe some other long-term deprivation. And in like fashion, if at some future time the positions should be reversed, then the Judeans' abundance might supply the Corinthians' needs.

Alternatively, it has been suggested that Paul was not thinking of the future but the present, and that the *plenty* of the Jerusalem church was spiritual wealth from which the Corinthians, like all Gentile believers who were spiritually impoverished, were privileged to be sharing (cf. Rom. 15:25–27). On the other hand, Paul may simply be making a general point rather than foreshadowing an actual reversal of fortunes or referring to the Gentiles' share in Jewish spiritual wealth. Finally, it is worth noting that it is from the abundance or surplus of those who are better-off that Paul expects the needs of those who are worse-off to be met. He does not advocate that those who are better-off reduce themselves to poverty to do so.

14c–15. *The goal is equality, as it is written: 'The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.'* Paul finds an illustration of equality in the experience of the exodus community. When God provided manna from heaven, each family head was to gather 'an omer for each person you have in your tent' (Exod. 16:16). As they gathered according to their needs, 'the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little' (Exod. 16:18). It is implied that the Lord miraculously ensured that the amounts gathered were sufficient for each person's need.[117] The needs of all were met, no-one suffered want and no-one had an oversupply. This model illustrates the ideal which Paul sets before his audience. They too should ensure that there is an equality of needs being met among the Christian communities. And for this to occur, those enjoying an abundance should meet the needs of those in want. Calvin (p. 114) comments, 'I acknowledge indeed that we are not bound to such an equality as would make it wrong for the rich to live more elegantly than the poor; but that there must be such an equality that nobody starves and nobody hordes his abundance at another's expense.'

iii. Commendation of those who will receive the collection (8:16–24)

Here Paul commends the three brothers he is sending to Corinth to assist in the administration of the collection. Titus is commended first (vv. 16–17), then the brother 'praised by all the churches for his service' (vv. 18–19), and thirdly 'our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous' (v. 22). The passage concludes with a summary commendation of all three (v. 23) and an exhortation that the Corinthians give proof of their love (for Paul) and the truth of his boasting about them (to the Macedonians) when the three brothers arrive (v. 24). Between the commendations of those whom he is sending, Paul digresses briefly to say that he is trying to 'avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift' (vv. 20–21). It is this concern that probably accounts for the rather full commendations Paul makes.

16. *Thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you.* The words *I have* in the expression *the same concern I have for you* do not appear in the original, being added by the NIV translators. In this case, the addition is helpful because the *same concern* here is neither that of the Macedonians (whose concern was for the Judean believers) nor the Corinthians' concern for themselves, and must therefore refer to the *same concern* that Paul had for the Corinthians. Paul begins his commendation of Titus with an ascription of thanks to God for the shared concern that he and Titus had. Paul recognizes that it was God who had put that *same concern* for the Corinthians into the heart of Titus, just as it was the grace of God at work in the Macedonians' lives that had produced their remarkable generosity (vv. 1–2). In what way are we to understand the nature of Titus' *same concern* for the Corinthians as Paul had in this matter of the collection? Perhaps he too realized it was a test of the sincerity of their love (v. 8) and he was anxious that they not be found to have failed the test.

17. In this verse Paul provides evidence for the concern Titus had: *For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative.* That Titus accepted Paul's appeal *with much enthusiasm* highlights the concern he had for the Corinthians. Informing the Corinthians of this constituted an effective commendation of him to them. Titus, though having only recently returned from Corinth, needed no persuasion from Paul to make the considerable journey back there again. Being so concerned for the Corinthians, he undertook the mission *on his own initiative* (*authairetos*) – just as the Macedonians had eagerly participated in the collection 'entirely on their own' (*authairetoi*). All this should predispose the Corinthians gladly to accept Titus and the task he is to carry out among them. Barrett (p. 228) notes that Paul appealed to Titus to undertake the journey back to Corinth, rather than ordering him to do so, reflecting the nature of Paul's relationship with his

colleagues.

18–19. *And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering*. Paul does not name this brother[118] who will accompany Titus, but he commends him on two counts. First, he is praised by all the churches *for his service to the gospel* (*en tō euangeliō*), that is, in preaching the gospel.[119] Second, he has the confidence of those churches who selected him to join those conveying the collection to Jerusalem. Paul does not name this brother or the churches that selected him for the task, though presumably they were the Macedonian churches. It is clear that whoever this well-spoken-of brother was, he and the churches who chose him shared Paul's view concerning the importance of the collection.

The final words of verse 19 indicate the purposes for which Paul accepted responsibility for administering the collection. It was *in order to honour the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help.* The collection, taken up among Gentile converts and given to Jewish believers, was a tangible expression of the reconciliation which God had effected through Christ. By reconciling both Jew and Gentile to himself through the cross, God had at the same time reconciled the two groups to one another. So the collection, as a tangible expression of the new relationship between Gentile converts and Jewish Christians, reflected the grace of God in the lives of those concerned, and therefore can be said *to honour the Lord himself* as the beneficiaries were moved to praise God.

However, the collection was carried out also *to show our eagerness to help*. Paul had fought long and hard to preserve the freedom of the gospel for his Gentile converts, and had won the approval of the Jewish mother church for the gospel he preached among the Gentiles (Gal. 2:1–10). It had been agreed that Gentile converts need not submit to circumcision nor take upon themselves the yoke of the law (Acts 15:1–35). Because of the two fundamentally different lifestyles, the Gentile churches could easily have gone their own way and had virtually nothing to do with the Jewish churches. When the leaders of the Jerusalem church affirmed Paul's gospel for the Gentiles, they asked him 'to remember the poor' (Gal. 2:10). Paul saw this as an important demonstration of unity between the two different expressions of Christianity, and was therefore eager to promote a collection among the Gentiles, as this would show his good will and that of his churches towards the Jewish believers.

20. Before moving on to the commendation of the third person whom he was sending to Corinth, Paul digresses briefly to explain why so much care is being taken to provide couriers with impeccable credentials to receive the collection and carry it to Jerusalem: *We want to avoid any criticism of the way we*

administer this liberal gift. There were opponents of Paul and his gospel who were only too ready to call into question the apostle's motives in financial matters, so that he had frequently to defend his integrity. Paul was neither like many itinerant orators who operated for personal profit (cf. 1 Thess. 2:3–12), nor was he using the collection as a ploy to line his own pockets (cf. e.g. 2:17; 11:7–11; 12:14–18; 2 Thess. 3:6–9). The collection was too important for inter-church relations to allow its administration to be called into question by accusations of impropriety. The collection involved a *liberal gift* (i.e. a large sum of money), and therefore greater care than usual had to be taken.

21. Paul further emphasizes the extreme care taken, by saying, *For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man.*[120] Paul's words echo those of Proverbs 3:3–4:

> Let love and faithfulness never leave you;
> bind them round your neck,
> write them on the tablet of your heart.
> Then you will win favour and a good name
> in the sight of God and man.

While the apostle's ultimate concern in this case was that the administration of the collection should be right *in the eyes of the Lord*, it was also important that it be seen to be right *in the eyes of man*. The success of the collection depended upon it.

22. Following the brief digression in verses 20–21, Paul commends the third member of the group being sent to Corinth. *In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous.* Unlike the 'brother' mentioned in verse 19 who was 'chosen by the churches', this person is described as *our brother*, implying perhaps that he was chosen by Paul. It is hard to know why Paul did not name either the person he commended in verses 18–19 or the one he mentions here. The former was 'praised by all the churches' and presumably would have been known to the Corinthians. The latter was almost certainly known to them also, for Paul goes on to say that he is *now even more* [*zealous*] *because of his great confidence in you.*[121] It is worth noting how important the quality of 'zeal' was to the apostle, both when commending Christian workers and when exhorting believers generally. We might place other qualifications higher on our list of priorities, but for Paul zeal was among the most important (cf. e.g. 7:11, 12; 8:7, 8, 16, 17; Rom. 12:8, 11; Eph. 4:3; 2 Tim. 1:16, 17).

23. Paul here sums up his commendation of the three-man team in such a way as to answer any who might ask, 'Who are these men?' He begins: *As for Titus,*

he is my partner and fellow worker among you. Titus' close association with Paul as his *partner* (*koinōnos*) is stressed, suggesting that he is functioning as Paul's apostolic representative. The words, *as for Titus*, translate *eite hyper Titou*. Betz (p. 79) notes that the word *hyper* was used when making 'a legal statement on someone's behalf' and reinforces the view that Paul was introducing Titus as his official representative. This is the only place where Paul uses the word *partner* (*koinōnos*) of a colleague, but he uses *fellow worker* (*synergos*) several times to denote both male and female colleagues (Rom. 16:3, 9, 21; Phil. 2:25; 4:3; Col. 4:11; 1 Thess. 3:2; Phlm. 1, 24).

As for our brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honour to Christ. In the case of the two brothers, Paul stresses their official capacity as *representatives* [lit. 'apostles'] *of the churches*. The significance of an apostle (essentially someone charged with a commission) can only be understood when we know by whom he/she was commissioned and for what. So, for example, the Twelve were apostles of Christ, commissioned by him to be witnesses to his resurrection (Luke 24:44–49; Acts 1:15–26). The two brothers Paul commends were apostles of the churches (cf. Phil. 2:25), commissioned to represent those churches and to travel with Paul to Corinth, and most likely also to Jerusalem, as bearers of the collection. Paul does not tell us which churches commissioned these apostles. We might assume, seeing that Paul was writing from Macedonia, that the churches referred to and their 'apostles' were Macedonian.

In chapter 9 Paul speaks of the humiliation he and the Corinthians would experience if, when he comes to Corinth and is accompanied by some Macedonians, the Corinthians are not ready (9:3, 4). If the messengers Paul says he was sending ahead here in chapter 8 and the churches who commissioned them were Macedonian, then the humiliation of the Corinthians would take place upon the arrival of these messengers, as well as later when Paul arrived with other Macedonians (9:5).

The statement, *they are representatives of the churches and an honour to Christ*, translates *apostoloi ekklēsiōn, doxa Christou* (lit. 'messengers of the churches, [the] glory of Christ'). '[The] glory of Christ' could refer to 'the messengers/apostles' (as in the NIV), in which case it may be understood to imply that these men worked for the 'glory of Christ' in that they participated in the administration of a collection which was 'to honour the Lord himself' (v. 19). Alternatively, '[the] glory of Christ' could refer to the churches (as implied by the punctuation in the NRSV: 'they are the messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ'). Barnett (p. 427) suggests that the churches were the glory of Christ because, against the dark background in which they were situated, they shone brightly and so glorified Christ. However, in context where Paul is commending

these three envoys, he is probably referring to them as the ‘glory of Christ’ rather than the churches that sent them. Betz (p. 82) argues that the very vagueness of the expression reflects ‘the language of diplomacy’, in this case to enhance the status of these brothers.

24. *Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.* Having spelled out the credentials of the three who are being sent to Corinth, Paul concludes by urging his audience to provide proof (i.e. by having their contributions ready) of their love (for their fellow believers in need), and of the validity of his boasting about their readiness to the messengers. This proof will be given *so that the churches can see it*, that is, when the churches’ representatives arrive and witness their readiness. The content of this verse also functions as an exhortation to the Corinthians to receive these envoys in a friendly manner.

iv. Be prepared and avoid humiliation (9:1–5)

1–2. *There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the Lord’s people*. In one sense there was no need for Paul to write about the collection (as he did in ch. 8) because the Corinthians had shown their readiness by raising the matter with him in the first place (cf. 1 Cor. 16:1–4).[122] He underlines this fact by saying, *For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians.* The content of that boasting is then stated briefly: *telling them that since last year you in Achaia*[123] *were ready to give*. On *since last year* (*apo perysi*), see commentary on 8:10. The effect of Paul’s boasting about the Corinthians’ readiness is then recorded: *and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action* (i.e. most of the Macedonians).

On the one hand, there was no need to write about the collection to those who had already taken the initiative in the matter, and whose zeal he had spoken about to stir the Macedonians to action. On the other hand, the fact that he had boasted about their readiness prompted him to bring the matter up again to make sure they were in fact ready when he arrived with representatives of the Macedonian churches, as the following verse makes clear.

3–4. However, there is a sense in which Paul’s writing was necessary. Readiness to give (8:11), or even having made a beginning (8:10), is not the same as having finished and having everything ready when Paul and the others arrive in Corinth. So Paul writes, *But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be*. *Brothers* here refers to Titus and the two unnamed representatives whom Paul commended in 8:16–24. In boasting about the

Corinthians' readiness, Paul stressed not only their willingness, but also his confidence that they would have their contribution ready when he arrived with the brothers to receive it. But now he is concerned that in the latter respect they may fail.

For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we – not to say anything about you – would be ashamed of having been so confident.[124] In fact, several Macedonians did come to Corinth, and were included among those who accompanied Paul from there on his journey to Jerusalem (i.e. Sopater, Aristarchus and Secundus; see Acts 20:4). If these people arrived in Corinth and found the Corinthians unprepared, Paul's embarrassment would be acute, exceeded only by the humiliation experienced by the Corinthians themselves.

5. *So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given*. Paul sent Titus and the two brothers (8:16–24) ahead to avoid the need for a hasty collection when he arrived with the Macedonian delegation, and the embarrassment and humiliation that would cause. *Generous gift* translates *eulogian* (lit. 'blessing'), foreshadowing the spiritual as well as the material effects of the gift (cf. vv. 12–14).

It was crucial that the gift be made willingly and cheerfully, and not *grudgingly given*. If their contribution were to be grudgingly given, an important purpose of the collection would be negated. It would not be an expression of the loving unity between Gentile and Jewish believers.

v. An exhortation to be generous (9:6–15)

In this section Paul uses agricultural imagery to underscore the point made in verse 5 about a generous gift, and to depict God as the one who enriches his people in every way for generous giving, and so to encourage his audience to be generous (vv. 6–10). Then he describes what results he expects to see issuing from the generous response of the Corinthians: the needs of the Jewish Christians in Judea will be met, and they will offer thanksgiving to God, recognize the Gentile Christians' obedience to the gospel and the surpassing grace of God at work in them, and so will long for them and pray for them. In short, the outcome will be the enhancement of the unity of the church (vv. 11–14). The section closes with an ascription of thanks to God for his 'indescribable gift', which strikes the same note as that sounded in 8:9.

6. The previous section (vv. 1–5) concluded with Paul's statement that he wanted the Corinthians' contribution 'as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly

given'. With this in mind, he reminds his audience of a well-known agricultural proverb: *Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.* It is an agricultural truism that, other things being equal, the size of the harvest will be directly proportional to the amount of seed sown. The principle involved is applied to human behaviour in Jewish wisdom literature (cf. Prov. 11:24–25) and corresponds to ideals of the Hellenistic world. Sowing and reaping in the present context refer to the contribution the Corinthians are to make and the results of that contribution respectively. The bountiful 'reaping' Paul hopes to see as a result of their bountiful 'sowing' is described in verses 9–14.

7. *Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion*. While Paul was looking for a generous contribution from the Corinthians, he stresses that it must be a voluntary gift, not one made because he is applying pressure. Their giving must be in accordance with what they have decided individually in their own hearts. If they give while feeling under compulsion (from Paul or his envoys), then their contributions will be made reluctantly and the whole purpose of the project (to express the concern of the Gentile churches for the needy Jewish churches in Judea) will be negated. It must be a voluntary offering, and to underscore this, Paul adds, *for God loves a cheerful giver*. Here he draws upon a rendering of Proverbs 22:8a found in the LXX (but not in the MT upon which English translations are based): 'God blesses a cheerful giver' (lit. 'God blesses a cheerful man and a giver'). The need for generosity in giving is stressed in several other places in the Bible (cf. Deut. 15:10–11; Matt. 5:43–48; Rom. 12:8). It is not difficult to suggest why God delights in the cheerful giver. He himself is such a giver and desires to see this characteristic restored among those who were created in his image. Christ stressed the same thing in his teaching (cf. Matt. 5:43–48).

8. This verse is replete with comprehensive expressions which speak of God's ability to bless his people so that they may abound in good works.[125] Paul begins: *And God is able to bless you abundantly* (lit. 'And God is able to make all grace abound to you'). In the case of the Macedonians, whose response to the collection Paul cited as an example in 8:1–5, the grace of God enabled them to contribute generously out of their poverty. In the case of the Corinthians, whom Paul considered better-off at the time (8:14), the grace of God shown to them is to be understood as the blessing of relative affluence. The purpose of God's blessing is then spelled out: so that *having all that you need, you will abound in every good work*. The meaning of the word translated *all that you need* (*autarkeia*) had been coloured by its use in ethical discussions from the time of Socrates. In Cynic and Stoic philosophy it was used of the person who was self-

sufficient. So Seneca, a Stoic and contemporary of Paul, understood *autarkeia* as that proud independence of outward circumstances and of other people which constituted true happiness.[126] Paul uses the word differently. For him *autarkeia* denoted not self-sufficiency, but the sufficiency provided by God's grace, and as such it made possible not independence of others, but the ability to abound in good works towards them

9. To reinforce his exhortation that the Corinthians contribute bountifully, Paul quotes verbatim from Psalm 111:9 (LXX, ET 112:9): *As it is written: 'They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures for ever.'* The psalm celebrates the blessedness of the one who fears the Lord and delights in his commandments. Such a person is blessed by God with material prosperity also, and is accordingly generous to the poor. Paul sets forth this God-fearing person as an example of those who abound in good works (they have freely scattered their gifts to the poor).

The meaning of *their righteousness endures for ever* (lit. '*his* righteousness endures for ever') has been variously interpreted. Some argue that Paul has in mind God's generous giving, and then 'his righteousness' is God's righteousness which clearly endures forever (so e.g. Barnett, p. 440). However, in the psalm the subject of the generous giving is the human person, and Paul introduces the quotation to reinforce the point that, because of God's blessing, the Corinthians will be able to 'abound in every good work' (i.e. to contribute generously to the collection). If this is the case, it is the righteousness of the Corinthian giver that will endure forever. How is this to be understood? Clearly not in the sense that generous giving establishes a person's righteousness in God's sight. Thrall (p. 582) suggests righteousness here is to be understood in terms of benevolence, something enabled by God who provides the means (cf. v. 10) so that it continues *for ever* (i.e. throughout life). The righteousness of such people is not based upon their generosity to the poor, but expressed in it. It is the sort of thing Paul describes elsewhere as 'faith expressing itself through love' (Gal. 5:6).

Making a comment that is as relevant today as when he made it, Chrysostom says, 'We should not be mean and calculating with what we have but give with a generous hand. Look at how much people give to players and dancers – why not give just half as much to Christ?' (Bray, p. 281).

10. The apostle continues the thought of the psalm cited in verse 9 and applies it to the Corinthians. In so doing, he alludes to texts in Isaiah 55:10 and Hosea 10:12: *Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness*. In this context the meaning is that God will multiply the material resources of the Corinthians, and as they 'scatter' them to meet the needs of the

Judean Christians, he will increase the effect of that righteous deed. The Corinthians, by making a monetary gift, will sow the *seed*, and God will increase the effect of that righteous deed so that it produces a rich harvest of unity, love and thanksgiving (cf. vv. 12–14).

11. *You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion*. The great liberality of the Macedonians was the result of the grace of God at work in them (8:1–2). Paul believed that God would enrich the Corinthians for great generosity as well. The apostle must have known that those with the resources do not always use them with generosity, so he looked to God to enrich his audience with this grace. Paul adds, *and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.* By saying 'through *us*', he includes with himself the others appointed to convey the collection to Jerusalem. It is through Paul and these others that thanksgiving to God will be produced, because they would bring the contributions to those in need.

12. *This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God*. The expression *this service that you perform* translates *hē diakonia tēs leitourgias tautēs* (lit. 'the service of this ministry'). The noun *leitourgia*, and its cognate verb *leitourgēo*, were used in non-biblical Greek to denote civil service rendered to the state by its citizens, and also of service more generally, for example, that of slaves to their masters. In the LXX the words are used extensively of cultic service to God, and so also in Hebrews (cf. Heb. 8:6; 9:21; 10:11). Paul uses the words elsewhere when speaking of monetary gifts made by Christians (Rom. 15:27; Phil. 2:30) and of their faith (Phil. 2:17). The provision of monetary gifts, which Paul describes as 'services' (*leitourgias*) in Philippians 2:30 (NRSV), are later described as 'a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God' (Phil. 4:18). The cultic background is very clear. Paul regarded Christian giving not only as service rendered to those in need, but also as service to God. It is important to note that for Paul the ultimate purpose of the collection, as of all forms of Christian 'service', is that thanksgiving should overflow from grateful hearts to God. The importance of thanksgiving to God is a recurring theme in this letter (cf. 1:11; 4:15).

13. *Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else*. In 8:24 Paul urged the Corinthians to show 'proof' of their love and the validity of his boasting about them by having their contributions ready when the delegation from Macedonia arrived. Here in verse 13 he envisages the positive outcome when the Corinthians pass the test and prove themselves by contributing

generously to the collection. It will result in praise being given to God by the Judean believers for the genuineness of the Corinthians' faith expressed in their generosity.

Paul refers to their *generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else*. *Them* refers to the Judean believers for whom the collection was being taken up. It is difficult to say to whom *everyone else* refers. Perhaps it is just a loose reference to any other needy believers who might become recipients of the Gentile collection.

14. *And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you*. Continuing to envisage the effects of the Corinthians' contribution, Paul foresees a new bond being forged between Jewish and Gentile believers. When the Jewish believers see *the surpassing grace* of God effective in the Gentile Christians, their hearts will go out to them. In this way one of the major purposes of the collection as far as Paul is concerned (i.e. to promote unity) will have been fulfilled.

15. *Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!* This verse strikes a note sounded already in 8:9. There the grace of Christ was shown in his becoming poor for our sakes so that we might become rich. That was God's indescribable gift. The word *indescribable* (*anekdiēgetos*) which Paul uses here is found neither in classical Greek nor in the papyri. It appears first in the New Testament and only in this verse. It appears to be a word the apostle himself coined to describe the ineffable character of God's gift. Once coined by Paul, it was used by Clement of Rome in his letter to the Corinthians (written c. AD 95) when writing of God's 'indescribable' judgments, love and power (1 Clem 20:5; 49:4; 61:1). The important thing to note is that for Paul all Christian giving is carried out in the light of God's indescribable gift, and therefore ought to be done with a cheerful heart as an expression of gratitude to God, as well as in demonstration of concern for, and partnership with, those in need.

Paul's confidence that the Corinthians would contribute to the collection was finally rewarded. When the apostle wrote Romans during his three-month stay in Greece (after the problems reflected in 2 Corinthians had been settled for the time being), he was able to say, 'Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there. For Macedonia and *Achaia* were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem' (Rom. 15:25–26, italics added; cf. Acts 24:17).

Theology

Paul's exhortations concerning the collection in chapters 8 – 9 provide important

teaching about Christian giving. Generosity is an aspect of the grace of God in people's lives. The grace of God in the Macedonians was evident in their being joyful in the midst of trials, generous in the midst of poverty, begging for the privilege of participating in the collection, and dedicating themselves to the Lord himself and to Paul in support of the collection. As a result, they could be held up as an example for the Corinthians, so that they too might excel in the grace of generosity as they excelled in other spiritual graces. Christian generosity cannot be demanded, but the example of Christ who became 'poor' so that we might become 'rich' is the supreme example and provides fundamental motivation for believers to be generous.

It is important to remember that people's capacity to be generous is ultimately made possible by God's generosity. He who provides 'seed to the sower' can enrich us in every way and increase our capacity to give to those in need. This, of course, presupposes that there will always be those who are in need (as Jesus said, 'The poor you will always have with you', Mark 14:7), and they must not be expected to be generous in the same way as those who are rich.

In dealing with financial matters, it is crucial that things be done in a way that is pleasing to God and right in the eyes of our fellow human beings. This will mean making conscious efforts, as Paul did, to avoid criticism by acting transparently and by involving people of good repute in the enterprise.

In advocating Christian generosity, Paul emphasized that his purpose was not to relieve some at the unreasonable expense of others. He only wanted there to be a form of equality whereby those who were well-off contributed to meeting the necessities of those suffering want. And those who do contribute have the joy of seeing people's needs met, thanks being given to God, and the hearts of the recipients responding in love to their benefactors. The whole matter of Christian giving is to be done in the light of God's 'indescribable gift'.

The significance of the collection for Paul and his mission is the subject of much debate.[127] Clearly, the collection was intended to be a compassionate response to the pressing needs of Judean Christians, and an expression of the unity of the Jewish and Gentile sections of the church (2 Cor. 8:14–15; cf. Rom. 15:25–27). Some similarities (and some differences) have been noted between the way Paul speaks of the collection and the way in which the Jewish temple tax was administered.[128] And, more conjecturally, it has been suggested that Paul conceived the bearing of the collection to Jerusalem by representatives of the Gentile churches in terms of the Old Testament prophecies of the latter days when the nations and their wealth would flow into Zion (Isa. 2:2–3; 60:5–7; Mic. 4:1–2). Furthermore, it is proposed that Paul hoped this would convince Jewish Christians that God was fulfilling his ancient prophecies, and as this realization

dawned upon unbelieving Jews, they would become jealous when they saw Gentiles enjoying the blessings of God first promised to them, and that would trigger the repentance of Israel for which Paul longed (Rom. 11:11–14, 25–32). Unfortunately, things did not work out as Paul is thought to have hoped. Although he was warmly received by those in the Jerusalem church when he arrived with those bearing the collection (Acts 24:17–26), it did not trigger repentance on the part of unbelieving Jews. Shortly afterwards, his presence in the temple with those undergoing purification rites resulted in a tumult, his arrest and a further hardening of Jewish people against the gospel.[129] This suggestion that Paul thought of the collection in terms of those Old Testament prophecies has been found unconvincing by the majority of recent commentators, for it constitutes a large superstructure built upon the foundation of inferences from a rather limited evidential base.

2. PAUL RESPONDS TO A NEW CRISIS (10:1 – 13:14)

The reader will notice a marked change in tone when moving from chapters 1 – 9 to chapters 10 – 13. In the former the tone is that of relief and comfort, and of confidence in God and in the Corinthians, despite the fact that Paul felt the need to explain his changed travel plans and stress the integrity of his ministry. The tone of the latter is very different. It is marked by satire and sarcasm, spirited personal defence, reproach directed to the Corinthians and a vigorous attack levelled at outsiders who had infiltrated and were now influencing the Christian community.

This marked change in tone (among other considerations) has led many recent commentators to view chapters 10 – 13 as the greater part, if not the whole, of a letter written prior to chapters 1 – 9 or subsequent to them. Many have concluded that chapters 10 – 13 are best identified as Paul's 'severe letter', written after 1 Corinthians but before 2 Corinthians 1 – 9. Others argue that chapters 10 – 13 were written after chapters 1 – 9 and constitute the greater part of a fifth letter written by Paul to Corinth. It is the latter view which is adopted as a working hypothesis for the commentary on chapters 10 – 13 provided below. For a fuller discussion of the nature of chapters 10 – 13 and their relation to the rest of the letter, see Introduction, pp. 45–46.

In chapters 10 – 13 Paul faces determined opposition. His opponents are Jewish Christians who put themselves forward as apostles of Christ. They highly prized eloquent speech, displays of authority, visions and revelations, and the performance of mighty works as the signs of a true apostle. These people had earlier infiltrated the Corinthian church, and their criticisms of Paul probably provided some of the 'ammunition' used by the offender (i.e. the one who caused grief, 2:5; who did the wrong, 7:12) in his attack against Paul. By writing the 'severe letter', Paul succeeded in moving the church to discipline the offender, and then in his next letter (2 Cor. 1 – 9) urged them to express their love to the now presumably repentant offender and to reinstate him lest Satan gain the advantage. In the same letter he called upon the Corinthians to fully open their hearts to him as his own heart was open towards them. Seeing Paul being thus reinstated in the affections of the Corinthians, and his authority re-established among them, the infiltrators mounted their own frontal attack against the validity

and integrity of Paul's apostolate. They succeeded in winning over the Corinthians to their point of view and getting them to submit to their authority. Paul, finding his authority usurped and his apostleship called into question, was forced, against his better judgment, to provide a strong personal defence and to mount a vigorous counter-attack against his opponents. The crisis Paul faced in this situation was the most crucial in all his relationships with the Corinthians, and this fact colours both the tone and content of chapters 10 – 13. See Introduction, pp. 54–55, 60–66, for further discussion of the historical situation in which chapters 10 – 13 were written and of the nature of Paul's opponents in Corinth at that time.

Paul's response to the crisis in relationships precipitated by the infiltrators consists of pleas and threats of disciplinary action, personal defence and satirical attack against his opponents, expressions of deep concern about the state of his converts, and pointed contrasts between the nature of his own mission and that of his opponents. While obviously reluctant to do so, Paul adds to this his 'fool's speech' in which he parades his apostolic credentials. He cites his impeccable Jewish ancestry, his apostolic sufferings and the visions and revelations he had experienced, and reminds his audience that he had performed 'the signs of a true apostle' among them. He warns them that he is about to make his third visit to Corinth, and says that he will refuse once again to become a financial burden to them, despite criticisms that this is proof either that he does not love his converts or that he is being crafty and intends to take advantage of them by more subtle means. He expresses his concern that when he comes the third time he might find some of them still caught up in immorality, and assures his audience that those who demand proof of his apostolic authority will get what they were asking for when he comes: he will not spare them.

A. Paul’s exercise of apostolic authority (10:1–18)

Context

Paul opens his response to this crisis by countering the criticisms that he lacks courage when present and that he conducts his ministry according to mere human standards. He insists that the ‘weapons’ he fights with have ‘divine power’. He says he is ready to ‘punish’ disobedience, even though his ministry is essentially for building up, not tearing down (vv. 1–11). He refuses to engage in pointless comparisons of his ministry with that of his opponents, and insists that he operates only in the sphere assigned to him by God. He does not boast of work done in another’s territory, as his opponents were doing, as his aim is to preach in the ‘regions beyond’ (vv. 12–18).

Comment

i. Paul responds to criticisms (10:1–11)

Paul appeals to the Corinthians so to act that when he comes on his third visit he will not need to take action against them as he is resolved to do against those who question the validity of his apostleship (vv. 1–2). He denies charges that he acts in a worldly fashion, assuring his audience that he conducts his ministry with ‘weapons’ that have divine power (vv. 3–5). He informs them that he is ready to punish his opponents in Corinth, as soon as their own obedience is complete (v. 6). He responds to the criticisms levelled against him by his opponents: first, that he was no true servant of Christ while they were (vv. 7–8), and second, that while his letters were ‘weighty and forceful’, ‘in person he is unimpressive’, and ‘his speaking amounts to nothing’ (vv. 9–11).

1. *By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you*. *Humility* here translates *praütētos*, which is usually rendered ‘meekness’ (so NRSV). Among the Greeks from classical times onwards it denoted a ‘mild and gentle friendliness’, a highly prized social virtue, and the opposite of brusqueness or sudden anger. It was regarded as virtuous to show mildness to one’s own people and harshness to one’s enemies. Mildness on the part of the judge meant sentencing offenders with more leniency than the law prescribed. The essential meaning of the word translated *gentleness* (*epieikeias*) is ‘suitable’ or ‘fitting’, and when used in a moral sense, ‘reasonable’ or ‘fair’. Applied to rulers, it denoted kindness, equity and leniency (cf. Acts 24:4). In the present context it is part of a hendiadys (the

use of two words joined by ‘and’ to express one idea), and therefore its meaning here is defined by that of *praütēs*, and so is rendered *gentleness* in the NIV.

The meekness and gentleness to which Paul appeals are exemplified in the life and ministry of Christ who dealt gently and compassionately with sinners (cf. Matt. 11:29). With this in mind, in the next verse Paul will beg the Corinthians to act in such a way that he will be able to deal gently with them and not have to be *‘bold’* in the use of his apostolic authority. Thrall (p. 600) comments,

> Paul’s reminder of the character of Christ could be understood in two different ways: either he is appealing to his audience to behave in a Christ-like manner towards himself, or else he is begging them not to compel him to abandon the Christ-like manner which he would wish to maintain towards them. The general context, concerned as it is with the personal impression Paul makes by his presence and by his letters, would support the second alternative.

It is important to remember that in the case of Christ, meekness and gentleness did not mean weakness, and this was also true of Paul. Hafemann (p. 393) comments, ‘Far from timidity, his [Christ’s] “meekness” is his slowness to anger, far from lacking conviction, his “gentleness” is his forbearance, in contrast to being vindictive.’

Before stating the content of his appeal in verse 2, Paul inserts an ironic reference to the criticisms of his behaviour that some in his audience have entertained: *I, Paul, who am ‘timid’ when face to face with you, but ‘bold’ towards you when away!* Paul had not acted authoritatively on his second (‘painful’) visit, as previously threatened (1 Cor. 4:18–21). This was probably the basis upon which his opponents accused him of being *timid* when face to face with the Corinthians, and of being *bold* only when communicating by letter at a safe distance (cf. 10:10–11).

2. *I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be towards some people who think that we live by the standards of this world.* Paul’s desire not to show boldness can no more be construed as a sign of ‘unapostolic’ timidity than can the meekness of Christ be construed as moral weakness. Paul did not wish to show boldness to the Corinthians as he expected to show towards those who accused him of acting according to *the standards of this world* (lit. ‘according to the flesh’), the false apostles and those Corinthians influenced by them. To act according to the flesh is the opposite of acting according to the Spirit. Paul responds to these criticisms in verses 3–6 with an extensive use of military terminology.

3. *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does* (more literally: ‘For while we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh’). In this verse and those that follow (vv. 4–6) Paul

employs military metaphors to make his point. He refers to waging war (v. 3), weapons and strongholds (v. 4), things raised up (i.e. towers/ramparts), taking captives (v. 5), and punishing disobedience (i.e. 'court-martial') (v. 6).

While acknowledging that he lives *in the world*, Paul denies that he wages war *as the world does*. To 'live in the world' means to participate in normal human existence with all its limitations. 'To wage war as the world does' here means to carry out ministry with mere human resources, and with the concomitant tendency to employ doubtful means (cf. 1:17; 4:2; 12:16–18). Paul did not rely upon the sort of things that itinerant orators did to make an impression, nor the things which his opponents in Corinth regarded as necessary in an authentic ministry: an impressive presence, exceptional speaking ability, self-commendation, Jewish pedigree, the experience of visions and revelations, the performance of signs and wonders, and an authoritarian manner (cf. 10:10, 12, 18; 11:20, 22; 12:1, 12).

4. To support the denial that he wages war 'as the world does', Paul says, *The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power*. He contrasts the *weak* weapons of the world and *powerful* weapons used in the service of God. *The weapons of the world* [130] refer to the things employed by those who 'wage war as the world does', mentioned in the commentary on the previous verse. Paul does not, in this passage, identify the weapons that *have divine power*, but his statements elsewhere suggest that they consist in the proclamation of the gospel through which the Holy Spirit releases his power to transform lives (4:1–6; Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:17 – 2:5; 1 Thess. 1:5; 2:13).

To demolish strongholds. The word *strongholds* (*ochyrōmatōn*) is found only here in the New Testament. It is used in a literal sense in Proverbs 21:22 (LXX), while Philo uses it figuratively of a stronghold prepared by persuasive words against the honour of God (*Confusion of Tongues*, 129). The military practice of building strongholds (in antiquity Acrocorinth was fortified by walls and gates) provided the imagery used by Cynic and Stoic philosophers, and in particular by Seneca, a contemporary of Paul, to describe the fortification of the soul by reasonable arguments to render it impregnable under the attack of adverse fortune. In the next verse Paul speaks of destroying arguments which stand against the knowledge of God, suggesting that the *strongholds* he has in mind are the intellectual arguments of unbelievers that have to be demolished so that the truth of the gospel might gain entry.

5. *We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.* The words *every pretension* translate *pan hypsōma epairomenon* (lit. 'every high thing lifted up'), an expression that relates to the

world of ancient warfare and denotes a tower or raised rampart built to withstand the enemy. Both the 'strongholds' of verse 4 and the 'tower' (*pretension*) of this verse stand for intellectual arguments employed by people in their rejection of the gospel. It is by the proclamation of the gospel that God releases his power by which these very arguments (cf. 1 Cor. 1:19: 'the wisdom of the wise') will be destroyed, and by which those who believe will be saved (cf. Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:17–25; 2:1–5; 1 Thess. 1:5; 2:13). This reflects an important aspect of Paul's missionary activity. His proclamation of the gospel, like our Lord's preaching of the kingdom, was not bare declaration, but involved reasoning and arguing with his hearers in an effort to remove barriers erected against the truth (cf. Acts 18:4; 19:8–10). While what Paul says here reflects his missionary tactics, he may also have in mind his rebuttal of arguments employed by his opponents in Corinth.

We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. By the proclamation and defence of the gospel, Paul destroyed arguments in an effort to take every thought captive to obey Christ. The imagery is of a stronghold breached and those sheltering behind its walls taken captive. The apostle's purpose was not only to demolish false arguments, but also to bring people's thoughts under the lordship of Christ. His mission as an apostle was 'to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith' (Rom. 1:5).

6. *And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete*. Paul portrays himself as being ready (*en hetoimō echontes* – an expression used of military preparedness) to punish every disobedience. It is not easy to determine what was the exact nature of the disobedience Paul stood ready to punish. Perhaps he believed that because he had carried out the pioneer evangelism in Corinth, this gave him the apostolic authority there, and any others claiming to be apostles ought to be in submission to him in that situation (cf. 10:13–16). But in the light of the accusations Paul makes in chapter 11, it is more likely that the disobedience he had in mind was far more serious. It was a tampering with the truth of the gospel (11:4), and because of that its perpetrators could be called 'false apostles, deceitful workers', and even servants of Satan (11:13–15). If all this be granted, then the complete obedience from the Corinthians for which the apostle waited before taking action against the intruders would be the rejection of the message of his opponents and their claims, and the recognition again of Paul's authority and the truth of his gospel.

The nature of the punishment that Paul was ready to inflict is also difficult to determine. The fact that he says he stood ready to do so once the majority of the Corinthians' obedience was complete suggests it involved excommunication (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1–13), something that could not be implemented without their

cooperation. Alternatively, he might have had in mind some manifestation of divine power like that visited upon Ananias and Sapphira (death, Acts 5:1–10) and Elymas the magician (blindness, Acts 13:6–11).

7. The first sentence of this verse, *You are judging by appearances*, is construed in the NIV as a statement of fact, whereas the NRSV interprets it as a command: 'Look at what is before your eyes.' Both are legitimate translations of the original, as the verb *blepete* can be construed as either an imperative ('Look!') or an indicative ('You are looking/judging') or even as an interrogative ('Are you looking?'). The imperative rendering of the NRSV is to be preferred on the grounds that *blepete* when used elsewhere in Paul's letters is always imperative (1 Cor. 8:9; 10:12, 18; 16:10; Gal. 5:15; Eph. 5:15; Phil. 3:2; Col. 2:8), with only one possible exception (1 Cor. 1:26). The sense of Paul's command is: 'Look at what is patently obvious!'

If anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, they should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as they do. What ought to be patently obvious to Paul's audience is that, even granted for the sake of argument the claims of his opponents to be Christ's (he will deny this later; cf. 11:13–15), he himself (and his colleagues) are equally so.

There has been much debate about the meaning of *belong to Christ* (*Christou einai*, lit. 'to be of Christ'). It has been variously understood to mean: (a) to be a Christian, (b) to have been a disciple of the earthly Jesus, (c) to be a servant or apostle of Christ, and (d) to be part of Christ (understood along Gnostic lines). The view that it means to be a servant of Christ or an apostle commends itself most in the light of both 11:23 ('are they servants of Christ . . . I am more') and the fact that throughout chapters 10 – 13 Paul is defending his apostolate. Paul's claim to be Christ's apostle rested upon his conversion-commissioning experience.

8. *So even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us*. Paul's reference to boasting somewhat freely of his authority may be an allusion to the authoritative demands made in his 'severe letter'. By *the Lord*, here he means Christ, the one who commissioned him as an apostle. He adds, by way of parenthesis, that his authority is *for building you up rather than tearing you down* (cf. 13:10; Jer. 1:10; 24:6; 42:10; 45:4). He states the purpose for which the Lord gave him authority both positively (*for building you up*) and negatively (not for *tearing you down*). While his use of authority may sometimes appear to tear people down (cf. 13:10), it is actually intended to build them up through spiritual discipline.

On the surface there appears to be a contradiction between what Paul says here – that the authority he has is not for tearing down (*ouk eis kathairesin*) –

and what he says in verse 4 – that he uses ‘weapons’ to demolish (*kathairesin*) strongholds. The same Greek verb is used in both places. The different contexts provide the resolution to the apparent contradiction. In the case of verse 4 he speaks of tearing down strongholds (i.e. intellectual resistance to the truth of the gospel), and this is a legitimate part of his apostolic mission. In the case of verse 8 he says the authority the Lord gave him is not for ‘tearing *you* down’ (i.e. it was given with the opposite intention of ‘building *you* up’). He tears down arguments, but builds up people.

Following the parenthesis, Paul completes what he started to say at the beginning of the verse: *So even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us . . . I will not be ashamed of it.* The clue to understanding this statement is to be found in verses 9–11. Paul is confident that it will become apparent that his behaviour when present is completely consistent with his bold use of authority by letter when absent, and so he will be vindicated rather than put to shame as far as his boasting of authority is concerned. An alternate view is that Paul is saying he will have no need to feel ashamed of his use of authority when he stands before the judgment seat of Christ (cf. 5:10), but this is less likely in the present context.

It is important to recognize that apostolic authority was of great significance for Paul. He was an ambassador for Christ (5:20), and as such he passed on the message entrusted to him with the full authority of his Lord. Therefore Paul expected to be obeyed when speaking in the name of the Lord; anyone who rejected his instructions rejected the word of the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 14:37–38). Because he was entrusted with such authority, Paul was careful to distinguish the word of the Lord from his own good advice and from other statements he sometimes felt forced to make (1 Cor. 7:10, 25; 2 Cor. 11:17). His authority was expressed not only in instructions which he expected to be obeyed, but also in the dynamic power of God which could be demonstrated (cf. 13:2–3). However, having such authority did not exempt the apostle from the experience of weakness, persecution and suffering. In fact, as the bearer of Christ’s authority he also shared in Christ’s weakness, even while the power of God was at work through him (cf. 13:4).

9. *I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters.* The NIV construes this verse as an independent sentence, but when the original is translated literally, it reads: ‘in order that I may not seem to terrify you by letters’. The grammatical connection with what precedes is not apparent. Thrall (pp. 626–627) suggests there must be ‘some intermediate thought’ that would connect it to verse 8. She says, ‘The connecting link would then be: “I say this”. And the meaning of the verse would be: “so that I may not seem to be operating,

so to speak, an epistolary ‘terror-campaign’ ”.’ It is clear that Paul was responding to criticisms made by his opponents who accused him of writing strongly worded letters and claiming an authority he did not have.

10. Paul knew what his opponents were saying to his converts, and he reproduces it here: *For some say, ‘His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.’* While Paul’s letters were regarded as intimidating (*weighty and forceful*), he was deemed to lack authority when present in person. The words *in person he is unimpressive* (lit. ‘[his] bodily presence is weak’) may reflect his opponents’ reaction to a physical ailment which was never healed (cf. 12:7–9; Gal. 4:15), or his lack of an impressive physical make-up, something regarded as essential by students of rhetoric who wished to impress an audience.[131] Most likely, however, it signifies what his critics regarded as a lack of a commanding presence because Paul did not provide displays of authority and spiritual charisma.

The charge that *his speaking amounts to nothing* was probably made by Paul’s opponents, either because they disliked his unadorned style of speaking (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1–2), or perhaps because they could not understand why one claiming to be an apostle of Christ had not spoken boldly in his own defence when attacked by the offender (cf. 2:5; 7:12), choosing rather to retire in humiliation and send a strongly worded letter from a safe distance.

11. Of those who so criticized him, Paul says, *Such people should realise that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present.* While the apostle may have chosen not to act authoritatively on his second visit, that does not mean he is unable to do so. The one who wrote the strong letters was prepared to stand up to his critics when he came on the third visit. No-one should mistake his efforts to be conciliatory as evidence that he lacked authority (cf. 10:6; 13:1–4).

ii. Boasting within proper limits (10:12–18)

In the previous section Paul defended himself against those who claimed that, while he could write boldly from a distance, his lack of authority was plain for all to see when he was present in person. In 10:12–18 Paul takes the offensive. He satirizes his opponents who commend themselves (by comparing themselves with one another!). By contrast, his own boasting, he says, is carefully measured and based upon actual work done in the sphere of operations assigned to him by the Lord. He concludes, clearly having his opponents in mind, ‘It is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.’

12. *We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves*. A popular method used by teachers to attract pupils in Paul's day was to compare themselves with other teachers (cf. the papyrus P. Oxy. 2190). Paul says he would not dare to compare himself with his critics! It is the self-commendation of his opponents and the way they go about it that is the particular object of Paul's satire: *When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise*. We cannot be certain about the criteria they might have employed in this measurement. However, it is likely that they employed the same criteria when comparing themselves with Paul, and there are hints in 2 Corinthians concerning what these were: an authoritative presence and impressive speech (10:1, 10; 11:20–21), the levying of a fee for the message proclaimed (11:7–11), an impeccable Jewish ancestry (11:21b–22), impressive spiritual experiences (12:1–6), the performance of apostolic signs (12:12), and some show of power and authority (11:19–20) to prove that Christ spoke through them (13:3). The triumphalist nature of these criteria should be noted. There is no room for weakness, suffering, persecution and imprisonment which were often Paul's lot, and which Jesus himself said would be the experience of those who followed him. If the understanding of the criteria adopted by Paul's opponents suggested here is valid, it is no wonder Paul says of these people: *they are not wise*.

13–14. Having criticized the way his opponents commended themselves, Paul contrasts it with his own measured boasting: *We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the sphere of service God himself has assigned to us, a sphere that also includes you*. In speaking of the *sphere of service* God has apportioned to him, Paul uses the expression *to metron tou kanonos* (lit. 'the measure of the sphere'). The basic meaning of *kanōn* is 'a rule' or 'a standard of measurement'. In recently published papyri there is evidence for the use of the word to denote services rendered within 'a specified geographical area',[132] and the same sense of the word is required here. The *sphere* (*kanōn*) of ministry that God assigned to Paul was the preaching of the gospel in Gentile lands (cf. Rom. 1:5, 13–14; 15:18–19; Gal. 2:7–8) and, as the success of his ministry in Corinth showed, the people of that city were included in his God-ordained sphere of ministry: *a sphere that also includes you*. The fact that he was within his rights when operating in Corinth seems to have been questioned by his opponents, because Paul immediately asserts, *We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ*. Paul bases his right to operate as an apostle in Corinth on two facts: first, God assigned to him the task of evangelizing the nations, and second, he was the one who carried out the initial

evangelization of Corinth.

15. *Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others*. What Paul means by boasting beyond limit is further clarified in this verse, namely boasting of the fruits of the labours of others as if they were the fruits of one's own. The implication of Paul's claim that he did not boast in other men's labours is that his opponents did.

Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our sphere of activity among you will greatly expand (more literally, 'but having hope that, as your faith grows, we shall be magnified among you in accordance with our sphere [of service] for abundance'). This part of verse 15 is very difficult to translate. The NIV and NRSV both construe it in the same way to mean that Paul hopes his sphere of service among the Corinthians will be enlarged as their faith grows. Such an enlargement of ministry would both signal the end of the present crisis, leaving Paul free to preach elsewhere, and also provide him with an enlarged support base from which to do so. Calvin (p. 137) comments, 'As if he had said, "If you had progressed as far as you ought, I should by now be occupied in gaining new churches and I should have your assistance in doing so. But, as things are, you are delaying me by your weakness." '

16. *So that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in someone else's territory.* In Romans, written not long after these chapters were penned, Paul speaks of his ambition to take the gospel to Spain (Rom. 15:24), and we should think of his reference to *regions beyond you* as denoting lands, like Spain, further to the west. Also in Romans, Paul expresses his ambition 'to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation' (Rom. 15:20). In the present context the same motivation underlies Paul's desire to preach in *regions beyond you*: he did not want to boast of work already done in another's field. There is in all this the implication that Paul's opponents, by interfering in Corinth, were doing the very thing which he sought so carefully to avoid.

Before leaving this verse, we should note that there remain in the world today both geographical areas and segments within societies where Christ is not known. There men and women who share Paul's ambition to preach the gospel where Christ has not already been named are still needed.

17. *But, 'Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.'* Though there may be some room for legitimate pride in work done by the grace of God (cf. Rom. 15:17–18), nevertheless the true ground of Christian boasting is the privilege of knowing God himself. Here (and in 1 Cor. 1:31) Paul draws on the teaching of Jeremiah 9:23–24, where the wise, the mighty and the rich are counselled against

glorying in their advantages. All who glory are urged to glory in the fact that they know the Lord. Jesus taught the Seventy the same lesson when they came back from their mission rejoicing that they had seen even the demons subject to them (Luke 10:17–20).

18. Glorying in success can easily degenerate into self-commendation. Paul reminds his audience (as he reminds himself), *For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.* The word translated *approved* (*dokimos*) carries the idea of approval after testing. Paul uses the word to describe a tried and tested servant of Christ, one whose worth has been proved (Rom. 16:10; cf. 2 Tim. 2:15). He uses the cognate verb (*dokimazō*) in reference to the testing of Christian workers (2 Cor. 8:22) and the works of believers (1 Cor. 3:13; Gal. 6:4).

In this verse Paul's eyes are upon the ultimate evaluation of a person's ministry. Then it will matter little what the individual says by way of self-recommendation or what judgments others have made. What will matter is the commendation which the Lord himself will give (cf. 1 Cor. 4:1–5). This is the rubric under which Paul carried out his apostolic labours, and in the present context it is probably implied that his opponents in Corinth did not. Paul returns again to the theme of passing God's test in 13:5–7.

Theology

Although it is distasteful to defend oneself against criticism, this is sometimes necessary for the sake of one's ministry, as it was in Paul's case. Particularly significant is his insistence that his ministry was not carried out according to the world's standards: he did not flatter his audience, nor adulterate the word of God to make it more acceptable, nor did he manipulate them by improper use of rhetoric. He countered arguments people used to resist the knowledge of God, while trusting that God's power would be released through the preaching of the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1–5). Paul ministered with God-given authority to build people up, not to tear them down. He did not lord it over people's faith, but worked with them for their joy (1:24).

While it is sometimes necessary to respond to criticism by putting the record straight, self-commendation for its own sake is to be avoided. The commendation that matters ultimately is that coming from the Lord himself: 'For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.' Believers long to hear the words: 'Well done, good and faithful servant! . . . Come and share your master's happiness!' (Matt. 25:21, 23).

There is a sense in which Christians can legitimately 'boast' of work faithfully

carried out for the Lord, while remembering that effective ministry is what Christ himself accomplishes through them (cf. Rom. 15:18). Ultimately, therefore, Paul's exhortation stands: 'But, "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord." '

B. Paul’s plea for tolerance and condemnation of his opponents (11:1–15)

Context

In this passage Paul foreshadows the ‘fool’s speech’ which is to follow later in this chapter and in the next. He explains that his great concern about his audience’s gullibility forces him to make the ‘fool’s speech’. He is concerned lest their minds be led astray from devotion to Christ by those who question his credentials and proclaim a different gospel. He responds to criticisms of his practice of not asking for or accepting financial support from the Corinthians. Because of this, he appears to have come under criticism on two counts. First, the Corinthians felt affronted because he refused to accept assistance from them, especially when by so doing he was forced to undertake menial work to support himself, work which they regarded as degrading for an apostle (v. 7). Second, this refusal was misconstrued as evidence that Paul did not really love the Corinthians. If he would not accept their money, surely that meant he had no real affection for them (v. 11). Despite these criticisms, Paul informs his audience that he has no intention of changing his practice, and the reason for this is that he wishes to undercut claims made by his opponents to work on the same basis as he does (v. 12). There follows a strong verbal attack in which Paul dispenses with irony and reveals clearly his opinion of his opponents (vv. 13–15).

Comment

i. The Corinthians’ gullibility (11:1–6)

1. *I hope you will put up with me in a little foolishness.* Paul regards the parading of his credentials in the ‘fool’s speech’ which is to follow (11:16 – 12:13) as an act of folly. This is especially so because, as he has just said, ‘it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends’ (10:18). Yet in the light of the situation in Corinth, he was forced to set forth his credentials, and that, not as he would have chosen, but in accordance with the criteria favoured by his opponents and apparently accepted by his converts. To meet the demands of the situation, Paul ‘answers the fool according to his folly’. When he entreats his audience, *Yes, please put up with me!* (construing *anechesthe* as imperative), it is probably more a sign of his own

embarrassment about the whole exercise than a concern that they might see it as inappropriate.

2–3. Paul reveals the deep concern which leads him to indulge in the folly of self-commendation: *I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy* (more literally, 'I am jealous over you with [the] jealousy of God'). As he sees what is occurring in Corinth, Paul is deeply moved because he shares the jealousy of God for his people (cf. Exod. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; Josh. 24:19). Chrysostom says, 'For God is said to be jealous, not in a human way but so that everyone may know that he claims sovereign rights over those whom he loves and does what he does for their exclusive benefit. Human jealousy is basically selfish, but divine jealousy is both intense and pure' (Bray, p. 290).

Paul employs a betrothal metaphor to express his concern: *I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.* Marriage among the Jews of Paul's day involved two separate ceremonies, the betrothal and the nuptial ceremony which consummated the marriage. Usually a year elapsed between the two, but during that period the woman was regarded legally as the man's wife, while socially she remained a virgin. The betrothal contract was binding, and could be broken only by death or a formal written divorce document. Unfaithfulness or violation of a betrothed woman was regarded as adultery and punishable as such.[133] These marriage customs provide the background to Paul's statements here, while at the same time recalling Old Testament passages where Israel is portrayed as the betrothed of God (cf. e.g. Hos. 2:19–20).

Paul saw himself as the agent of God through whom his converts were betrothed to Christ (the 'father' of the bride, as it were), and felt under obligation to ensure that they would be presented as a pure virgin to her one husband at the nuptial ceremony when the marriage will be consummated at the parousia of Christ (cf. Eph. 5:27; Col. 1:22). Clearly, as the early Church Fathers recognized, Paul was not speaking of the physical, but the 'spiritual virginity' of those sanctified by grace through faith in Christ.[134]

In view of recent events in Corinth, Paul was forced to say, *But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.* To portray the danger he sees, Paul compares it with the deception of Eve in the garden ('the serpent deceived me, and I ate', Gen. 3:13). It is significant that the serpent's 'seduction' of Eve was not sexual, but rather the beguiling of her mind by denying the truth of what God had said (Gen. 3:1–7). Thus, the story of Eve aptly depicts the danger the Corinthians faced (i.e. that their minds will be led astray). The word translated *minds* (*noēmata*) is found only six times in the New

Testament, every time in Paul's writings, and five out of the six in 2 Corinthians. Elsewhere Paul uses it to describe the 'schemes' of Satan (2:11), hardening or blinding of the 'mind' (3:14; 4:4), the taking captive of every 'thought' to obey Christ (10:5), and the 'mind' that is kept by the peace of God, which passes understanding (Phil. 4:7). In the present passage Paul is concerned with the beguiling of the minds (not the compromise of the morals) of his audience. What he means by this will be revealed in verse 4, but before proceeding to that it is important to stress that Christians' minds are prime targets for the assaults of the serpent (which Paul equates with Satan; cf. v. 14), assaults that are intended to lead them astray from their devotion to Christ.

4. *For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached.* Just as Eve was deceived by the serpent that denied the truth of God's word, so Paul's converts' minds were being led astray by those who preached another Jesus. As noted in the commentary on 10:12, the criteria for evaluating apostleship that were employed by Paul's opponents were apparently triumphalist in character and left no room for the experience of weakness or suffering. It may be that in their preaching Paul's opponents stressed the power and glory of Christ to the virtual exclusion of the fact that he had also known weakness, humiliation, persecution, suffering and death. Paul preached Christ crucified as Lord, so a proclamation like that outlined above would seem to him to be the preaching of another Jesus.

Or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received. The word *spirit* in the phrase, *a different spirit*, is not capitalized because the spirit received at the hands of the false apostles is not the Holy Spirit, and therefore very different from the Spirit the Corinthians received when they responded to the gospel proclaimed by Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 2:12; 3:16; 6:19). What *different spirit* people actually received at the hands of the false apostles is difficult to determine. If we recognize that Paul's opponents operated in a very different spirit from the spirit in which Paul operated (being authoritarian and overbearing [11:20] rather than gentle and caring as Paul was [10:1; cf. 1 Cor. 4:21]), we could say that the *different spirit* the Corinthians were willing to accept was their authoritarian and overbearing spirit. Along similar lines, Martin (p. 336) says that the different spirit Paul's opponents brought refers to 'their attitude to living before the congregation [that] betrays a spirit in contradiction of Paul's strength-as-weakness (*astheneia*) teaching and practice'.

However, if in the phrase, *a different spirit*, the word 'Spirit' is capitalized, it denotes the Holy Spirit. Harris (p. 744) spells out the case for this interpretation:

> Jesus-Spirit-gospel is an apt summary of Christianity . . . his [Paul's] *kērygma* centred on Jesus Christ

crucified and risen, on the gift of the Spirit of God or of Christ as the fulfilment of promise and the pledge of inheritance, and on the good news of forgiveness and reconciliation in Christ as the instrument of God's saving power. He knew that these three elements stood or fell together, for 'another Jesus' would inevitably mean both a 'different Spirit', since the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:9; Phil. 1:19), and a 'different gospel', since the gospel is about Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 2:12; 9:13; 10:14). His opponents apparently used the same three terms, but their content was so different that the message they were proclaiming amounted to a perversion of the gospel, indeed a false gospel, no gospel at all.

Or a different gospel from the one you accepted. Paul used the same expression, *a different gospel*, when describing the teaching the Judaizers brought to his churches in Galatia (Gal. 1:6–9), and it has been suggested that the gospel of Paul's Corinthian opponents may have been the same, that is, a gospel stressing the need for Gentiles not only to believe in Christ, but also to take upon themselves the yoke of the law and submit to circumcision if they wanted to be numbered among the true people of God. While Paul's opponents in Corinth were Jewish (11:22), this is nevertheless unlikely on two counts. First, there is no mention in 2 Corinthians 10 – 13 of demands to keep the law (whether food laws or Sabbath and other special day observances) or to undergo circumcision. Second, the emphases we do find in 2 Corinthians 10 – 13, for example, on skill in speaking and knowledge (11:6), displays of authority (11:20), visions and revelations (12:1) and the performance of apostolic signs (12:12–13), are not found in Galatians. Therefore it seems better to interpret *a different gospel* in the same way as 'another Jesus', that is, as a gospel which stressed the power and glory of Christ and which had little place for Christ crucified as well as Lord.

You put up with it easily enough (lit. 'you bear with it well'). Paul uses the same word here as he did in verse 1 ('I hope you will put up with me'). It is no wonder he felt he could ask his audience to put up with him when he knew they were putting up easily enough with those who preached a different gospel.

5. *I do not think I am in the least inferior to those 'super-apostles'*. From expressions of concern, Paul now turns to personal defence. For a discussion of the identity of the super-apostles, see Introduction, pp. 63–64. The position adopted in this commentary is that they are to be identified with those who preached a different gospel (v. 4) and whom Paul calls false apostles and servants of Satan (vv. 14–15). In claiming to be not in the least inferior to these men, Paul is not at the same time conceding that they are his equals. He is just responding to their claims. Later he will make his own claims and assert that he is in fact superior to them (vv. 21b–33).

6. *I may indeed be untrained as a speaker, but I do have knowledge*. The first part of this statement could be understood in either of two ways: first, as a straightforward concession that in the use of rhetorical skills in public speaking

Paul is inferior to his opponents; and second, as a rhetorical device by which he places himself in an inferior position vis-à-vis his opponents, even though he knows (and expects his audience to know) that he is in fact superior to them. It is the former alternative which fits the context better. Paul's purpose seems to be, while conceding inferiority in the less important area of rhetorical skills, to claim superiority in the far more important area of knowledge. Ambrosiaster notes, 'Paul did not mean by this that he did not know how to speak but that commendation did not depend on mere eloquence' (Bray, pp. 291–292).

By *knowledge* Paul means primarily insight into the mystery of the gospel (cf. Eph. 1:9; 3:1–6; Col. 1:26–27) which his opponents have failed to understand properly. Of this knowledge, Paul says, *We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way*. Undoubtedly he did so during the eighteen months or more he spent teaching the word of God in Corinth during his first visit to the city (Acts 18:11), as well as by his letters. It may be added that the responsibility of all who pastor God's people is to make his truth *perfectly clear* to them *in every way*.

ii. The matter of financial remuneration (11:7–15)

7. *Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge?* According to Acts 18:3, Paul worked as a tentmaker/leatherworker to provide for his needs during his first stay in Corinth. By so doing, he 'lowered' himself, for among the Greeks it was regarded as degrading for philosophers or itinerant teachers to engage in manual work to supply their needs. No doubt aware of this, Paul asks with ironic exaggeration whether he committed a *sin* by so abasing himself when he preached God's gospel free of charge. Alternatively, it has been suggested that Paul's practice was a *sin* because it contravened the dominical teaching that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 9:14). Another view is that Paul's preaching free of charge was a *sin* because it involved a refusal of the Corinthians' offer of financial support. To refuse benefaction in the ancient world was a rejection of friendship, and constituted an insult to those who offered it. While each of these suggestions has merit, the first seems to fit best in the context where Paul's question includes the notion of lowering himself while preaching free of charge. The expected answer to Paul's question is, of course, a resounding 'No'.

What did Paul have in mind when he said that he lowered himself *in order to elevate you*? When he preached the gospel *free of charge* and the Corinthians responded with faith, they were 'elevated' to become members of God's people, inheritors of the promises of God.

8. *I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you*. The verb ‘to rob’ (*sylaō*) that Paul uses here is a strong one. In the papyri it is used with the meaning ‘to pillage’, and in classical Greek it was used predominantly in a military context meaning ‘to strip’ (a dead soldier of his armour). Why Paul chose such a strong word is difficult to determine. Perhaps he wanted to bring home to the Corinthians the lengths to which he had gone in making the gospel available to them free of charge, that is, even to the extent of ‘robbing’ other churches by accepting support from them while working in Corinth, work from which the donors would receive no benefits.

9. What exactly was involved in ‘robbing’ other churches Paul spells out here. *And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed.* The word *supplied* translates the aorist indicative of *prosanaplēroō*, which can mean either simply ‘to fill up’ or ‘to fill up by adding’. In the present context, where the proceeds from Paul’s own manual work obviously would have provided most of his needs, the latter sense, ‘to fill up by adding’, appropriately expresses the function of the gifts brought from Macedonia. From evidence available in Paul’s letters, it seems that among the Macedonian believers it was those at Philippi who were the main contributors to his needs. They repeatedly shared in Paul’s ministry by assisting him financially from the time they were converted up until and including his imprisonment during which he wrote Philippians (cf. Phil. 1:5; 4:10, 14–18).

I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so. Because Paul’s needs were met either by the results of his own manual labour or by gifts from the Macedonians, he was able to refrain from burdening the Corinthians, and he asserts that he is determined to continue that practice in the future. By so saying, he may have been also making it plain that by informing the Corinthians of his being in need he was not making an implied request for help.

10. *As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, nobody in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine. The regions of Achaia* denotes the Roman province of Achaia of which Corinth was the major city and administrative centre. Throughout these regions, Paul affirms with an oath, his boast of ministering free of charge will not be silenced. No doubt Paul’s opponents would have liked to see his boasting silenced by him relenting and accepting financial remuneration, but he was determined that it would not be so (cf. 5:12).

This policy may have been felt as an affront by the Corinthians, especially having just been told (v. 9), if they had not known before, that while Paul was in their midst he had actually been in need and had accepted help from others while

refusing to accept it from them.

There are a number of possible reasons why Paul refused assistance from the Corinthians. First, there was his general ambition to preach the gospel free of charge. To preach it was mandatory for him; to preach it free of charge was his own choice (cf. 1 Cor. 9:15–18). Second, there was his desire not to burden those among whom he ministered, and perhaps we may add that he did not wish to lose his independence by becoming financially obliged to anyone. In Paul's world, the acceptance of a benefaction often meant becoming a 'client' of the benefactor, and so sacrificing some of one's independence.

We may wonder, then, why Paul accepted assistance from the Macedonians. Perhaps he felt free to accept gifts from churches who by giving them wished to participate in his ministry in other places. In such cases, his ambition to offer the gospel free of charge would not be compromised, and there would be little chance that his benefactors would regard him as their client.

11. Because Paul's opponents could not silence his boasting, they tried to undermine his relationship with the Corinthians by suggesting that his refusal to accept their assistance was proof that he did not really love them. Paul was aware of their strategy, so he poses the rhetorical question: *Why? Because I do not love you?* He does not bother to dignify this accusation with a reasoned reply. Instead, calling upon God as his witness, he simply affirms his love for his audience: *God knows I do!*

12. Paul restates the assertion he made in verse 9b, but in slightly different terms: *And I will keep on doing what I am doing* (i.e. he will refrain from placing any financial burdens upon the Corinthians). In the light of the activity of his opponents in Corinth, Paul had an added reason for doing so: *in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about*. This part of verse 12 is difficult to translate and interpret, but the NIV rendering captures what is probably Paul's intention here. His opponents, in order to consolidate thoroughly their position in Corinth, wanted to be able to say that they carried out their mission on the same terms as Paul did so as to be considered equal with him. However, there was one crucial area in which their ministries differed from his: they wanted financial remuneration from the Corinthians. If they were bona fide apostles, they need not have been concerned about this distinction, for most other apostles accepted remuneration (cf. 1 Cor. 9:3–7), and Paul himself defended at length the right of Christian workers to do so (cf. 1 Cor. 9:7–14). It seems likely that Paul's opponents not only accepted remuneration, but greedily extracted it (cf. 2:17; 4:2; 11:20), and this would have made them particularly sensitive to odious comparisons that could be made of their ministry and Paul's. They would have

been pleased if Paul discontinued his practice in this matter, but he was for that very reason determined not to do so, and in this way he undermined their claims to work on the same terms as he did.

13. Paul now dispenses with irony, personal defence and explanations of his policy in money matters, and with striking virulence exposes the true character of his opponents. *For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ.* Essentially they are deceivers, passing themselves off as apostles of Christ when they were not, and for that reason they deserved the epithet *false apostles*. Paul has already indicated that they preach 'a different gospel', and that made them *false apostles*.

14. The deceitfulness of these people does not surprise Paul: *And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.* Paul may be thinking here of Genesis 3 and the deceitfulness of the serpent who 'enlightened' Eve. Alternatively, there are stories in Jewish pseudepigraphical works in which the devil or Satan appears as an angel to deceive Eve (*Life of Adam and Eve* 9:1–3; *Apocalypse of Moses* 17:1), and the apostle could be alluding to these. Or it may simply be that Paul, as a result of his missionary experiences, came to recognize Satan's devices (cf. 2:11).

15. Whatever lies behind Paul's statement in verse 14 that Satan 'masquerades as an angel of light', the conclusion he draws from it is plain enough. Arguing from the greater to the lesser, he says, *It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness*. Paul's opponents are revealed here as instruments of Satan who *masquerade as servants of righteousness*. Paul does not make clear in what way they *masquerade as servants of righteousness*. It is unlikely that they were like the Judaizers operating in Galatia and demanding obedience to the law and submission to circumcision. However, as Jews they may have advocated some level of law observance which led Paul to contrast the glory of ministry under the old and new covenants in 3:7–18. Satan's attacks on the church are seldom frontal. They are more often subversive, and carried out by those within the church who misguidedly serve his ends. It is precisely this that Paul fears may happen in the Corinthian church, as 11:3–4 indicates very clearly.

Of those who serve Satan in Corinth, Paul says, *Their end will be what their actions deserve*. In 5:10 Paul reminded his audience that 'we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due to us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.' In other epistles also, when dealing with those who oppose the truth of God or attack his messengers, Paul asserts that they will face the judgment of God (Rom. 3:8; 1 Cor. 3:17; Phil. 3:19; 2 Tim. 4:14).

Theology

In 11:1–6, foreshadowing the ‘fool’s speech’ that is to follow in 11:16 – 12:13, Paul explains that what motivates his ‘folly’ is the godly jealousy he feels for his converts. Like a father who betroths his daughter to her future husband and desires to see her presented as a pure virgin to him, Paul seeks to ensure that the devotion of those who, as a result of his preaching, have given their allegiance to Christ are not subverted by those who preach another Jesus and another gospel. This underlines the importance in Christian ministry of a real commitment to enhancing people’s devotion to Christ while protecting them from false teachers who would deceive them.

It is surprising that Paul engages in a comparison of his ministry and that of his opponents. But there is a time, as was the case on this occasion with Paul, when genuine Christian leaders need to respond to criticisms of their ministry, not as self-justification, but for the sake of the ministry itself. As Paul did so, he highlighted the fact that knowledge of gospel truth and faithfulness in keeping it before people are more important than style or rhetorical adornment in conveying the message.

In 11:7–15 Paul defends his policy of not accepting financial support from those among whom he is presently ministering so as to make the gospel available free of charge. He does this even though it involved lowering himself in people’s eyes by engaging in manual labour. He insists that refusing their benefaction was not a sign that he did not love them. It was a practice he was determined to continue in order to distance himself from his opponents who were greedy for financial gain. Paul’s example is a reminder that Christian ministers must not be motivated by a desire for financial gain, but rather by a desire to please God and be a blessing to his people.

Paul’s description of his opponents as false apostles, deceitful workers and servants of Satan seems harsh to modern readers. But considering these people were preaching ‘another Jesus’ and ‘another gospel’, and the consequences involved for any who accepted their heretical message, they needed to be exposed. Christian ministers today need likewise to expose false teachers in order to protect God’s ‘flock’ from ‘wolves’ that would devour them.

C. The ‘fool’s speech’ (11:16 – 12:13)

Context

Because of concern for his converts and their susceptibility to deception, Paul exposed his opponents’ true nature as ‘servants of Satan’ (11:13–15). As well as doing that, and against his better judgment, here in 11:16 – 12:13 he demonstrates that, even using his opponents’ criteria, he is a better servant of Christ than they are. So, in the extended ‘fool’s speech’ of 11:16 – 12:13, he boasts of his credentials, apostolic trials, visionary experiences and the mighty works he performed. He knows such worldly boasting is foolish, but in the circumstances where his converts have been swayed by the boasting of others, he feels compelled to boast a little himself. But in the end he turns this boasting match on its head and boasts not of his strengths but of his weaknesses, for God’s strength is made perfect in human weakness.

Comment

i. Accept me as a fool (11:16–21a)

In this opening section of the ‘fool’s speech’, Paul asks his audience to bear with him and he makes clear that what he is about to say is not said with the Lord’s authority. Then with biting irony he asks them to bear with him, seeing that they have been ready enough to bear with other fools, being wise themselves! These others have acted in the most high-handed and pretentious fashion, but Paul says ironically, ‘we were too weak for that!’

16. *I repeat*. Paul had already asked his audience to bear with him ‘in a little foolishness’ (v. 1), and now, following the long diversion of verses 2–15, he repeats his request in slightly different terms: *let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then tolerate me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting*.[135] Paul is conscious that the boasting in which he is about to engage is an act of folly, but he does not want the Corinthians to regard him as foolish for doing so. In fact, it is only their gullibility vis-à-vis the claims of the false apostles that forces him to boast at all (cf. 12:11). But even if they do regard his boasting as the act of a fool, let them accept him as such, and listen to his boasting as they have listened to the boasting of the other fools (his opponents) whom they have received.

17–18. *In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but*

as a fool. Paul makes clear that the boasting in which he is about to indulge is not something he engages in *as the Lord would* (*kata kyrion*; NRSV: 'with the Lord's authority'). Ambrosiaster comments, 'God does not approve of boasting, so this mode of speaking does not come from him. But the content of what he is saying is still true' (Bray, p. 296).

Paul explains what motivates this act of folly: *Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast. Boasting in the way the world does* translates *kauchōntai kata sarka* (lit. 'boast according to [the] flesh'), that is, of human achievement, of power and prestige, and even of spiritual experiences, in terms which do not take into account what is pleasing to God. It is because *many* (his opponents) boast *in the way the world does*, and because his converts have been won over by such boasting, that Paul feels forced to indulge in it too for their sakes, even though he is painfully aware that such boasting is pure folly.

19. *You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise!* The fools they gladly put up with are the intruders, Paul's opponents. So, as the Corinthians have gladly put up with those fools, Paul asks that, even if they regard him as a fool, to put up with him as well. The expression *since you are so wise!* is a cutting allusion to the Corinthians' tendency to pride themselves on their own wisdom (cf. 1 Cor. 3:18–20; 4:10; 6:5; 8:1–7; 13:2).

20. *In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you*. Unlike Paul, who saw his role as working with people for their joy and not lording it over their faith (1:24), the intruders brought those they influenced under their 'lordship'. Paul exposes the despicable authoritarianism of his opponents, as well as the misplaced forbearance of the Corinthians, by piling up in close succession four expressions which depict the nature of the Corinthians' enslavement. *In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or puts on airs or slaps you in the face. Exploits* (*katesthiei*, lit. 'consumes') probably refers to the intruders' greedy demands for remuneration. The verb translated *takes advantage of* (*lambanei*, lit. 'takes') is used by Paul again in 12:16, where he writes, 'Be that as it may, I have not been a burden to you. Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I caught [*elabon*] you by trickery!' This illuminates the unusual use of the verb *lambanō* in the present context: the Corinthians were 'taken in' or 'fleeced' by Paul's opponents. *Puts on airs* (*epairetai*) signifies a presumptuous lifting up of one's self. Paul uses the same verb in 10:5 when referring to 'every pretension that sets itself up [lit. 'every high thing lifted up'] against the knowledge of God'. To slap the face was a way of humiliating a person. Paul may be using the expression literally, in which case it would mean the false apostles had become so authoritarian in their dealings with the Corinthians that they would actually slap the faces of those who questioned their

authority. Alternatively, Paul could be using the expression metaphorically to mean his opponents were acting in a way that dishonoured the Corinthians. Chrysostom comments, 'He said this, not meaning that they were stricken on the face, but that they spat upon and dishonoured them.'[136]

Welborn argues that Paul depicts his opponents as 'pretentious parasites', referring to a figure well known and ridiculed in Greco-Roman comedies, in order to contrast their behaviour with his own modest behaviour, and as a reproach to the Corinthians who have taken in and been 'taken in' by such persons.[137]

21a. Paul concludes this paragraph with another statement filled with scathing sarcasm: *To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that!* The Corinthians had entertained the criticisms of Paul's opponents that he was weak (10:10). Paul now throws that back at them, saying in effect, 'Yes, I admit, we were too weak to make such a despicable display of overbearing authoritarianism as that practised by those intruders!'

ii. Paul's Jewish ancestry (11:21b–22)

In this section Paul responds to his opponents' claims to impeccable Jewish ancestry, asserting that his own Jewish credentials are just as good.

21b–22. *Whatever anyone else dares to boast about – I am speaking as a fool – I also dare to boast about.*[138] The apostle will mention in turn those things of which his opponents boast: their Jewish pedigree and their being servants of Christ (vv. 22–23), visions and revelations experienced (12:1), and the performance of signs and wonders (12:12). Then he will indulge in a little boasting of his own to show that he is in no way inferior in any of these areas. Both here (vv. 21b, 23a) and in three other places in the speech (11:30; 12:1, 11) Paul shows how uneasy he is about boasting – *I am speaking as a fool.*

Are they Hebrews? So am I. The designation *Hebrews* may be understood in a couple of ways: (i) to denote ethnic purity, as in the expression 'a Hebrew of Hebrews' (Phil. 3:5), distinguishing Jews by birth from proselytes; (ii) to distinguish Hebrew and Aramaic-speaking Jews who generally lived in Palestine (Hebrews) from Greek-speaking Jews generally of the dispersion (Hellenists) (cf. Acts 6:1). However, this distinction is not as clear-cut as it might seem, for as the inscription, '[Syn]agogue of the Hebr[ews]', found in Corinth (see Introduction, p. 26) shows, even Jews of the dispersion referred to themselves as 'Hebrews'. In the present context it is best to see Paul claiming that he has the same pure Jewish ancestry as that claimed by his opponents. Whether they were Palestinian or Hellenistic Jews cannot be determined from these verses.

Are they Israelites? So am I. Israelites were possibly distinguished from Hebrews on the grounds that Gentile proselytes could be incorporated into Israel, but could never, of course, claim to be Hebrews (born of Hebrews). The term 'Israelite' then should probably be taken to denote the religious and social rather than ethnic characteristics of being a Jew.

Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. How are we to distinguish *Abraham's descendants* from *Israelites*? In Romans 11:1 Paul says, 'I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham', using the terms almost synonymously. Perhaps we may distinguish them in this way: if *Hebrews* is to be understood ethnically, and *Israelites* religiously and socially, then *descendants of Abraham* could be understood theologically and related to God's call and promises to Abraham's offspring.

While there are difficulties in discerning the precise nuances of these three terms, Paul's main thrust is clear. Whatever boasting his opponents indulge in as far as their Jewish pedigree is concerned, Paul can boast of the same.

iii. A better servant of Christ (11:23–33)

Paul concedes for the sake of argument that his opponents are servants of Christ, but claims that he is more so (vv. 21b–23a). To reinforce his claim, he provides a list of his apostolic trials (vv. 23b–29), which may be divided into four sections: (a) verses 23b–25 which speak of imprisonments, beatings and being near death, including a detailed explanation of what these involved; (b) verse 26 which speaks of frequent journeys, with a description of the dangers of travel; (c) verse 27 which speaks of toil and hardship, with an account of the privations involved in these; and (d) verses 28–29 which speak of anxiety for all the churches, with an example of what caused it. Finally, he narrates the story of his ignominious flight from Damascus as a further illustration of his 'weakness' as an apostle (vv. 30–33).

23a. *Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more.* Responding to his opponents' claims regarding Jewish ancestry, Paul simply claimed to be their equal, but here, with rhetorical heightening, he responds to their claim to be servants of Christ by saying that he is more than their equal. He is prepared, for the sake of argument, to concede what he elsewhere (vv. 13–15) denies (i.e. that they are servants of Christ), because he will show that he is more than their equal anyhow. In the following verses he will claim that he is more so because he has worked much harder and suffered much more in his service of Christ.

By saying, *I am out of my mind to talk like this*, Paul reveals again his

reluctance to be responding at all to such claims. The comparing of one servant of Christ with another is something he had already warned the Corinthians against (1 Cor. 1:11–16; 3:4–9, 21–22; 4:1), and now through the force of new circumstances he is engaging in that very practice himself.

23b. Supporting his claim to be a better servant of Christ than his opponents, Paul provides a list of his apostolic hardships and sufferings. The list opens with the words: *I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again*. The much harder work probably refers to strenuous exertions in his missionary work, exertions far greater than those of his opponents, and even of the other apostles (cf. 1 Cor. 15:10). Acts records only one imprisonment before the time these chapters were written – the overnight stay in the prison at Philippi (Acts 16:19–40). Paul's brief reference to far more imprisonments reminds us that he experienced many more trials than Acts records, and how limited our knowledge of his missionary career really is, even with the Acts account to draw upon. What is meant by the severe flogging, and being exposed to death again and again, he explains in verses 24–25.

24–25. *Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one*. Deuteronomy 25:1–3 specifies that punishment by beating must not exceed forty strokes, and as a hedge around the law the Jews of Paul's day limited the number to forty minus one, lest by an error in counting the prescribed number be exceeded and the law be broken by an impetuous executioner, and the offender permanently disgraced (cf. Chrysostom, Bray, p. 298). Jesus warned his disciples that they would be flogged in synagogues (Matt. 10:17; Mark 13:9), and Paul in his pre-conversion days actually instigated such floggings (Acts 22:20; 26:11). Having been converted to the faith he once opposed, he himself had, by the time he wrote this letter, been subjected five times to judicial floggings in synagogues. This reveals indirectly that, despite much opposition, Paul did not give up his connection with Judaism or the synagogue and lose himself in the Gentile world.

Three times I was beaten with rods. The one such incident we know of took place in Philippi (cf. Acts 16:22–23),[139] and it is probably in the light of this that Paul, writing shortly after the event, speaks of having 'suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi' (1 Thess. 2:2). Glancy argues that the scars left upon Paul's body as a result of his beatings (cf. Gal. 6:17) were not, like the battle wounds on the bodies of soldiers, regarded as badges of honour. Rather they were 'markings of a servile body, insignia of humiliation and submission'. So in fact Paul's boast about the beatings he had endured would be seen as a sign of weakness, not valour, and this is what the apostle intended it to be.[140]

Once I was pelted with stones. Stoning could be either a Jewish judicial execution (cf. Lev. 24:14, 16) or an act of mob violence. The latter was the case in Lystra where Paul was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19).

Three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea. From Acts we know of only one shipwreck in which Paul was involved, and that took place after this letter was written. However, Acts records nine sea voyages which the apostle made prior to this time, and there were almost certainly others. So there were plenty of voyages during which Paul could have suffered shipwreck. Spending a night and a day in the open sea must have brought the apostle face to face with death, as had his stoning at Lystra.

26. *I have been constantly on the move*. With these words, the second section of Paul's trials list begins which sheds light on the dangers he faced in his travels: *I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers*. Most of these references to dangers are self-explanatory. 'Danger from rivers,' Ambrosiaster says, occurred 'in winter, when there was constant rain and rivers often overflowed their banks' (Bray, p. 298). *Danger from false believers* probably refers to the attacks of those who opposed Paul and his gospel (cf. Gal. 2:4), and here, most likely, he has in mind especially those who opposed him in Corinth.

27. The third section of the trials list bears the heading, *I have laboured and toiled*, and once again a general description is followed by specific examples. *And have often gone without sleep*. This probably does not refer to sleeplessness because of anxiety, as that would be better included in verse 28, where Paul speaks of the pressure of his concern over the churches. But included as it is here among examples of labour and toil, the sleepless nights were probably due either to his preaching and teaching into the early hours (cf. Acts 20:7–12, 31) when those who had to labour during the day would be free to listen, or to the occasions when he had to ply his trade at night so as to support himself when he used the daylight hours for missionary activity (2 Thess. 3:7–8). *I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked*. Despite income from manual work and gifts from the Macedonians, there were times when Paul suffered want (cf. Phil. 4:10–13) and must have gone without food, drink and adequate clothing (cf. Rom. 8:35; 1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:13).

28–29. This fourth section of the trials list differs from the previous three in that it deals with subjective rather than objective matters: *Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches*. It should be noted that Paul's concern here is not the unwarranted anxiety about oneself which Jesus cautioned his disciples against (Matt. 6:25–34), but rather that

healthy concern for the welfare of others which Jesus himself experienced (Luke 13:34). The Corinthian letters provide abundant examples of situations which kept the pressure upon Paul's pastoral heart. He himself cites one example: *Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?* This reflects Paul's concern for those who are weak in faith, and who are caused to stumble and fall because of the behaviour of those who pride themselves on being strong in faith (cf. Rom. 14:1–23; 1 Cor. 8:1–13). When Paul saw Christians weak in faith, he felt their vulnerability, and when he saw them made to fall, he burned with indignation against the behaviour of those who had caused it. Chrysostom comments, 'What wonderful affection in a pastor! Others' falls, he is saying, accentuate my grief, others' obstacles inflame the fire of my suffering' (Bray, p. 299).

30–33. In this passage Paul narrates an incident from the earliest days of his experience as a Christian. This supplements the list of trials of which he has already boasted, but also seems to parody the whole business of boasting. The passage begins, *If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness*. Again the apostle shows his distaste for boasting, and foreshadows the fact that he is about to turn the whole thing on its head. Unlike the trials list of verses 23b–29, which some might construe as triumphalist (i.e. 'all these difficulties I have overcome in order to fulfil my commission'), the account of his ignominious flight from Damascus which he is about to narrate contains little of which to be proud.

The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised for ever, knows that I am not lying. Before proceeding to his narration, Paul appeals to God as witness that what he is about to say is true. He may have wished, by this affirmation, to stress the truth of the content of the trials list also, though much of that is likely to have been common knowledge. The grammatical construction in the original indicates that he *who is to be praised for ever* is predicated of the God and Father, not the Lord Jesus.

In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. King Aretas IV (9 BC – AD 40)[141] was ruler of the Nabateans, whose capital was at Petra. The *governor* (*ethnarchēs*) 'has been taken to be a royal official charged [by Aretas] with oversight of the Nabatean commercial colony established at Damascus'.[142] In Galatians 1:17 Paul says that following his conversion, 'I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.' It is likely, therefore, that Paul began preaching the gospel in Arabia and may have aroused the antagonism of Aretas, who then ordered his governor in Damascus to arrest him.[143] According to the account of Paul's escape in Acts 9:23–25,

hostile Jews who reacted against his forthright preaching of Jesus as Messiah plotted to kill him and were watching the gates of Damascus so as to seize him when he tried to leave. As Paul's own testimony in the present passage identifies the governor as the one who guarded the city, it would appear that the Jewish and Nabatean communities acted in concert seeking to seize Paul. On later occasions, Jews in other cities were to bring charges against Paul (cf. Acts 18:12; 25:7, 15).

But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands. Paul's departure from Damascus on this occasion was very different from his earlier approach as persecutor. Then he came as a zealous Jewish crusader 'breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples', and carrying letters to leaders of the Jewish synagogues in Damascus authorizing him to bring bound to Jerusalem any who 'belonged to the Way' (Acts 9:1–2). But now he found himself being hunted down by his fellow Jews because he preached Jesus as Messiah. Thus he was forced to flee from Damascus, escaping by being lowered down over the wall in a basket like a bundle of merchandise. This was probably Paul's first taste of the ignominy of persecution, and it must have left an indelible imprint upon him. It was a humiliating experience, and its inclusion here seems to constitute a parody of the whole purpose of boasting.

iv. Visions and revelations (12:1–10)

Paul's boasting now moves from apostolic trials to visions and revelations. He recounts, in the third person, an experience in which he was caught up to the third heaven, to paradise, where he heard things about which he was not permitted to speak. Instead, he tells of a thorn in the flesh given to keep him from becoming too conceited, and how he sought God in prayer repeatedly for its removal, but in response was told that God's grace was sufficient for him. Through this revelation he learnt of the simultaneity of weakness and power. Paul's emphasis upon the coincidence of weakness and power was almost certainly intended to undermine triumphalist ideas about power and authority held by his opponents, and to support his own claim to apostolic authority, despite his imprisonments, persecutions and rejection which may seem to be inconsistent with that claim.

1. *I must go on boasting*. While the apostle was convinced there was nothing to be gained by boasting, he recognized that in the present situation there was much to be lost if he did not. His opponents had drawn up an agenda, it had been adopted by his converts, and he must now respond to the next item therein. *Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations*

from the Lord. We are accustomed, perhaps, to the occurrence of visions and revelations in the stories of God's dealings with people in Old Testament times. It is surprising just how much they are a part of the accounts of God's dealings with Christians in New Testament times as well. Zechariah received a vision while serving in the temple, and was told his prayer had been heard and that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son whose name would be John (the Baptist) (Luke 1:8–23). Jesus' transfiguration is called a vision which was given to Peter, James and John (Matt. 17:9). The women who went to Jesus' tomb reported that they had seen a vision of angels who said that Jesus was alive (Luke 24:22–24). Stephen, just before his death, saw a vision of 'the Son of man' standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55–56). The Lord spoke to Ananias in a vision when he instructed him to seek out Saul of Tarsus after the latter had been struck blind on the Damascus road (Acts 9:10). Peter was made ready to receive a call to visit Cornelius' household by a threefold vision of unclean animals descending from heaven in a sheet (Acts 10:17, 19; 11:5). On another occasion when he was released from prison by an angel, Peter thought he was seeing a vision (Acts 12:9). The book of Revelation is the description of revelations made to the author on the Isle of Patmos (Rev. 1:1).

Paul experienced many visions and revelations of the Lord. The first and most important was the revelation of Jesus Christ to him on the Damascus road (Acts 22:6–11; 26:12–20; Gal. 1:15–16). Subsequently he saw a vision of a man from Macedonia calling him to come over and help (Acts 16:9–10). When he was carrying out pioneer evangelism in Corinth, he received encouragement from the Lord through a vision (Acts 18:9–11). Paul claimed he received his gospel by revelation (Gal. 1:12), and that his insights into the mystery of the gospel, his access to true wisdom, and his understanding of particular eschatological truths were based upon revelations from God (cf. Eph. 3:3–5; 1 Cor. 2:9–10; 1 Thess. 4:15).

2–4. *I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven.* Of the many visions and revelations Paul experienced, he singles out one that took place *fourteen years ago*. His dating of the experience underlines its historical reality. Barnett (p. 561) comments, 'Paul's "fourteen years ago" must be calculated (by internal reckoning) from the time of writing this letter (c. AD 55), suggesting that this vision/revelation occurred c. AD 42, at which time Paul would have been in his native Syria-Cilicia (Gal. 1:18, 21; 2:1; Acts 9:29–30; 11:25).' This places the experience several years after his conversion, and thus it cannot be equated with the revelation of Christ to Paul on the Damascus road. It is remarkable that, as far as we know, Paul had not spoken of this experience previously, probably, as he says later, 'so that no one may

think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, even considering the exceptional character of the revelations' (vv. 6–7, NRSV).

Paul describes the experience in the third person (*I know a man*), perhaps as a way of indicating its sacred character for him, or alternatively because he wanted to maintain a distinction between the Paul who was granted this superlative experience in the past and the Paul whose behaviour people may see and whose words they may hear in the present (cf. 12:6). In fact, the account is so consistently cast in the third person that the reader may even wonder whether the apostle is relating the experience of another person, rather than his own.[144] However, a careful reading and appreciation of the thrust of verses 1, 5, 7 confirms that Paul is speaking of his own experience. The reference here to *a man in Christ* can be taken to mean simply Paul as a Christian.

The apostle says he was *caught up to the third heaven* (v. 2) and a little later that he was *caught up to paradise* (v. 4). He used the same verb, 'to catch up' (*harpazō*) in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 when speaking of Christians who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord and will then be 'caught up' to meet the Lord in the air.

Among Paul's contemporaries, differing cosmologies were in vogue, variously portraying three, five or seven heavens, which were spoken of as a series of hemispherical strata above the earth. It has been suggested that the reference to 'the heavens, even the highest heaven' (lit. 'heaven and the heaven of heavens') in Solomon's dedication prayer in 1 Kings 8:27 gave rise, among the Jews at least, to the notion of the heavens in three strata. However, the text itself is probably no more than a simple Hebrew superlative. In the pseudepigraphical writings (e.g. *T. Levi* 3) there is reference to several heavens, and in rabbinic writings seven heavens are mentioned (Str-B 3, p. 531).

The identification of the third heaven with Paradise which is made by Paul in the present passage has a parallel in the *Apocalypse of Moses* 37:5, where God hands Adam over to the archangel Michael and says, 'Lift him up into Paradise unto the third heaven, and leave him there until that fearful day of my reckoning, which I will make in the world.'

In both Jewish (e.g. *1 Enoch* 39:3f.) and Gentile (e.g. Plato, *Rep*. 10:614–621) literature there are accounts similar to that of the apostle's description of his experience. In the Babylonian Talmud (*Hag.* 14b) there is a story of four rabbis who were temporarily taken up into Paradise, but so awesome was their experience that only one, Rabbi Akiba, returned unharmed. The story post-dates Paul (R. Akiba died c. AD 135), but indicates, nevertheless, the sort of accounts that were circulating in the first and second centuries of the Christian era.

All these literary parallels, whether in terminology, concepts or the experience

of being caught up, show three things. First, what Paul spoke of was understandable to his contemporaries. Second, the experience of being caught up into Paradise was believed to be awe-inspiring, and this explains in part Paul's great reticence in describing it. Third, the experience of being caught up to the third heaven would place the apostle on a level with the great heroes of faith, and by claiming such an experience, Paul would completely outflank his opponents. It is therefore all the more remarkable that he did not make maximum capital out of it. But instead, having disclosed the bare fact, he quickly directs attention away from his experience and to his weakness as the only safe ground for boasting.

Speaking of being caught up into the third heaven or Paradise, Paul says, *Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know – God knows* (v. 2). If Paul himself did not know the exact mechanism whereby his rapture occurred, there is certainly no way in which we can. However, some effort must be made to understand the two possible means which he mentions, *in the body or out of the body*. In the Old Testament tradition two men were translated bodily to heaven: Enoch (Gen. 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kgs 2:9–12), but their translations were permanent not temporary. It is also said of Elijah that he was carried off bodily from one place to another by the Spirit of the Lord (1 Kgs 18:12).

The New Testament accounts of Jesus' temptation refer to him being taken by the devil to the pinnacle of the temple and to a high mountain (Matt. 4:5, 8), but the mechanism (whether bodily or visionary) is not specified. The writer of Revelation tells of his being carried away 'in the Spirit' to a wilderness (Rev. 17:3), and to a great high mountain (Rev. 21:10). Whether being 'in the Spirit' means out of the body or simply denotes a visionary experience is not clear.

Philo appears to have believed that heavenly experiences necessitate being out of the body, for he explains that should the strains of heavenly music ever reach our ears, irrepressible yearnings and frantic longings would be produced, causing us to abstain from necessary food. And alluding to Exodus 24:18, he says that Moses was listening to heavenly music 'when, having laid aside his body, for forty days and as many nights he touched neither bread nor water at all' (*De Somnis* [*On Dreams*] 1, 36). Such an idea of non-bodily rapture would be in line with dualistic beliefs that there cannot be any contact between the heavenly and material worlds, the latter being regarded as evil by definition. When Paul says that he does not know whether his temporary translation was in the body or out of the body, he keeps open the possibility of both, and thereby makes clear that he would not accept the dualistic view that the material world is inherently evil. At the same time, he does not exclude the possibility of a spiritual experience out of the body.

And I know that this man – whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows – was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. The expression *inexpressible things* (*arrēta*) is found only here in the New Testament, but is common in ancient inscriptions. It was associated with the mystery religions and describes things too sacred to be divulged. Such secrecy concerning things that had been revealed was a commonplace among devotees of the mystery religions of Paul's day, but quite unusual in Christian circles. Paul did speak of the 'mystery' of the gospel, but that was something which, though previously hidden, had now been made known to the apostles and prophets through the Spirit for the express purpose that they should proclaim it to all people (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1 mg.; Eph. 3:1–9; 6:19–20; Col. 1:25–27; 4:3). It is only in the present context that Paul speaks of something revealed to him that he could not speak about, presumably because it was so sacred and intended for him alone.

Paul's account of his rapture differs markedly from other such accounts from the ancient world, both in its brevity and the absence of any descriptions of what he saw. Paul refers only to what he heard.

5–6a. *I will boast about a man like that.* Although the brief account is finished, Paul continues to speak of the experience in the third person. He has been forced to boast of the Paul who fourteen years ago experienced such a revelation, but refuses to make that the ground of present boasting: *but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses*. Having felt forced into the futile exercise of boasting about spiritual experience, Paul returns (cf. 11:30) to the one safe ground of boasting – his personal weakness – and develops this further in verses 7–10. However, before doing so, he insists, *Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth*. If he did choose to boast about that experience, he would not, in one sense, be acting foolishly, because all he has said about it is true.

6b–7a. *But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, or because of these surpassingly great revelations.*[145] The apostle's reason for making less of his past experience than he might is that he wants people's evaluation of him to be based upon *what I do or say* (*ho blepei me ē akouei ex emou*; lit. 'what he sees [in] me or hears from me'). Harris (p. 850) comments, 'Seeing and hearing encompass the two primary ways in which an evaluation of a person can be undertaken – by observing conduct and listening to what is said. In Paul's case the reference would be to all his behaviour as a person and as a missionary-pastor, and to all his preaching and teaching.' Paul wanted people's evaluation of him as an apostle to be based on these things, not upon his past revelatory and visionary experiences.

7b. *Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh*. Instead of making capital out of his rapture, as his opponents obviously did out of their spiritual experiences, Paul immediately explains how he was kept from becoming too conceited. A *thorn* (*skolops*) was given him in the flesh. The word *skolops*, found only here in the New Testament, was used for anything pointed (e.g. a stake, the pointed end of a fish-hook, a splinter or a thorn). The fact that Paul speaks of a thorn in the *flesh* suggests that the imagery is of a splinter or a thorn, rather than a stake, as some have argued.

In the LXX *skolops* is used figuratively in Numbers 33:55 ('But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs [*skolopes*] in your eyes and thorns in your sides'), Ezekiel 28:24 ('No longer will the people of Israel have malicious neighbours who are painful briers [*skolops*] and sharp thorns') and Hosea 2:8 (ET, 2:6) ('Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes [*skolopsin*]; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way'). In each case, *skolops* is used to denote something that frustrates and causes trouble in the lives of those afflicted. That Paul's *thorn* was a trouble and frustration to him is evident from his thrice-repeated prayer for its removal (v. 8).

Paul further describes the thorn in his flesh as *a messenger of Satan, to torment me*. In the story of Job, Satan is allowed to harass that great hero of faith and endurance, but only within the limits set by God (Job 1 – 2). In 1 Thessalonians 2:17–18 Paul tells his audience how he longed to revisit them after he was forced to leave Thessalonica (cf. Acts 17:1–10), but could not do so because Satan blocked his way. And in the present context Satan is allowed to torment the apostle by means of a thorn in the flesh. It is important to recognize that in both Old and New Testaments Satan has no power other than that allowed him by God. In the Gospels Jesus has complete power over all the forces of darkness. Satan has no power over him (John 14:30–31), and demons must obey his will (Mark 1:21–28; 5:1–13). This power Christ gave to his disciples (Mark 6:7). And yet we see in the case of Paul that Satan was allowed to block the apostle's way and torment him with a thorn in the flesh. However, it must be said that in both cases the actions of Satan, while in themselves bad things, are made to serve God's purposes. In the first case, having his way blocked kept him on the move and that meant the gospel came to Berea, Athens and Corinth. In the second case, the torment served to keep Paul spiritually well-balanced. It was a weight upon his spirit preventing him from becoming conceited.

Many suggestions have been made concerning the nature of Paul's 'thorn in the flesh'. They include: (i) some form of spiritual harassment, for example, the limitations of a nature corrupted by sin, the torments of temptation, or oppression by a demon; (ii) persecution, for example, that instigated by Jewish

opposition or by Paul's Christian opponents; (iii) some physical or mental ailment, for example, eye trouble, attacks of malarial fever, stammering speech, epilepsy, headaches or a neurological disturbance; (iv) the Corinthian church's rejection of his apostleship.[146] However, the plain fact is that there is insufficient data to decide the matter. Most modern interpreters prefer to see it as some sort of physical ailment, and the fact that Paul calls it a thorn in the *flesh* offers some support for this. Galatians 4:15 is appealed to by those who want to identify it as an eye problem.

8–9. *Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me*. Although there is no essential similarity between Paul's experience and that of Jesus in Gethsemane, nevertheless it is interesting to note that both prayed three times that something be removed, and in both cases the removal requested was not granted. However, just as Jesus was strengthened to face his dreadful and unique ordeal, so encouragement and strength were made available to Paul: *But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you.'* Essentially, the word of the Lord to Paul was that while the thorn would not be removed, his grace would enable him to cope with it. To this was added the explanation, *for my power is made perfect in weakness*. In 1 Corinthians 1:26–31 Paul pointed out to his converts that by God's deliberate choice not many of them were wise according to worldly standards, nor influential, nor of noble birth. The reason was that 'God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong . . . so that no one may boast before him.' The Lord's response to Paul's request for removal of the 'thorn' was to remind him that his power is manifested in the weak. It also provides, in this context, justification for Paul's rejection of the type of boasting indulged in by his opponents, and for his own practice of boasting in weakness.

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. Having been taught that Christ's power is made perfect in weakness, Paul is glad to boast of his weaknesses. This does not mean he enjoys weaknesses as such; what he delights in is the power of Christ that rests upon him in these weaknesses. The verb 'to rest upon' (*episkēnoō*) is quite rare. It is found only here in the New Testament, and not at all in the LXX or the papyri. Before Paul, its only known use is by Polybius the Greek historian (c. 201–120 BC) who used it twice of the billeting of soldiers. It may, therefore, be better to translate the verb as 'dwell in' or 'reside' rather than 'rest upon'. Either way, it is the experience of Christ's power in his weakness that enables Paul to boast.

10. *That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Paul applies the lesson he learnt from the Lord's response to his prayers for the removal of the 'thorn' to all the difficulties he experienced in his apostolic ministry, whether personal weakness and hardships, or pain inflicted upon him by others. When he says, *I delight in weakness* . . . , the verb translated *delight in* (*eudokeō*) may also be translated 'be content with' (so NRSV), but in neither case should it be construed in such a way as to indicate that Paul was a masochist, enjoying the sufferings he experienced. The reason he delighted in his sufferings was because he knew that Christ's power would rest upon him in the midst of them.

While Paul's audience could have gained much by learning of the simultaneity of weakness and power of which Paul speaks in verses 7–10, his motive in setting it out was not limited to that. His opponents had criticized his apostleship on the grounds of his weakness (cf. 10:10), and very likely they regarded the many persecutions and insults that Paul experienced as inconsistent with his claim to be an apostle of the exalted Christ. By setting out the principle of divine power manifested through human weakness, Paul both defended his own claim to apostleship and cut the ground from under the claims of his opponents.

v. Signs of an apostle (12:11–13)

With these verses Paul brings his 'fool's speech' to an end. He says that the whole exercise was an act of folly, but one he was forced into by the failure of his converts to speak up on his behalf. They ought to have commended him, rather than he having to indulge in the folly of boasting on his own behalf, for in fact he was in no way inferior to the so-called 'super-apostles'. The Corinthians had been favoured by the performance of apostolic signs; the only thing they had missed out on was being burdened financially by Paul. He concludes ironically by asking their forgiveness for this wrong!

11. *I have made a fool of myself.* Paul is conscious that his boasting has been an exercise in foolishness. But in a sense the Corinthians themselves are to blame. He says, *but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you.* Paul places particular emphasis upon the words *you* and *I*. In effect, he says, '*You* Corinthians forced me to indulge in self-commendation, when in fact *I* ought to have been commended by you.' If, instead of accepting the criticisms of Paul made by his opponents, the Corinthians had spoken up on his behalf, testifying that it was through his preaching that they had been converted (cf. 1 Cor. 9:1b–2), that God had confirmed his preaching with signs and wonders, and that his behaviour among them had been exemplary, then Paul would have had no need to boast on his own behalf. People do not need to indulge in the

unpleasant act of self-commendation when their friends, or those to whom they have ministered, take positive action to defend their integrity.

For I am not in the least inferior to the 'super-apostles', even though I am nothing. Paul speaks sarcastically when he refers to his opponents as *super-apostles*, and insists that he is in no way inferior to them. When he adds, *even though I am nothing*, he is probably referring to what his opponents were saying about him. Alternatively, he may be revealing in a straightforward way his own sense of unworthiness to have been entrusted with an apostolic commission (cf. 1 Cor. 15:9–10).

12. *I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle*. The word *true* is an addition in the NIV for which there is no counterpart in the original. While its inclusion, therefore, is strictly unwarranted, it does draw attention to the fact that Paul is here concerned to show that he is a true apostle, even according to the criteria espoused by his opponents. He claims that he is in no way inferior to these people in respect of *the marks of a true apostle*. And these Paul itemizes as *signs, wonders and miracles*. The account of Paul's first visit to Corinth in Acts 18 records no miracles, but obviously such had been carried out, otherwise his appeal to them here would be nonsense. In Romans (written shortly after these chapters) he speaks of his ministry in terms of 'what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done – by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God' (Rom. 15:17–19). Clearly, the performance of *the marks of a true apostle* were a normal accompaniment to Paul's ministry, and in this respect Corinth had been no less favoured than others.

13. *How were you inferior to the other churches, except that I was never a burden to you?* On what grounds the Corinthians might have felt themselves to have been disadvantaged in comparison to other churches is not specified. Clearly it was not that Paul's ministry among them was not accompanied by 'signs, wonders and miracles', for he had just reminded them that these 'marks of a true apostle' had been demonstrated among them.

Perhaps they felt offended that Paul had refused to accept support from them while he accepted it from other churches. If this was the case, then Paul asks them ironically, *Forgive me this wrong!*, implying it would seem that it is a strange thing indeed that they should object to being not burdened or exploited by him, as they had been by his opponents (cf. 11:20).

Theology

Paul felt forced to boast about his apostolic credentials in the 'fool's speech',

because his converts were being deceived by his opponents and had accepted their criteria for judging the validity of his ministry. While boasting, he repeatedly emphasized that doing so was against his better judgment – he was ‘not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool’. Because the validity of his ministry had been called into question and because the Christian standing of his converts was threatened, he judged it imperative to set out his credentials. There comes a time to speak up when one’s ministry is under attack and to defend its authenticity, even at the risk of being accused of self-commendation.

When claiming to be a better servant of Christ than his opponents, Paul emphasized, not his eloquence or the success of his mission, but the beatings and imprisonments he had suffered, the dangers he had been exposed to, and the privations he had undergone – things which showed his weakness rather than his strength. These things would not have commended him to his opponents or the Corinthians, but they were the badges of a true servant of Christ. The Lord himself said, ‘Remember what I told you: “A servant is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also . . . They will treat you this way because of my name’ (John 15:20–21). For Paul, sufferings were legitimizing evidence that he was a true servant of Christ (cf. Gal. 6:17).

While claiming to be the recipient of visions and revelations because he was forced to defend the authenticity of his ministry, Paul chose not to capitalize on these experiences. Instead, he directed his audience’s attention to his thorn in the flesh, further evidence of his weakness, and he emphasized the sufficiency of the grace of God, whose strength is made perfect in human weakness. This has been the experience of Christian people through the centuries who have learnt, as Paul did, that ‘this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us’ (4:7).

Paul’s preaching in Corinth had been accompanied by ‘signs, wonders and miracles’, and the Corinthians had failed to say this had been the case when his ministry was criticized by his opponents as lacking in this respect. As a result, Paul had to defend the validity of his ministry himself. From this we may learn how important it is to come to the defence of our Christian brothers and sisters when they are unjustly criticized, so they are not placed in the invidious position of having to defend themselves.

D. Paul’s planned third visit (12:14 – 13:10)

Context

Having been forced to ‘boast’ about his apostolic credentials in the ‘fool’s speech’ to demonstrate to the Corinthians that he was in no way inferior to the false apostles, in this section Paul addresses other matters that cried out for attention. First, in respect of financial integrity he assures them that he is willing to spend his resources and to be spent himself for their benefit, and neither he nor those whom he sent intended to exploit them (12:14–18).

Second, to set the record straight, Paul insists he is not interested in simply defending himself, but has his audience’s well-being in mind. And he writes as he does because he fears that on his upcoming third visit he might find them to be not as he would wish, and as a result they would find him to be not as they would wish (12:19–21).

Third, aware that there were still some in Corinth who suspected him of malpractice, Paul warns them that any charges they might bring must be supported by two or three witnesses. If they demand proof that Christ speaks through him, apparently because his weaknesses seemed to nullify such a claim, he assures them that though he is ‘weak’ in Christ, he will act with the power of God when he deals with them (13:1–4).

Fourth, he exhorts his audience to examine themselves, and he assures them he is glad to be weak if they prove to be strong. He explains that he is writing now in the hope that it will produce improvement in them, so that when he comes he will not have to be harsh in his dealings with them, as he has threatened to be (13:5–10).

Comment

i. Paul refuses to burden the Corinthians (12:14–18)

14. *Now I am ready to visit you for the third time*. This statement is ambiguous both in the original and in the NIV translation. It could mean either that this is the third time Paul has been ready to make a visit (without indicating whether he actually made all the visits for which he was ready), or that he is now ready to make his third visit. Fortunately 13:1 resolves the question, confirming that he is about to embark on his third visit. The two previous ones were the pioneer missionary visit and the ‘painful visit’ (see Introduction, pp. 29–30, 33). Paul’s

intended third visit is mentioned in several other places in this letter (10:2; 12:20–21; 13:1, 10), and from these references it is clear that the apostle was ready for a showdown, though he still hoped it would not come to that.

And I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. On the third visit Paul will adhere to his policy of not accepting support from the Corinthians. His purpose in coming is to win them back, not to tap their resources. Calvin (p. 165) paraphrases Paul's purpose: 'I seek larger wages than you think, for I am not content with your riches but I seek the whole of you in order to present you to the Lord as a sacrifice from the fruits of my ministry.' There may be in Paul's statement a veiled contrast between his motives and those of his opponents, who in this respect could not claim to work on the same terms as he did (cf. 11:12).

After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. Paul draws upon the general principle that in family life it is the parents who provide for their children and not vice-versa (there does come a time, of course, when adult children should provide for elderly parents; cf. Mark 7:8–12; 1 Tim. 5:4). Paul applies this general principle to his relationship as spiritual father to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor. 4:15) to support his decision not to burden them financially (elsewhere he does defend the right of ministers of the gospel to be supported financially; cf. 1 Cor. 9:4–14).

Paul uses the verb 'to save up' (*thēsaurizō*) here, which is found also in his advice concerning the collection: 'On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, *saving it up*, so that when I come no collections will have to be made' (1 Cor. 16:2, italics added). This advice, it seems, had been falsely construed by his opponents to mean that he really wanted his spiritual children to lay up money for him. Paul denies such accusations by saying that it is parents who should lay up for their children and not vice versa.

15–16. As parents willingly provide for their children, Paul says, *So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well*. Two cognate verbs are used: *dapanaō* ('to spend') and *ekdapanaō* ('to expend'). The word *dapanaō* is used elsewhere in the New Testament where it usually refers to spending money (Mark 5:26, the woman with the haemorrhage spent all she had on doctors; Luke 15:14, the prodigal spent all his inheritance on riotous living; Acts 21:24, Paul spent money to pay for the sacrifices offered by Jewish Christians), and this is its common use in the papyri as well. So here, consistent with the context and in parallel with these other uses, Paul employs the word to express his willingness to spend his resources for the Corinthians. By spending his resources, he probably includes meeting the cost of his support while

labouring among and for the Corinthians.

The word *ekdapanaō* is found only here in the New Testament, and means ‘to spend’ or ‘to expend’. Applied to a person, as here, it means to expend oneself in the sense of the sacrifice of one’s life. Such is the apostle’s commitment to his converts that he is prepared not only to spend his resources, but even to sacrifice his own life for their sakes. Such a statement of extreme commitment to the well-being of others is not an isolated one in Paul’s writings. He felt the same way about his Jewish compatriots (Rom. 9:3) and the Philippian church (Phil. 2:17).

After such a statement of his love and commitment to the Corinthians, Paul understandably asks, *If I love you more, will you love me less?* The apostle, who is prepared to exhaust his own earnings so as not to be a burden to the Corinthians, and is prepared even to sacrifice his life for them if necessary, asks whether, in response to his abundant love, he is going to be loved less by them.

And Paul knows why the greater love for them on his part means less love for him on theirs. It is because one expression of his love (refusing to be a burden to them) has been misconstrued by his opponents. So he confronts his audience with the charge levelled against him: *Be that as it may, I have not been a burden to you. Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I caught you by trickery!* This charge originated with Paul’s opponents, and was entertained for a time by his converts. The craftiness and trickery of which Paul was accused was that of using the occasion of the collection for the poor Judean Christians as an opportunity to benefit himself substantially as well. That this was the nature of the accusation is confirmed in verses 17–18.

17–18. Paul confronts his audience again: *Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent to you?* To increase the impact, he reminds them of the ones he sent to them. *I urged Titus to go to you and I sent our brother with him.* Paul refers to the sending of Titus and the ‘earnest’ brother that he foreshadowed in 8:16–17, 22.[147] Having reminded them, he asks a second question: *Titus did not exploit you, did he?* Both this and the previous question by their form in the original demand a negative answer. Paul concludes his defence against this allegation by asking, *Did we not walk in the same footsteps by the same Spirit?* These questions, as both their form in the original language and the translation provided in the NIV show, require a positive answer. Both Paul and those whom he sent to Corinth on the business of the collection had acted in the same way, with complete integrity. The apostle expects his audience to acknowledge that fact.

By the same Spirit translates *tō autō pneumati*, which is susceptible to two interpretations, either that of the NIV which identifies *pneuma* here as the Holy

Spirit and interprets the whole as a reference to walking in the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:16), or that of the NRSV which identifies *pneuma* as the human spirit and translates the whole as: 'Did we not conduct ourselves with the same spirit?' Both make good sense, but perhaps the second is preferable in the context where it is Paul's and his emissaries' conduct towards the Corinthians that is defended.

ii. The real purpose of Paul's fool's speech (12:19–21)

In these verses Paul seeks to clarify the real underlying motive of his boasting. Certainly, he felt forced into it because his audience had been influenced adversely by the boasting of his opponents, and he needed to show that he was in no way inferior to those men. But underlying that, his real aim was to strengthen his converts (v. 19). And this he did because he was afraid that when he came on his third visit, both he and they would find in one another not what they would desire. They might find Paul acting with bold authority against them, and he might find that many of them were still caught up in the sins of the past (vv. 20–21).

19. *Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you?* This has been translated in the NIV (and also in the NRSV) as a question. It could also be translated as a statement: 'You have been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you.' But either way, Paul's point is the same. He wants to correct a view of his boasting which interprets it as an effort to defend himself. Hafemann (p. 487) comments, 'Thus, in defending himself, Paul has not been seeking the approval of the Corinthians but fighting to strengthen their faith (12:19c) . . . Since God is making his appeal through Paul (5:20b), for him to fight for his own legitimacy as an apostle is to fight for the faith of the Corinthians.'

We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ. As a Christian, Paul knows that all he says (and does) is *in the sight of God*. He states this fact here to underline the truth of what follows: *everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening*. When Paul says *everything . . . is for your strengthening,* he refers, most likely, to all that he has said, done and written, particularly in the present letter which they might have mistakenly construed as mere self-defence. He also reiterates the purpose of apostolic ministry: to strengthen/build up the church (cf. 10:8; 13:10). People are strengthened and built up in their faith by both encouragement and admonishment.

It should be noted that after the strong words and irony of chapters 10 – 12, Paul's true feeling for his converts emerges again in the appellation *dear friends* (*agapētoi,* lit. 'beloved'; cf. 11:11; 12:15). It was Paul's love for the Corinthians,

as much as his dismay because a false gospel was being entertained by them, that accounted for the strength of his attack against his opponents and the extent of his boasting.

20. Paul laboured to strengthen the Corinthians because he loved them, but also, he says, *For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be*. He is ready to come to them for the third visit (12:14) and does not want to be disappointed when he arrives. If what he fears is in evidence when he arrives, he warns, *you may not find me as you want me to be*. If there is no improvement, then Paul must act with boldness and authority against the church (cf. 1 Cor. 4:21), as he has threatened to act against his opponents (10:2, 6; cf. 13:1–4).[148]

Paul spells out in detail what he fears he might find when he arrives: *I fear that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.* The list may owe something to traditional lists of vices that Paul makes use of elsewhere (e.g. Rom. 1:29; 13:13; Gal. 5:19–21; Col. 3:8–9). However, it is significant that the first two items on Paul's list here, *discord* and *jealousy*, are the very things he mentioned when dealing with the problem of party spirit in 1 Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor. 1:11; 3:3). And the last item on Paul's list, *disorder*, was a problem addressed in 1 Corinthians in relation to women's behaviour and the celebration of the Lord's Supper, as well as the use of spiritual gifts, all in the context of the worship of the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 11:2–34).

21. Paul was by no means convinced that the problems he addressed in 1 Corinthians were now things of the past, and this is confirmed by his words in verse 21: *I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you*. In 9:3–4 Paul spoke of the humiliation he would feel if, when he came to Corinth with some of the Macedonians, the Corinthians proved to be unprepared to make their contribution to the collection. But here he faces the possibility of a far greater humiliation, that of seeing the results of his labours in Corinth marred by serious moral breakdown. He envisages being *grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged*. Calvin (p. 167) comments, 'Paul reveals to us the mind of a true and sincere pastor when he says that he will look on the sins of others with grief. It is right that every pastor should bear the concerns of the Church on his heart, should feel its ills as if they were his own, sympathize with its sorrows and grieve for its sins.'

In 1 Corinthians 5 – 6 Paul dealt at length with the arrogance of the Corinthians and the immoral practices of some in their midst. These included incest (a man living with his stepmother) and the use of prostitutes, and in the latter case it appears to have been justified by appeal to the slogan: 'I have the

right to do anything' (1 Cor. 6:12). Paul called for disciplinary action against the incestuous person (1 Cor. 5:3–5) and argued that sexual immorality was incompatible with the Christian's status as the dwelling-place of the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:18–20).

If it is correct to identify the incestuous person with the one who later questioned Paul's authority and led the personal attack against him during the 'painful visit', then we know that he was eventually disciplined severely, so much so that Paul urged the rest to turn and forgive him (2:6–8). In that case, it is unlikely that this person is included among those who sinned before and had not repented. It is more likely that Paul refers to those who formerly practised immorality and who may have desisted for a while (in deference to his appeal in 1 Cor. 5 – 6) without truly repenting. But in the new crisis situation where Paul's authority was called into question again, this time by Jewish Christian opponents of the apostle, he fears some of the Corinthians may be engaging in immoral and licentious practices once more.

iii. Paul threatens strong action on his third visit (13:1–10)

The apostle speaks here in threatening terms of his third visit to Corinth. He informs his audience that when he comes again to Corinth, he will not spare offenders. If they want proof that Christ is speaking through him, then they shall get it! He tells them that just as Christ was crucified in weakness but now lives by the power of God, so too he (Paul), though sharing the weakness and suffering of Christ, will act with the power of God when he deals with them. Alluding again to their demands for proof, Paul responds by challenging his audience to prove themselves to see whether they are holding to the faith. He assures his audience that for his part he could never act contrary to the truth.

1. *This will be my third visit to you*. The first visit was that of Paul's pioneer evangelism in Corinth (c. AD 50–51), and the second was the 'painful visit' (c. AD 55) made after the writing of 1 Corinthians (see Introduction, pp. 53–54). The third visit (made c. AD 56–57) has been foreshadowed several times (cf. 10:2; 12:14, 20–21), and it is clear from these references and the present context that Paul is prepared for a showdown.

Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. Paul here introduces, without any introductory formula, a slightly abbreviated version of Deuteronomy 19:15 (LXX). The requirement that accusations must be supported by the evidence of at least two witnesses was stressed in first-century Judaism. The same requirement was incorporated by Jesus into his instructions

to the disciples concerning church discipline (Matt. 18:16), and is also reflected in a number of places elsewhere in the New Testament (John 8:17; 1 Tim. 5:19; Heb. 10:28; 1 John 5:8).

Paul's introduction of this quotation here has been understood in various ways. Some draw attention to Paul's reference to his second and third visits to Corinth in verses 1–2 and suggest that these are somehow analogous to the two or three witnesses demanded by the law (so e.g. Calvin, p. 169; Thrall, p. 876). The evidence provided by these visits will justify the disciplinary action Paul intends taking in Corinth. However, Paul's first visit can hardly be seen as a witness to Corinthian misdemeanours (it was the pioneer evangelistic visit during which the church was founded). Further, the third visit could hardly be regarded as a 'witness' when it was on that visit Paul intended taking disciplinary action. Such an interpretation also makes Paul do strange things with the text of Deuteronomy 19:15 which clearly refers to the witness of persons (not events), as allusions to it elsewhere in the New Testament testify.

Another suggestion is that the warnings Paul gave (v. 2) constitute the witnesses required. The difficulty in this case is that, despite the multiple warnings given, only one person is involved as a witness. A third possibility is that Paul, determined to take disciplinary action when he arrived, is simply assuring his audience that he will do so in accordance with the instructions of Jesus and the judicial procedures accepted by the churches[149] and, as Hafemann (p. 490) suggests, he will support his charge against them with several witnesses from within the congregation itself.

Finally, the apostle could be issuing a challenge to any in his audience who may have been inclined to bring a charge against him. If so, Paul is saying that they must be prepared to sustain their accusations by the evidence of two or three witnesses. This suggestion takes note of the fact that it is not only the Corinthians who are under scrutiny (by Paul), but also Paul himself (by them) (vv. 5–10).

2. *I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent.* Paul both updates his warning and pinpoints for us the time when he first issued it. The occasion of the original warning was his second visit, that is, the 'painful visit' during which he had been attacked by the offender (cf. 2:5; 7:12). From the present context we learn that Paul did not conclude his second visit before uttering dire warnings to those who were still unrepentant about their previous sins.

On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others. Paul's reference to *those who sinned earlier* may be understood as a reference to the unrepentant sexual offenders of 12:21 (cf. 1 Cor. 6:12–20), while *any of the*

others is possibly a reference to those who condoned the sexual offences (cf. 1 Cor. 5:2, 6) or simply to other members of the church. The content of the apostle's warning is: *on my return I will not spare them*. Paul had threatened that on his second visit he would take disciplinary action (1 Cor. 4:18–21), but in the event he withdrew without doing so, preferring rather to write a 'severe letter'. But now, ready to make his third visit, he warns his audience that he will not spare them this time. The nature of the disciplinary action he intended to take is not specified. Suggested explanations include the excommunication of the offenders or some supernatural affliction (cf. 1 Cor. 5:3–5; Acts 13:8–11).

3. Paul here gives a reason for the threat in verse 2b that 'I will not spare those who sinned': *since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me*. The Corinthians wanted proof that Paul functioned as Christ's 'mouthpiece'. Influenced by his opponents, they had adopted various criteria for testing the validity of apostolic claims. One of these was that through a true apostle the word of Christ should be heard, and there should be evidence to prove that this was so. Such evidence would include an impressive presence and powerful speaking ability (10:10), and the performance of signs and wonders (12:11–13). Paul would not have objected to the view that through true apostles Christ speaks, but would have taken strong exception to the proofs of this demanded by his opponents and the Corinthians. He had learnt that the power of Christ rested upon the weak, and that Christ spoke through his servants when they proclaimed the gospel, not because of their impressive personal presence, high-sounding words, or even accompanying supernatural signs.

In response to the demand for proofs, Paul threatens to provide evidence of Christ's speaking through him, but it will be evidence that his audience will not find to their liking. He will not spare them. He will be severe in his use of apostolic authority (cf. v. 10). In this regard he warns the Corinthians: *He* [*Christ*] *is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you*. Christ had worked powerfully by the Spirit among the Corinthians when Paul performed the signs of an apostle in Corinth (12:12; cf. Rom. 15:18–19), but in the present context Paul has in mind the power of Christ revealed in disciplinary action against those who persisted in their sins. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:30–31, written in response to news of abuses at the Lord's Supper, may provide a clue to what he has in mind here: 'That is why many among you are weak and ill, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment.'

4. *For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power*. Paul reminds his audience that the Christ who now lives by the power of God was once crucified in weakness, having taken upon himself the weakness of

mortal human flesh in the incarnation. This provides a paradigm by which they should understand the paradox of Paul's own apostolic ministry: *Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him in our dealing with you*. The many evidences of the apostle's weakness (cf. 1:3–11; 4:7–12; 11:23–29) should not blind the Corinthians to the fact that Christ's power is being manifested in his apostolate. While acknowledging his weakness in Christ, Paul threatens to use the disciplinary power of Christ when dealing with his audience. Hafemann (p. 492) comments:

> The parallels established between Christ and Paul in 13:4 show how Christ's power is made perfect in Paul's ministry (cf. 12:9). His primary purpose as an apostle is to mediate through his suffering in Christ the knowledge of God and the transforming power of the life-giving Spirit (2:14 – 3:18; 4:1–15). This is the way in which Paul usually mediates the power of Christ's resurrection. But toward those who reject the cross and the power of Christ as embodied in his suffering and endurance, the resurrection power of Christ will be made known through his acts of judgment within the church. If Paul is an agent of God's redemption, he must also be an agent of God's judgment (cf. 2:15–16a; 4:4; 6:1–2).

5. *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves*. The positioning of the repeated reflexive pronouns *yourselves* (*heautous*) in the original language shows that Paul emphasizes that the Corinthians should be examining themselves rather than him. The meaning of being *in the faith* could refer to holding the truth of the gospel, or living as true believers. When Paul urged the Corinthians to examine themselves, was he implying that they might find they were not true believers? What he says next reveals this was not the case, as does the way he addresses them throughout the letter. The result Paul expected from their self-examination was that they were certainly *in the faith*, and his purpose in urging them to do so was that they would conclude that the one who led them to faith in Christ must be a true apostle.[150]

Do you not realise that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test? In a previous letter Paul had stressed the importance of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the congregation and the individual believer, and the moral implications of this (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19–20). In the present context, where the prospect of moral failure on the part of the Corinthians has raised Paul's concern (cf. 12:21), the ethical implications of the presence of Christ by the Spirit is implicitly invoked by Paul's question: *Do you not realise that Christ Jesus is in you?* The Corinthians appear to have been quite confident that Christ was in them, so the purpose of Paul's question is to reawaken in them the moral implications of that great fact.

6. *And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test*. Just as Paul emphasized in the previous verse (by the emphatic positioning of reflexive

pronouns) that the Corinthians should test themselves to ensure that they were holding to the faith, so he stresses here, by the inclusion of the emphatic pronoun *we* (*hēmeis*), his hope that he and his colleagues will be found not to have failed the test. This comes as a surprise, for the context leads us to expect that Paul's hope would be that the Corinthians would be the ones found not to have failed the test. The explanation is: by testing themselves and reaching the conclusion that they do hold to the faith and that therefore Christ is in them, the Corinthians will at the same time be acknowledging that Paul and his colleagues have not failed the test. For if the Corinthians hold the true faith and are indwelt by Christ, that is so because of what they received through the ministry of Paul and his fellow workers, and that in turn proves that Paul is a true apostle, one who has not *failed the test*. Harris (p. 923) puts it this way: 'He assumes that the Corinthians will give themselves a "pass" on their self-audit and hopes that they will clearly perceive the indissoluble link between their "pass" and his "pass".'

7. *Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong*. Paul discloses the content of his prayer, and this disclosure not only reveals his concern for the Corinthians, but also functions as an exhortation to them. The *wrong* he prays they will avoid is best understood in this context as failure to hold to the faith (v. 5) and a falling back into immorality (12:21).

Lest his motives be misunderstood, he explains that his reason for praying is *not so that people will see that we have stood the test but so that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed*. Though Paul hopes they will find out that he has not failed the test (v. 6), this is not his main concern. He wants them to avoid wrongdoing, not because his own reputation would suffer, but because he wants them to be found doing what is right. Calvin (pp. 173–174) paraphrases Paul: '"I have no anxiety", he says, "for myself or for my reputation; my only fear is that you should offend God, and I am ready to be as a reprobate myself, if only you are free from all blame" – a reprobate, that is, in the judgment of men, who very often reject those who are worthy of the highest honour.'

Those who may deem Paul to have failed the test would probably do so on the grounds that he failed to provide proofs that Christ spoke through him; in other words, he lacked an impressive presence, his speech was of no account (10:10), and there was little evidence, as they thought, of spiritual power in his ministry (e.g. visionary experiences and the performance of signs and wonders; cf. 12:1, 11–13). In his 'fool's speech' Paul provided such evidence as they demanded, even though he gave it his own special twist (see commentary on 11:16 – 12:13). However, as far as he was concerned, legitimization of his apostleship belongs not with such displays of power, but is seen in the changed lives of his converts.

When they pass the test of holding the faith, and that finds expression in moral renewal in their lives, then the genuineness of Paul's apostolate will be confirmed (cf. 3:1–3).

8. Lest his statement 'though we may seem to have failed' (v. 7b) should be misconstrued as an admission that he has acted wrongly, Paul adds, *For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth*. The truth is best understood here as the gospel, and what Paul asserts is that he could never act in a way that is contrary to the gospel or its implications.

9. *We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong*. This statement reinforces that of verse 7, and recasts it in general terms. Paul is prepared, as he says in verse 7, to appear to have failed as long as the Corinthians do what is right. Now, in more general terms, he says that he is prepared, even glad, to be weak if that means strength for his converts. During his ministry, Paul had discovered that weakness in himself was the concomitant of God's power at work in others (cf. 4:11–12; 12:7–10), a fact which rests upon God's decision to use the weak things of this world to achieve his purposes (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26–29). The sort of strength Paul looked for in his converts was commitment to the gospel and the outworking of that commitment in moral renewal.

And our prayer is that you may be fully restored. It is a mark of the apostle's Christian maturity and commitment to the purposes of God that in the face of the defection of his converts, and their calling into question of his own apostolate, his overriding concern is not self-justification, but rather their restoration, that their moral failures should be put right.

10. Paul sums up the purpose of his letter: *This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority*. This statement of purpose fits well with the content of chapters 10 – 13 in which Paul has repeatedly threatened a severe use of authority (10:5–6, 11; 12:20; 13:1–4). Despite repeated threats, Paul hoped all along that it would not prove necessary to carry them out (10:2; 12:19–21). We may say, then, that the purpose of chapters 10 – 13 was to recall the Corinthians to their senses so that they would reject the false gospel and false claims of Paul's opponents and also live out in their lives the moral implications of the gospel and so forestall a severe use of authority by Paul.

Paul describes his authority as *the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down*. It is true that elsewhere in his writings Paul speaks of an exercise of authority which could be seen as a tearing down (e.g. handing people over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, 1 Cor. 5:3–5; cf. 1 Tim. 1:20), nevertheless the primary function of that authority was for building up Christ's church. This is stressed again and again in this letter (cf. 10:8; 12:19).

Theology

Paul defended his integrity in financial matters in the light of accusations that his refusal to accept support was a smokescreen behind which he was exploiting the Corinthians through the collection. Though his policy was not to accept support from those among whom he was presently ministering, he defended the right of others to do so. All this underlines two things: gospel ministers deserve support, but may waive the right if they wish; financial integrity is vitally important to prevent one's ministry being ill spoken of. To correct false impressions in this matter is not merely a matter of self-defence, but is necessary to ensure that one's efforts to strengthen the church are not rejected.

The Corinthians wanted proof that Christ spoke through Paul. For them it seemed that his sufferings, persecutions and weaknesses militated against his claim to be an apostle, the mouthpiece of Christ. Paul emphasized that weakness did not invalidate his claim, but was in fact the concomitant of the power of Christ at work through him. This is both a warning against a triumphalist approach to ministry and an encouragement to remember that God's power is made perfect in human weakness.

The authority of the minister is essentially for the building up not the tearing down of God's people. Calvin's comment (pp. 175–176) is apposite: 'Since the Gospel is by its own nature "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1.16) and "the savour of life unto life" (II Cor. 2.15, 16) and is only contingently "a savour of death", the authority conferred upon ministers of the Gospel ought to be used for the salvation of those who hear them, for if it turns out to their destruction, that is against its nature.'

E. Conclusion (13:11–14)

Context

Typical of ancient letters, this one concludes with some final words of exhortation and encouragement, followed by a benediction invoking God's blessing upon the audience.

Comment

i. Final exhortations and encouragement (13:11–13)

11. *Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Rejoice* translates *chairete*, as it does in 1 Thessalonians 5:16 where it is part of a similar list of brief exhortations. It could also be translated 'farewell', as in the NRSV.

Strive for full restoration, encourage one another. What Paul required by way of *full restoration* is clear enough. He wanted the Corinthians to reject the different gospel brought by his opponents (11:1–6), to recognize his rightful claims to be their apostle (10:13–18; 11:21–23; 12:11–13), and to make sure no immoral practices were allowed in their midst (12:20–21). Paul has already appealed to the Corinthians to examine themselves and amend their ways so that when he comes he will not have to be harsh in the use of his authority (vv. 5–10).

Be of one mind, live in peace. This reminds us that the disharmony which marred the church when 1 Corinthians was written (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10–12; 3:1–4) was still a source of trouble in the church (cf. 12:20). To this exhortation Paul adds the assurance: *And the God of love and peace will be with you*. This promise should not be understood as a reward that will be given if the Corinthians obey Paul's exhortation. It is best taken as an encouragement to those who set themselves to obey, as well as an indication of the source of power by which they will be enabled to do so.

12. *Greet one another with a holy kiss*. In the New Testament the kiss was a sign of greeting and respect. So, for example, Jesus reproached Simon the Pharisee because he gave him no kiss when he entered his house (Luke 7:45). It was also used as a symbol of gratitude, as in the case of the woman who, being forgiven much, kissed Jesus' feet repeatedly (Luke 7:38, 45). It was an expression of love in the case of the father of the prodigal who embraced and kissed his wayward son when he returned home (Luke 15:20). Paul repeatedly

exhorted members of the churches to greet one another with a holy kiss (apart from the present context such exhortations are found in Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 1 Thess. 5:26, cf. 1 Pet. 5:14).

In Greco-Roman society public kissing tended to be treated with some reticence, although it seems as a form of welcome it was becoming more common in the imperial period and, if that was the case, 'it may have been easier for the church to make the public kiss into a group rule and provide it with a deeper motivation'.[151]

The fact that the kiss was described as *holy* indicates that erotic overtones were excluded; the kiss was a greeting, a sign of peace and Christian *agapē*. In post-New Testament times the use of the holy or cultic kiss is found in early Christian liturgies, especially the Eucharist. However, quite early there were objections voiced against the practice because of the suspicions of non-Christians and because of the danger of erotic perversion.[152]

13. *All God's people here send their greetings*. *All God's people*, whose greetings Paul conveys, are to be understood as either all the Christians of Macedonia, or those Christians in the particular Macedonian city from which he wrote this letter.

ii. Benediction (13:14)

14. The closing invocation of God's blessing is especially significant because of its triadic formulation. It is the only place in the New Testament where God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are explicitly mentioned together in such a benediction.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. In 8:9 Paul wrote, 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich' (see commentary on 8:9). This is the nature of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ which Paul invokes upon his audience, a grace completely undeserved, yet overwhelmingly generous and astonishingly committed to the well-being of sinful human beings.

And the love of God. The love of God is a major theme in Paul's theology. It was demonstrated supremely when God provided, and was involved in, the great reconciliation effected by Christ so that human beings might live at peace with God (5:18–21; Rom. 5:6–8). This is the nature of the love of God which Paul invokes upon his audience. Once again, what is involved is completely undeserved and astonishingly generous.

And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. The word *fellowship*

translates *koinōnia*, the essential meaning of which is ‘participation’. The expression *the fellowship of the Holy Spirit* can be construed to mean either participation in the Holy Spirit where the Holy Spirit is understood as the one in whom Christian people share (objective genitive construction). Alternatively, it can be construed to mean a fellowship created by the Holy Spirit (subjective genitive construction). Both ideas are true and are found elsewhere in Paul’s letters (e.g. 1 Cor. 12:13 where, on one interpretation of that text, Christians are said to have been both baptized *by* one Spirit [*en pneumati*] into one body, and made to drink *of* one Spirit). In any case, Christians can share ‘objectively’ in the Spirit only if the Holy Spirit himself as subject makes that participation possible.

Theology

Paul’s appeal for ‘full restoration’ calls upon his audience to do two things: to recognize his role as their apostle, and to have done with immoral practices. The former involves acceptance of the truth of the gospel he preaches, and the latter entails the abandonment of sinful practices. Both of these things are crucial in the restoration of truly harmonious relationships in the Christian community.

The unique trinitarian form of the benediction in which Paul invokes the blessing of God upon his audience highlights the immense privileges of believers: they are recipients of the grace of the Lord Jesus who became ‘poor’ so that they might become ‘rich’; they are the objects of the love of God who gave up his only Son, making him ‘to be sin for us’, so that in him we might be ‘made right with God’; and they share in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

NOTES

1. Strabo (c. 63 BC–AD 22) completed his *Geography* c. 7 BC, and included in this work is a description of early Corinth as it was before its destruction in 146 BC. Some questions have been raised concerning the accuracy of his statements about cult-prostitution; cf. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, p. 12; Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, pp. 55–56.
2. Suggested dates range from the second to the fifth century AD.
3. Lang, *Cure and Cult*, pp. 1–31.
4. It is possible that this Erastus is to be identified with the one named in an inscription discovered in 1929 to the east of the stage building of the theatre in Corinth which reads: 'Erastus for his aedileship laid (the pavement) as his own expense'. While this identification has been questioned by some, it still remains as a significant possibility. Cf. discussion in Kruse, *Romans*, pp. 585–587.
5. So also Bruce, pp. 23–25, 164–170; Barrett, pp. 3–11; Furnish, pp. 26–46; Martin, p. xl.
6. Cf. e.g. Allo, pp. lii–liii; Lietzmann, pp. 139–140; Tasker, pp. 30–35; Hughes, pp. xxiii–xxxv; Kümmel, *Introduction*, pp. 287–293; Bates, 'Integrity', pp. 56–59; Stephenson, 'Defence', pp. 82–97.
7. So e.g. Plummer, pp. xvii–xix; Strachan, pp. xxxix–xl.
8. So e.g. Bultmann, pp. 16–18; Schmithals, *Gnosticism*, pp. 87–110. The latter detects the remains of six letters: (A) 2 Cor. 6:14 – 7:1; 1 Cor. 6:12–20; 9:24 – 10:22; 11:2–34; 15; 16:13–24, (B) 1 Cor. 1:1 – 6:11; 7:1 – 9:23; 10:23 – 11:1; 12:1 – 14:40; 16:1–12, (C) 2:14 – 6:13; 7:2–4, (D) 10:1 – 13:13, (E) 9:1–15, (F) 1:1 – 2:13; 7:5–16; 8:1–24.
9. E.g. Strachan, p. xv; Schmithals, *Gnosticism*, p. 95.
10. E.g. Schmithals, *Gnosticism*, pp. 95–96.
11. So e.g. Hughes, pp. xxvii–xxx.
12. So e.g. Plummer, pp. xxvii–xxxvi; Strachan, p. xix; Bultmann, p. 18; Wendland, p. 8; Schmithals, *Gnosticism*, p. 96.
13. Bruce, p. 169; Barrett, p. 9; Furnish, pp. 30–41; Martin, p. xl; Thrall, p. 20.
14. Cf. e.g. Weiss, *Earliest Christianity* 2, p. 353, who regards ch. 8 as the later addition, and Bornkamm, 'History', p. 260; Schmithals, *Gnosticism*, pp. 97–98; Bultmann, p. 18, who regard ch. 9 as having been added subsequently.

15. Lambrecht, ‘Paul’s Boasting’, pp. 352–368, provides a detailed discussion and evaluation of reasons put forward in support of the view that ch. 9 was a separate letter, but concludes that this was not so.
16. So e.g. Allo, pp. 52–53; Lietzmann, pp. 139–140; Tasker, pp. 30–35; Hughes, pp. 33–35; Kümmel, *Introduction*, pp. 287–293; Bates, ‘Integrity’, pp. 56–59; Stephenson, ‘Defence’, pp. 82–97; Barnett, pp. 17–23; Harris, pp. 42–51; Schmeller, pp. 19–38; Seifrid, pp. xxvii–xxix.
17. Bruce, pp. 166–172; Barrett, pp. 9–10, 21; Furnish, pp. 30–41; Martin, p. 40; Thrall, pp. 5–13.
18. Cf. Kennedy, *Rhetorical Criticism*, pp. 19–20.
19. Cf. Zeller, pp. 49–52.
20. Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, p. 349; Bultmann, p. 18.
21. Bornkamm, ‘History’, pp. 259–260; Wendland, p. 9; Schmithals, *Gnosticism*, pp. 98–100.
22. Plummer, p. 67; Tasker, pp. 56–57; Kümmel, *Introduction*, p. 291; Harris, pp. 12, 242; Thrall, pp. 21–22. Allo, p. 45, broadens the base of thanksgiving to include not only relief of anxiety when Titus arrived, but also the reminder of the universal triumph of the gospel evoked by the mention of Macedonia in 2:13 and thereby of the faithful Christians in that part of the world.
23. Chrysostom, comment on 2 Cor. 2:13 in Homily V on 2 Corinthians.
24. Harris, p. 12; Thrall, p. 22; Bachmann, *Korinther*, pp. 126–127, cited by Thrall, ‘Second Thanksgiving’, p. 105.
25. Hughes, pp. 76–77; Thrall, p. 22.
26. Zahn, *Introduction*, p. 343, n. 1, cited by Thrall, ‘Second Thanksgiving’, p. 106.
27. Barrett, p. 97.
28. Thrall, ‘Second Thanksgiving’, pp. 111–119.
29. Cf. e.g. Bultmann, p. 180. Harris, pp. 15–25, summarizes the presumed ‘non-Pauline’ features of 6:14 – 7:1 before pointing out those features of the passage that are clearly Pauline and concluding that it stems from Paul’s hand.
30. Wendland, p. 212; Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, p. 356; Strachan, pp. xv, 3–4; Schmithals, *Gnosticism*, pp. 94–95.
31. Allo, pp. 189–193.
32. Plummer, pp. 23–24; Lietzmann, p. 129; Allo, pp. 53, 193–194; Tasker, pp. 29–30; Hughes, pp. 241–244; Barrett, pp. 23–25; Harris, pp. 14–25; Thrall, pp. 25–36; Barnett, pp. 23–24.
33. Lietzmann, p. 129.

34. Hughes, p. 244.
35. Barrett, p. 194.
36. Plummer, p. 25; Harris, p. 497.
37. Dahl, ‘Fragment’, p. 69.
38. Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth*, pp. 130–140, questions this dating, arguing against the reliability of the testimony of Orosius who alone explicitly dates the expulsion of Jews from Rome as the ninth year of Claudius’ reign (i.e. AD 49), a testimony contained in a book written in AD 418. He does so on the grounds that Orosius cites the earlier testimony of Suetonius (*Claudius*, 25) and there is nothing in Suetonius’ writings to support that dating. Murphy-O’Connor himself argues for an AD 41 dating of Claudius’ edict, but this implies inaccuracy on Luke’s part who indicates that Paul’s arrival in Corinth (to be dated c. AD 50) occurred shortly after Aquila and Priscilla’s arrival there, having being expelled from Italy by the edict of Claudius.
39. Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth*, pp. 146–150.
40. For a detailed discussion of the chronology of Paul’s relations with the Corinthian church, see Harris, pp. 101–105; Barnett, pp. 14–55; Thrall, pp. 74–77.
41. Cf. e.g. Calvin, p. 29; Alford, *Greek New Testament*, 2, p. 637; Denney, pp. 1–6; Hughes, pp. 59–65.
42. Alford, *Greek New Testament*, 2, p. 53; Denney, pp. 3–5; Hughes, pp. 50–51.
43. So e.g. Barrett, p. 7.
44. Seifrid, p. 75.
45. This is a widely held opinion, supported by e.g. Plummer, pp. 54–55; Strachan, p. 70; Bruce, p. 185; Bultmann, pp. 47–48; Furnish, p. 168.
46. Thrall, pp. 68–69.
47. Cf. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, pp. 44–57.
48. So, recently, Harris, pp. 85–87; Barnett, p. 35.
49. Barrett, pp. 29–30, argues that Paul’s opponents were ‘Jews of Palestinian origin, who exercised a Judaizing influence’, who for strategic reasons when in Corinth adopted certain Hellenistic characteristics.
50. Barrett, ‘Paul’s Opponents’, pp. 60–86. Cf. Harris, pp. 75–76; Martin, pp. 338–339.
51. So also e.g. Barnett, p. 33; Furnish, p. 49.
52. Cf. Briones, ‘Mutual Brokers’, pp. 536–556.
53. Cf. Yves Lafond, ‘Achaeans, Achaea’, in Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider (eds.), *Brill’s New Pauly: Antiquity* (Brill Online, 2014).

54. See O. Schmitz, G. Stählin, '*Parakaleō, paraklēsis*', *TDNT* 5, pp. 773–799.
55. Denney, *Death of Christ*, p. 82.
56. So e.g. Best, *One Body*, pp. 131–136.
57. Kruse, *Foundations for Ministry*, pp. 111–114.
58. Hemer, 'A Note', pp. 103–107, argues that 'there is no ground in contemporary usage for seeing a judicial metaphor here'. Rather, *apokrima* is best understood as an 'answer' given by God to a petition made by the apostle.
59. Denney, p. 28.
60. Tertullian, 'On the Resurrection of the Flesh', ANF 3, p. 582.
61. Yates, 'Paul's Affliction', pp. 241–245. See also Wood, 'Death', pp. 151–155.
62. Cf. Sevenster, *Paul and Seneca*, pp. 84–102; C. Maurer, '*Synoida/syneidēsis*', *TDNT* 6, pp. 898–919.
63. Thrall, '*SYNEIDĒSIS* ', pp. 118–125.
64. An alternative reading has 'holiness' (*hagiotēti*) instead of 'integrity' (*haplotēti*); in either case the overall sense is the same.
65. Chrysostom says, 'the pleasure would be double because it would come both from his writings and from his presence' (Bray, p. 200). Hafemann (p. 84) adopts an active interpretation of the *benefit*, suggesting it refers to two opportunities the Corinthians would have to contribute to the collection. Fee, '*CHARIS*', pp. 533–538, suggests that the *benefit* (*charis*) Paul refers to in v. 15 should be taken in an active sense, indicating that the extra benefit the Corinthians were to have would be two opportunities to show 'kindness' to their apostle by helping him first on his way to Macedonia, and then on his journey to Judea.
66. Wenham, '2 Corinthians 1:17, 18', pp. 271–279, suggests the expression was well known among early Christians, and the Corinthians claimed that Paul was behaving as if Jesus' words legitimized his saying one thing and doing another in respect of his travel plans. Paul responded that he was not guilty of distorting the meaning of Jesus' words to justify his vacillation.
67. Some commentators (e.g. Plummer, pp. 34–35) construe this verse not as an assertion with an oath, but as a straightforward statement: 'God is faithful in that our word to you has not been Yes and No.' In this case, it becomes an assertion that Paul's reliability rests upon God's faithfulness. However, the majority of scholars (e.g. Lietzmann, p. 103; Furnish, p. 135; Thrall, p. 144) rightly recognize the presence of an oath formula here. Where Paul uses the expression *God is faithful* as part of a simple statement, it is not followed by a *hoti* clause (Furnish, p. 135).

68. The word *arrabōn* is found only three times in the New Testament, and only in Paul's letters (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14). Cf. Kwon, '*Arrabōn*', pp. 525–541, who argues cogently against the view that *arrabōn* means 'deposit' in the sense of a part-payment now, the balance of which will be paid later.
69. Some scholars argue that the four expressions introduced by Paul in vv. 21–22 reflect the terminology of early Christian baptismal liturgies. Whether they had baptismal connotations in Paul's day is debatable, but not out of the question, especially in the light of the fact that there was not in the New Testament the separation between the rite of baptism, belief and reception of the Spirit that some see today. Cf. Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13. Cf. also Dunn, *Baptism*, pp. 131–134.
70. Cf. Novenson, 'God Is Witness', pp. 355–375.
71. Most commentators identify the 'one' of the second part of the verse with the 'you' of the first part. This is done either by regarding the 'one' as a representative Corinthian, or, as in the case of the translators of the NIV, by simply replacing the 'one' with 'you'.
72. When Paul says *I wrote*, he uses the aorist tense of the verb (*egrapsa*), which the NIV treats as a simple past tense and therefore refers to the 'severe letter' written previously. However, it is possible to treat *egrapsa* as an epistolary aorist referring to the letter Paul was currently writing. In this case, the test of the Corinthians' obedience would not be the disciplining of the offender referred to in verses 2–6, but to his reinstatement called for in verses 7–11. Cf. Stegman, '*Egrapsa*', pp. 50–67.
73. Barrett (p. 99) argues that the imagery is drawn rather from the world of sacrifice (the smell of the burnt offerings or incense ascending to the nostrils of the deity). He draws attention to the words, we are an aroma of Christ 'to God' (*tō theō*)' in 2:15, arguing that the 'aroma' is intended primarily for God, not human beings. However, as Furnish (p. 177) points out, the aroma in the present context is thought of primarily as something affecting human beings, not God. Also, the words *tō theō* could be translated 'for God', thus yielding a translation: 'we are an aroma of Christ for God', i.e. an aroma for God 'among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing'.
74. Another possible approach to the interpretation of these verses is suggested by Manson, 'Suggestion', pp. 155–162, who cites rabbinic sources in which the Torah acts as both an elixir of life (for Israel) and a deadly poison (for Gentile nations). It is against this background that Paul speaks of Christ as an aroma which has similarly diverse effects on those who believe or

disbelieve the gospel.

75. Egan, ‘Lexical Evidence’, pp. 34–62.
76. For a detailed discussion, see Hafemann, *Suffering*, pp. 12–179.
77. Harris (p. 259) argues that the sense of self-commendation in 4:2; 6:4 is positive – boasting in the Lord (indicated by the non-emphatic *synistanein heauton*), whereas in 5:12; 10:18 it is pejorative (indicated by the emphatic *heauton synistanein*).
78. Cf. Barrett, pp. 96, 108; Bultmann, p. 71; Martin, pp. 44, 51; Thrall, pp. 223–224.
79. Cf. BDAG s.v.
80. That is, if they did not avail themselves of the forgiveness offered through the prescribed sacrifices, sacrifices which pointed forward to the sacrificial death of Christ that inaugurated the new covenant and alone made forgiveness possible.
81. Cf. Rosner, *Paul and the Law*, pp. 159–205.
82. The word used is *telos*, which can mean ‘end’ either in the sense of ‘terminus’ or in the sense of ‘goal’. Some scholars argue for the latter, saying the glory reflected on the face of Moses was the glory of the (pre-existent) Christ, the goal of the old dispensation. But the flow of Paul’s thought here demands the former, as recognized by most commentators.
83. Baker, ‘Moses’ Face’, pp. 1–15.
84. The phrase *were made dull* translates *epōrōthē*, an aorist passive form of the verb (*pōroō*) often translated ‘were hardened’, where the implied subject is God (cf. Rom. 9:13–18), although that does not lessen human responsibility (cf. Rom. 10:21).
85. Augustine says, ‘It is not the Old Testament that is done away with in Christ but the concealing veil, so that it may be understood through Christ. That is, as it were, laid bare, which without Christ is hidden and obscure’ (Bray, p. 222).
86. Calvin (p. 48) interprets *ean epistrepsē pros kyrion periaireitai to kalymma* to mean ‘whenever he [Moses] turns to the Lord the veil is taken away’.
87. van Unnik, ‘Unveiled Face’, p. 161, provides evidence that in early rabbinic texts ‘“to cover the face” is a sign of shame and mourning; “to uncover the head” means confidence and freedom’.
88. Harris (p. 320) notes the similarities between 4:1–6 and 2:14–17 and suggests both passages constitute a defence of the integrity of Paul’s ministry vis-à-vis his critics:

4:2 Nor do we distort the word	2:17 we do not peddle the word of God

of God	for profit
4:2 in the sight of God	2:17 before God
4:3 to those who are perishing	2:15 among . . . those who are perishing
4:5 we preach	2:17 we speak
4:6 the knowledge of God's glory	2:14 the knowledge of him

89. The verb translated *lose heart* (*enkakeō*) is found in four other places in Paul's letters (4:16; Gal. 6:9; Eph. 3:13; 2 Thess. 3:13) and once in Luke 18:1. In each case, the context indicates that the translation *lose heart* is appropriate. This being the case, alternative translations such as 'behave badly', appropriate in some extra-biblical texts, should not be adopted here.
90. Chrysostom comments, 'Some were "walking in craftiness." They had a reputation for taking nothing, but in fact they took it and kept it secret. They had the seeming character of saints and apostles but were full of innumerable secret wickednesses. Paul takes nothing and calls on the Corinthians as his witnesses. Likewise he does nothing wicked and asks them to testify to the truth of what he is saying' (Bray, p. 227).
91. LSJ s.v. lists as a possible meaning: '*adulterate* incense, wine, etc.'.
92. In John's Gospel Christ's death is also a manifestation of his glory (cf. John 12:23–33).
93. Calvin (pp. 55–56) comments, 'When Christ is called *the image of the invisible God* the reference is not merely to His essence, because He is, as they say, co-essential with the Father, but rather to His relationship to us because He represents the Father to us . . . He is the image of God to us because He reveals to us things in His Father that would otherwise remain hidden.'
94. There is an alternative and better-attested reading in the Greek manuscripts which reads: 'For it is the God who said, "a light shall shine out of darkness".' In this form it could allude to the prophecy concerning the land of Zebulun and Naphtali in Isa. 9:2: 'The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.' This text is taken up and applied to the ministry of Christ in Matt. 4:15–16 and Luke 1:79.
95. Early Church Fathers differed in their interpretation of the *spirit of faith*. Augustine regards it as a reference to the human spirit of faith (Bray, pp. 234–235). Chrysostom regards it as a reference to the Holy Spirit's

work in both the prophets and apostles (Bray, p. 234; so too Hafemann, p. 187). Campbell, '2 Corinthians 4:13', pp. 337–356, argues that Paul is referring to the Spirit of Christ. Cf. also Stegman, *'Episteusa'*, pp. 725–745.

96. The view that Paul is speaking about resurrection life experienced by believers now, rather than eschatological resurrection, is unlikely, especially in the light of the parallels between 2 Cor. 4:13–14 and 1 Thess. 4:14. Cf. Plevnik, 'Destination', pp. 83–95.
97. This is an example of what grammarians describe as a third-class conditional sentence (*ean* + subjunctive in the protasis, with virtually any form of the verb in the apodosis). Such conditional sentences are employed to express an assumption that given the future condition in the protasis is true, what is expressed in the apodosis will follow. In the case of 5:1, what Paul is saying is that if *the earthly tent* we now live in should in the future be destroyed, then we will *have a building from God . . . not built by human hands*.
98. Cf. Harris, pp. 371–372; Barnett, pp. 257–258; Thrall, pp. 363–367; so too, Chrysostom and Origen (Bray, p. 239).
99. Ellis, 'II Corinthians v.1–10', pp. 211–224, argues that being *found naked* here does not refer to existence as a disembodied spirit, but is to be understood ethically, referring to the shame of exposure before the judgment seat of Christ. So too Hafemann (p. 212).
100. An alternate view is that Paul's not wanting to be *unclothed* was his aversion to death itself, rather than the disembodied state that might follow.
101. Contra Hafemann (pp. 216–217) who argues that because Paul says this in the midst of his discussion of eternal resurrection life, salvation itself is in view here.
102. Thrall (p. 405) offers a very different exegesis of this verse. She notes that *en prosōpō kauchōmenous* (translated in the NIV as *take pride in what is seen*), when translated literally, reads: 'boasting in face', and suggests that those who opposed Paul boasted about the glorious face of Moses (cf. 3:7) and contrasted that with the lack of outward glory of Paul's ministry.
103. This is the way *hyper* is construed here by both BDAG, s.v. and H. Riesenfeld, '*hyper*', *TDNT* 8, pp. 509–510.
104. Danby, *Mishnah*, p. 6.
105. As rendered by the NIV (and most other English translations), this constitutes an exhortation directed to Paul's Corinthian audience. Translated literally, the original Greek (*deometha hyper Christou, katallagēte tō theō)* reads: 'We implore on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.' The verb *deometha* ('implore') has no direct object. This has led some exegetes to

argue that Paul is not addressing his exhortation to his Corinthian audience. However, *katallagēte* (‘be reconciled’) is a second-person plural imperative indicating that the exhortation is directed to them.

106. Cf. Oden, *Classic Christianity*, p. 395.

107. Chrysostom comments, ‘Any one of these things is intolerable, but taken together, think what kind of soul is needed to endure them’ (Bray, p. 257).

108. The present passive participle here rendered *known* is *epiginōskomenoi* from the verb *epiginōskō* which Paul uses in 1 Cor. 16:18, where he speaks of fellow workers who deserve recognition.

109. See e.g. Seneca, *On Benefits*, VII.ii.5–6.

110. The Hebrew text of Lev. 19:19 on which our English versions are based contains a prohibition, not of yoking, but of breeding different species of animals.

111. The NIV has reversed the order of Paul’s affirmation of friendship as it is found in the original (*eis to synapothanein kai syzēn*: ‘to die together and live together’) to render it *live or die with you*. While the word order of the original is unusual, it is not unknown (cf. 2 Sam. 15:21 LXX).

112. Subsequent events, reflected in chs. 10 – 13, suggest that either Titus’ report, or Paul’s response to it, was prematurely optimistic.

113. Paul’s expression of confidence here stands in stark contrast to the way he addresses the same people in chs. 10 – 13 (cf. esp. 11:3–4, 19–20), and this is one of the main factors which leads many scholars to see in chs. 10 – 13 the remains of a subsequent letter of Paul (see Introduction, pp. 43–46).

114. Harris (p. 553) argues that Paul’s opponents in Corinth were inhibiting the success of the collection by accepting the offer of support made by the Corinthians and thus becoming an extra financial burden on them.

115. There is a variant which reads ‘the love from you in us’ instead of *the love we have kindled in you*, but the context, where the qualities evident in the Corinthians are listed, suggests the latter is to be preferred.

116. Harris (p. 587) comments, ‘If Paul had advocated the practice of tithing, this would have been an appropriate place for him to mention or defend it. But so far from championing the practice of giving by percentage, he argues for proportional giving.’

117. This is how Philo understood Exod. 16:16–18 (*Quis rerum divinarum heres sit*, 191), which he then applied allegorically to the word of God.

118. Suggestions concerning his identity made by early Church Fathers include Luke (Pelagius, Oecumenius) and Barnabas (Chrysostom, Theodoret of Cyr) (Bray, p. 276). Other suggestions include Luke (Plummer, p. 248; Hughes, p. 313), Apollos (Martin, p. 275), and Sopater, Aristarchus or

Secundus who are mentioned as representatives of the Macedonian churches in Acts 20:4.

19. Where the expression *en tō euangeliō* is used elsewhere by Paul (10:14; Rom. 1:9; 1 Cor. 9:18; Phil 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:2), in most if not all cases it relates to preaching the gospel.
20. In 4:2 Paul spoke in similar vein in relation to his preaching: 'By setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.' Cf. also Rom. 12:17: 'Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.'
21. Theodoret of Cyr says, 'Some people think this refers to Apollos, whom Paul promised in his first epistle that he would send' (Bray, p. 277).
22. Betz, p. 90, argues that Paul says, 'there is no need for me to write' in order 'to relieve the tiresomeness of the subject', anticipating the reaction: 'Oh, not another of those letters on the collection!'
23. In the original it is not *you in Achaia* (as in the NIV), but just 'Achaia' (as in the NRSV), about whom Paul boasted of their being ready. If Achaia was in fact ready, Betz, pp. 92–93, asks why Paul wrote to ensure they would be. His suggestion is that the churches of Achaia were to be distinguished from the church in Corinth (cf. 1:1) – Achaia was ready, only Corinth was not, and Paul wanted the Achaeans to make sure the Corinthians would do their part. However, as Corinth was the provincial capital of Achaia, it is unlikely that it would be excluded from Paul's boasting about Achaia being ready. It may be added that Paul speaks of Achaia because his earlier reference was to the Macedonians.
24. *Having been so confident* translates *en tē hypostasei tautē*, which may also be rendered: 'in this endeavour'. Thrall (pp. 568–570) supports the view that *hypostasis* here is best interpreted as 'plan' or 'project'.
25. The verse is notable for remarkable paronomasia (the repetition of words having the same stem) in the Greek original: God is able to make all (*pasan*) grace abound to you, so that having always (*pantote*) in all things (*panti*) all (*pasan*) you need so that you may abound in all (*pan*) good work.
26. Sevenster, *Paul and Seneca*, pp. 113–114.
27. Nickle, *Collection*, is representative of modern approaches and provides a readable coverage of the main issues involved. See also S. McKnight, 'Collection for the Saints', *DPL*, 143–147; Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, pp. 287–305, and the major commentaries by Furnish (pp. 409–413) and Martin (pp. 256–258).
28. Nickle, *Collection*, pp. 74–93.
29. Ibid., pp. 129–142.

30. By *weapons of the world*, Chrysostom says, ‘he means wealth, glory, power, loquaciousness, cleverness, half-truths, flatteries, hypocrisies and so on’ (Bray, p. 284).
31. In *Acts of Paul and Thecla 3* Paul is described as ‘a man of small stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked’.
32. *NewDocs* I, pp. 36–45.
33. Batey, ‘Paul’s Bride Image’, pp. 176–182.
34. So e.g. Origen, Augustine, Caesarius of Arles (Bray, pp. 290–291).
35. Calvin (pp. 147–148) interprets Paul’s reference to *a little boasting* temporally, as something he will indulge in only for a short time.
36. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 12, p. 392.
37. Welborn, ‘Caricature’, pp. 39–56.
38. The twofold phrases, *to boast about*, are added in the NIV to make clear what Paul intended. Literally rendered, the text would read: ‘whatever anyone dares . . . I also dare’.
39. In fact, it was illegal for magistrates to have a Roman citizen (as Paul was) beaten, though the Philippian magistrates did not know initially that Paul held Roman citizenship, and for this reason they came to apologize to Paul for what they had done (Acts 16:36–39). We know from incidents recorded in other ancient literature that the law was not always observed in practice.
40. Glancy, ‘Boasting’, pp. 99–135.
41. It was the daughter of Aretas IV who was the first wife of Herod Antipas, and whom the latter divorced to marry Herodias, the wife of his half-brother, Philip (Matt. 14:3–4).
42. *ABD* s.v. ‘Aretas’.
43. Cf. Murphy-O’Connor, ‘Paul in Arabia’, pp. 733–734.
44. Barrier, ‘Visions’, pp. 33–42, argues that Paul is not speaking of his own experience, but parodying that of his opponents. So, too, Goulder, ‘Vision’, pp. 53–71.
45. The words, *or because of these surpassingly great revelations* (*kai tē hyperbolē tōn apokalypseōn*) (v. 7a), could be seen as part of the explanation why Paul refrained from boasting, (i.e. that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me, and particularly not because of these surpassingly great revelations), or as the reason why he was given a thorn in the flesh (to prevent him from becoming conceited as a result of receiving such revelations, v. 7b).
46. So McCant, ‘Paul’s Thorn’, pp. 550–572; Woods, ‘Opposition’, pp. 44–53.
47. Paul omits any reference to ‘the brother who is praised by all the churches’

who also accompanied Titus (8:18–19), possibly because he was not an associate of Paul, but an appointee of the churches.

148. The NRSV translates 12:20a as ‘For I fear that when I come, I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish’, in which the negative particles do not relate to the verbs ‘find’, but to what was wished for/wanted.

149. Against this view, it has been argued that personal witnesses are needed only to bring to light secret sins, not public scandals with which Paul is concerned here (assuming the scandals were not simply based on rumours but on events known publicly). In response, it can be stated that the role of witnesses is not only to bring to light what was secret, but also to bear responsibility before the judiciary for the charge brought.

150. Cf. Brown, ‘Meaning’, pp. 175–188.

151. Klassen, ‘The Sacred Kiss’, pp, 122–135, esp. 126–128.

152. Jewett, *Romans*, p. 973, notes, ‘In the post-NT period, when the church was attempting to conform to the society, “the men kissed the men and the women the women,” thus avoiding the appearance of promiscuity. It is therefore likely that the adjective “holy” was attached to this inclusive greeting in response to sexual promiscuity encouraged by such kissing.’ Cf. G. Stählin, ‘*Phileō* ’, *TDNT* 9, pp. 142–143.